

The Abomination Vaults: Expanded

A Resource for Game Masters

By Taylor Hodgskiss

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Summary and Contents

The Abomination Vaults is an excellent adventure, but like all adventures it is meant to be built upon. Any playthrough will be different, just as every group is different. Every GM will do things a little differently. This is how I did things.

I have collated most of the changes and additional content I included in my Abomination Vaults game because I know I would have liked to have a resource like this to draw ideas from when I was starting out. In the document, I will explain why I made these changes. You might disagree. That's fine! Like all such resources, you should take whatever you think will work for your game, and ignore the rest. I hope you can find some of my ideas helpful.

Here is what this document contains:

The Roseguard

- Expanded histories of the Roseguard, from their individual careers before they banded together to their ultimate sad fate following the defeat of Belcorra
- Roseguard artifacts necessary for descending to the 5th level are now more powerful, take more effort to acquire, and grow in ability throughout the adventure
- The Roseguard remain relevant to the end, and their aid can be enlisted in the final battle against Belcorra by completing a difficult combat/ritual

Otari NPCs

- Otari NPCs have more fleshed-out personalities, motivations, and goals
- Most NPCs have at least one side quest, which is often non-violent in nature to provide a breather from the Vaults; some of these side quests tie into the Troubles in Otari adventure
- Added some new characters, mostly for good reasons

Changes to the Vaults

- Added some traps and puzzles, just for fun
- Expanded the role of the arena into an active coliseum in which the PCs can challenge foes singly or as a party for rewards (see Red Holiday below)
- Several scripted encounters with Caliddo Haruvex in the upper levels
- Urevian is now a Disney villain
- The lift down from the seventh level breaks after use, trapping party in the eighth level
- Rectified a baffling and inexcusable absence of flumphs in the Darklands
- Implied involvement of the alghollthus in the background of this adventure
- And more!

Random Encounter System

- A simple system for running a limited number of random encounters within the vaults, including a table of encounters custom-made for this adventure

The Founder's Day Festival

- Designed to introduce players to Otari NPCs, tell the tale of the Roseguard, and foreshadow events later on, such as Dorianna's curse and the influence of the Kortos Consortium
- Includes rules for a wide variety of games, events, and challenges
- A theatrical production, which the PCs may be part of
- Mayoral election speeches, and the important introduction of Carman Rajani
- A harrow reading from Wrin
- Festival ends with the activation of the Gauntlight and the Deadtide for Otari event!

The Letters of Dr. Zacchaeus Quagmire III

- A simple treasure hunt through the levels of the vaults, initiated by the 'treasure map' found as loot in the beginner box adventure
- Provides some clues and hints to the players about what is coming up next – if they can find the letters!

The Great Absalom Spellbook Obtainment Expedition

- A short side-quest to Absalom to retrieve *Thresholds of Truth*
- Emphasis on non-combat solutions
- Guidelines and suggestions for running skill challenges and stealth/heist encounters
- Why it's important for the PCs to go to Absalom at least once during this adventure

The Red Holiday

- A system for running arena combat, singly or as a party, at the Red Holiday
- Several tables of level-appropriate encounters and rewards
- The Cheery Man, mysterious and insane announcer/organizer of the Red Holiday, follows the party's progress on the upper levels and can be battled as the grand finale

Demontide for Otari

- A new event following the resolution of the Urevian story, in which Belcorra retaliates with an attack on Otari, reiterating the threat she poses and her growing power
- Includes dream sequence fake-out
- Kill beloved NPCs
- Raise the stakes

The Consortium Conspiracy

- Introducing Credence and Cryde, sinister agents of the Kortos Consortium
- PCs have several opportunities to put a stop to their nefarious activities, lest the Kortos Consortium take over Otari!
- Emphasis on investigation, skill encounters, and other non-combat scenarios

Integrating the Beginner Box and Troubles in Otari

- Advice on smoothly integrating this content into your Abomination Vaults adventure
- Suggestions for handling leveling

List of Sidequests

- A checklist of sidequests outside the vaults, with recommended levels and rewards

The Roseguard

The Roseguard, while an important part of the lore and history of this adventure, is described in scant detail in the official content. I am sure this is intentional, so that every GM can make adjustments to match their own unique group and preferences.

As for me, I greatly expanded upon the lore and history of the Roseguard, and I went to considerable lengths to make this historic adventuring group a more meaningful and important part of the story. I added Aeseephana's tomb to The Menace Under Otari (which you can read about in the Beginner Box section of this document), I altered and empowered the Roseguard relics necessary to overcome the barrier to the 5th level, and I added late-game content in which the party can take steps to secure the Roseguard's aid in their final struggle against Belcorra. If any of this is of interest to you, read on.

The History of the Roseguard

Otari Ilveshti grew up as an orphan in Absalom, where he learned the arts of stealth and thievery to survive. He dreamed of adventure from a young age, and joined up with disreputable sailing crews as soon as he was able. He soon fell in with pirates, and for several years partook of their wickedness. One day, they raided the wrong ship, but Otari's life was spared by a cleric of Caiden Cailean. This was the turning point in Otari's life, as he forsook his piratical ways and devoted himself instead to the cause of justice and liberation. Though young, Otari was exceptionally skilled, and he soon became known as the Sea Hawk across the Inner Sea due to his habit of swooping down upon slaving vessels seemingly out of nowhere. (The sea hawk, as you know, is another name for the osprey.) Thus the Osprey Club in Otari is named after him, and they consider themselves honorable thieves, as Otari was.

Vol Rajani took her ancestral blade, the Rosa Argentis, when she was exiled from Nidal. Her family's symbol was the silver rose, and between the thorny blade and her rose-themed armor, she soon gained a name for herself as the Rose Knight. She battled her way across the Inner Sea region, participating in arena combat and slaying monsters. When the Roseguard first came together, after they all leapt to action to stop a rampaging monster at the Absalom docks, it was Vol Rajani's idea that they join forces, and it was because of her rose symbol that they decided upon the Roseguard as a name. It was originally Vol's intention to bring her powerful new allies back to Nidal and reclaim her throne, but over time she lost interest in her old goals. Eventually, during a dramatic moment on one of their adventures, she uttered her famous line: "I would rather be a hero than a princess."

Zarmavdian, the dwarven wizard, is a figure shrouded in mystery. His origin is unknown, though rumor claims he hails from one of the dwarven sky citadels in the north. Even his true name is unknown, for 'Zarmavdian' was a title given to him by a remote tribe in the distant Mwangi Expanse. (Zarmavdian was exceptionally well-traveled.) The title Zarmavdian can be roughly translated as 'the watchful one,' for Zarmavdian was observant as well as clever, and his tactical foresight saved the day just as often as his mighty spells during the adventures of the Roseguard. Zarmavdian was a bit of an eccentric. He dabbled in everything – cookery, poetry, cartography,

all forms of art and craft. The depth of his imagination was profound, and he was constantly on the hunt for secrets and mysteries.

Aeseephana Menhemes was known as the Huntress. She was the youngest of the Roseguard when they first came together, still only a teenager. Yet she was wise far beyond her years, and her skill with a bow was great, and she had the favor of Erastil. Although Vol founded the Roseguard, and Zarmavdian was the brains of the operation, and Otari its moral compass, in essence it was the Huntress who became its leader. Legend says she had an inspiring aura about her. She and Otari developed a romantic relationship with each other over the course of their adventures, and they had only recently exchanged engagement vows before the fateful encounter with Belcorra Haruvex.

The Belcorra Encounter, and Aftermath

Belcorra was attempting to mount the fulcrum and lenses onto the height of the Gauntlight when the Roseguard came upon her and engaged in battle. If they had been even a few days later, Absalom may have fallen! Even during the battle, they did not fully understand the importance of their actions. Otari “died” during this battle, though as we know, he survived and ended up further down in the vaults. The details on what exactly happened here, as well as the answer to the obvious question of “why didn’t the victorious Roseguard find him afterward?” can be found in my notes on meeting Otari in the fourth level, in that section of this document.

The fate of Otari is known, but what about the rest of the Roseguard? When they believed Otari dead, they turned the full might of their vengeance upon Belcorra and overpowered her. Belcorra perished as the fulcrum broke, scattering the lenses. The psychic backlash of this event had two effects: first, it inflicted the curse of the empty death upon the three remaining members of the Roseguard – Vol, Zarmavdian, and Aeseephana. Second, the souls of those present were partially bound to the lenses! Belcorra’s soul was bound to the black lens, by which she was awoken centuries later. This had no immediate effect upon the Roseguard, but when they died, instead of becoming ghosts and being consumed by Nimbalothe as is normal for those afflicted with the empty death, their souls entered a sort of inert stasis due to their link with the lenses.

When Belcorra died, the Roseguard were stricken with an incurable curse of empty death, and they briefly sensed Nimbalothe. They fled from the Gauntlight in terror, and returned only once to confirm that their friend Otari had perished. They founded the town nearby atop some old ruins in the caverns with the intent of taking care of any wandering monsters that might have served Belcorra, and to be ready should Belcorra ever reawaken as Zarmavdian feared – for they had not recovered her body, nor the lenses.

According to the official story, Aeseephana, Vol, and Zarmavdian lived happily ever after in the town of Otari. This is not quite what happened, and some of the NPCs in Otari today (including Morlibint, Wrin, Vandy, and even mayor Oseph) are aware that the truth is darker. For the surviving members of the Roseguard were haunted by nightmares, by thoughts of Nimbalothe.

They lived for another decade or so, long enough for Vol and Aesephana to bear lineages, but their end was far from happy.

Zarmavdian eventually realized that their souls had been bound to some kind of artifact, but he was never able to locate the lenses (which had been taken below by Belcorra's servants) due to their powerful nondetection magic. Zarmavdian descended steadily into madness as he delved ever deeper into the terrible mysteries of Nhimbalo. He began devising a ritual designed to free himself and his friends from the accursed lenses, but the ritual was impossible to complete without the lenses. Ultimately, Zarmavdian simply disappeared, leaving behind only his tome, *Thresholds of Truth*, which was taken into protective custody by wizards in Absalom. Some suspect that Zarmavdian removed himself from the world, either by suicide or by self-imposed exile to some distant plane, so that he could not harm anyone in his ever-encroaching madness. Whatever the case, he did die, and his soul now slumbers in the lens.

Vol Rajani went mad. Increasingly paranoid and violent, the dark night eventually came when Aesephana Menhemes was forced to slay her old friend in order to protect innocent lives. Aesephana died soon after, depressed and alone, and she was buried in a vault below the town. A dark spirit, drawn by the taint of the empty death and by Aesephana's misery and despair at the end of her life, came to inhabit her tomb. The party will have to deal with this spirit to retrieve Aesephana's relic.

The Roseguard Relics

Four powerful items are required for the party to breach the barrier and advance to the 5th level of the vaults. These items take some effort to acquire, but they are very useful, and they will grow in power throughout the adventure.

The Cailean Key is freely given by Otari's ghost. This magical key has the stats of a skeleton key. The key can gain up to three upgrades:

Upgrade 1: Ability to cast Freedom of Movement once per day

Upgrade 2: Ability to cast Word of Freedom once per day

Upgrade 3: Word of Freedom can be cast once per hour

There are several opportunities throughout the Vaults to physically set people free. Examples of this include Chafkhem in the fifth level, the creatures in kitchen on the sixth level, Cynemi on the seventh level, or Huglu on the eighth level. You may find more. The first three times that the PCs make a choice to set a creature free, for its own good, the Cailean Key becomes more powerful.

The Rosa Argentis is the blade of the Rose Knight and the ancestral weapon of the Rajanis. This beautiful silver longsword is artfully worked with a rose-and-thorns motif. It gains additional powers in the hands of a Rajani.

The Rosa Argentis is a +1 striking longsword (+2 if wielded by a Rajani). The wielder of the Rosa Argentis gains a +2 bonus on all checks to Aid allies. It also grants the following abilities. Flurry of Flowers (2 actions): Make three attacks against three different enemies in range. The sword is treated as Agile when calculating MAP for this ability. Blossom Veil (2 actions) (only in the hands of a Rajani): This functions exactly as the spell *blur*.

Upgrade: when Vol Rajani's spirit is contacted in her lens, the Rosa Argentis becomes a +2 greater striking weapons. In addition, it gains its final ability: Piercing Thorn (2 actions): This ability functions as Power Attack, but it also ignores damage resistance, cover, and concealment. However, it requires that the wielder of the Rosa Argentis is either grappling or being grappled by the target of this attack.

For notes on how the Rosa Argentis may be acquired, see my notes on the fourth level of the vaults.

The Cloak of the Huntress is a fine grey-brown cloak once worn by Aeseephana Menhemes, the Huntress. The wearer of this cloak gains the Hunt Prey and Hunter's Edge (Precision) class features from the Ranger class, in addition to a +2 bonus to Stealth checks. The precision damage from Hunter's Edge increases by 1d8 if the wearer already has Hunter's Edge (Precision).

Upgrade: When Aeseephana's spirit is contacted in her lens, the cloak is further empowered. The wearer can cast the spells *true strike* and *lose the path* once per day.

Acquiring the Cloak of the Huntress requires dealing with the dark entity inside of Aeseephana's tomb below the town. Her holy symbol (in the possession of mayor Menhemes) is the key necessary to open the tomb. If the party involves Vandy Banderdash, she will assist them in this encounter.

When the tomb is opened, a wraith emerges! Use the normal wraith stats, but also give it an aura with the effects of the *crushing despair* spell, as well as an at-will use of the spell *agonizing despair*. If the party does not already know the tragic tale of Vol and Aeseephana, you can give some clues about it here.

Your party might be level five or six when they attempt this fight. In that case, you might slap the Elite template on the wraith, or even try a weakened dread wraith if you want to keep things interesting!

If Vandy is involved, she will channel positive energy as she attempts a purification ritual while the party battles the wraith. This has the effect of healing the party by 2d8 and damaging the wraith by the same amount every round, just as if she was repeatedly casting a three-action *heal* spell heightened to second level.

Finally, Zarmavdian's tome, *Thresholds of Truth* is kept in a special collection in Absalom, as described in that section of this document.

This strange and heavy tome is bound with dark, magical stone. It is heavily annotated, as described in *The Hands of the Devil*, but it also contains Zarmavdian's recipes, poetry, maps, and other products of his busy mind. The final twenty or so pages appear blank. (They are not.)

In addition to the spells listed in the second book of the adventure, the *Thresholds* contains the following:

5th level: *banishment, drop dead, telepathic bond, sending*

6th level: *chain lightning, elemental confluence, scrying, true seeing*

7th level: *contingency, reverse gravity, prismatic spray*

This is because we are reimagining Zarmavdian, and the rest of the Roseguard, as being higher-level than the adventure-as-written implies.

Thresholds of Truth can be (and has been) used as a magical shield. It is 2 bulk, and can be strapped to an arm like a normal shield. When used this way, it has hardness 7 and 30 BP. The contents of the book are not damaged if the shield 'breaks,' but the cover must be repaired for it to be used again as a shield. If the wielder is attuned to *Thresholds of Truth*, they can spend one action on their turn to activate the defensive runes on its cover. This is similar to raising a shield, except that instead of increasing AC, it gives the wielder the benefits of a *globe of invulnerability* spell (level 3, counteract check +15) until the start of their next turn.

Upgrade: when Zarmavdian's spirit is contacted via his lens, the final pages of his tome reveal themselves. He was working on a complex ritual with the aim of freeing himself and his companions from the baleful gaze of Nhimbalth. The party can complete the ritual and free the trapped souls of the Roseguard, as described in the section below.

The Fulcrum Lenses

As part of my plan to involve the Roseguard with the end of the story, I have bound their souls to the fulcrum lenses. This does NOT have any effect upon the location of the lenses, their powers, or their role in the final defeat of Belcorra. Rather, the intent is to give the players the option of finishing Zarmavdian's ritual and freeing the Roseguard (which will also allow the Roseguard to aid the party in the climactic battle, although the party doesn't know this). If the party declines to perform the ritual, they can defeat Belcorra as normal, but the souls of Vol, Aeseephana, and Zarmavdian will be forever lost along with her.

Aeseephana Menehemes is bound to the Crimson Fulcrum Lens. Her spirit will awaken if the lens comes into contact with her cloak or her holy symbol. Otari and Dorianna will also be able to sense her presence and awaken her.

Vol Rajani is bound to the Emerald Fulcrum Lens. Her spirit will awaken if the lens comes into contact with the Rosa Argentis. Otari and the Rajanis will also be able to sense her presence and awaken her.

Zarmavdian is bound to the Ochre Fulcrum Lens. His spirit will awaken if the lens comes into contact with his book. Otari will also be able to sense his presence and awaken him.

Any hero who rolls a check to investigate these lenses will be able to sense a faint non-Nhimbaloth presence within them on a roll of at least 25. If they roll 30 or higher, they will be able to identify the presence as a soul which is somehow bound or connected to the lens. Wrin, Morlibint, or Vandy can all reveal this information to the party if they are shown the lenses.

Communicating with the spirits even when they awaken is not easy, and is unlikely to be very helpful. A spirit medium like Wrin, a psychic like Dorianna, or Otari himself can all establish a line of communication with these lost Roseguard spirits, but the connection is faint, like a distant echo. Furthermore, the spirits seem confused, their memories of their lives vague. They have difficulty understanding the current situation, or how much time has passed, and they are consumed by fear of Nhimbaloth and other strong emotions they felt near the ends of their lives. They may still react to especially strong stimuli. (For example, Aeseephana might have a heartfelt interaction with her distant descendant, or with Otari.) In general, these three unfortunate spirits should be portrayed as pitiable rather than helpful.

When Zarmavdian is contacted, the party will discover his final ritual in his spellbook – a ritual they can bring to completion to free these heroes of old. The party doesn't know this, but performing the ritual will also allow the Roseguard heroes to provide aid in the final battle against Belcorra!

Zarmavdian's Ritual

[note: although I am using the term 'ritual' here, the mechanics of Zarmavdian's ritual differ from the normal rules of rituals in this system. For example, once the preparations are complete, the ritual takes minutes rather than hours.]

The amount of effort it requires to prepare the ritual should be proportional to how interested your players are in such a task. If they like the idea of spending a week of downtime buried in arcane research, consulting ancient tomes and various spirits and whatnot, then have them roll some checks. (Maybe give them a bonus if they have *The Whispering Reeds* and if they communicate with Zarmavdian.) Otherwise, they could just hand *Thresholds of Truth* to Morlibint, Wrin, or possibly even Vandy, and those NPCs will get it sorted out.

Regardless, as the ritual is being prepared and/or researched, a nosoi appears to watch, and to offer assistance if it is required. This psychopomp tells you that your efforts have not gone unnoticed in the vast courts of the Boneyard. Attempting to free souls from the wretched gaze of Nhimbaloth is a very good thing in the eyes of Pharama, Nhimbaloth's ancient enemy, and the nosoi is here to offer what aid it can.

When the party is ready, they can attempt the ritual. The nosoi will forewarn them to be ready, as this might draw unwanted attention. First, the party must select NPC assistants to help with the casting of the ritual. This ritual is a matter of the divine, the occult, and the arcane all in one. Therefore, Wrin, Morlibint, and/or Vandy are all options.

Second, the location. The ritual must take place within 200 feet of the Gauntlight. The most natural location is area D14 on the fourth level, because that is close to where Otari's bones are. The party will have to move his bones elsewhere if they want to conduct the ritual in some other location. The ritual requires a lot of space, so only a few other places within the vaults are viable, such as the arena or the Darklands caverns (though levels 8 and 9 are inadvisable, as Belcorra herself might make an appearance). The surface near the Gauntlight keep is also a good choice.

Third, the flavor. Go nuts with all the arcane instruments, occult symbolism, wizardly runes, guttering candles, etc. This ritual is 99% percent preparation, 1% action. There might be chanting, incense, open books everywhere, whatever your players like. The only parts that are truly necessary are the lenses, *Thresholds of Truth*, and Otari's bones. The ritual circle is ten feet across.

And finally, the ritual itself! Things will get interesting.

The chosen NPC allies will begin with the finale of the ritual: chanting, summoning energies, casting spells. The PCs can assist. All is going well, until...

With a terrible screech and a burst of dark energy, a monstrous wormlike creature appears! This is a neothelid – a foe that is very likely beyond the ability of the party to deal with. It communicates its purpose: it is a servant of Nhimbalothe (as well as the progenitor of the seugathi that the party faced in the 6th level), and it is here to stop all this nonsense. The nosoi immediately vanishes.

The party must defend their allies performing the ritual! Let them fight the neothelid for a single round – just long enough to put the fear of Nhimbalothe into them. But at the end of the first round, the nosoi returns – with backup. A mighty psychopomp known as a morrigna appears to face off against the neothelid. A raging battle ensues, which is just a bit above the level at which the party can meaningfully contribute. This battle will continue in the background, symbolizing the struggle between Nhimbalothe and Pharasma, throughout the remainder of the ritual.

But the party has their own problems, because the neothelid seems to have opened some kind of path for other servants of Nhimbalothe. As the morrigna appears, so does a familiar foe: a voidglutton! The party might have voidglutton-induced PTSD at this point, so it's good for them to have a chance to strike back at a monster which very possibly has the blood of one or two PCs, if not a whole party, on its seven-fingered hands. (This is an elite voidglutton if you're running the vaults a level ahead.)

So here's how the encounter works: at the start of each round after the morrigna appears, a new elite voidglutton joins the battle. This will continue until the ritual is complete. The ritual takes

16 rounds to complete. (Adjust to 12 if you have only one PC that can easily contribute to the ritual, or to 20 if you have three or more.) That's a lot of rounds, you say – *and* a lot of voidgluttons! Yes, but listen: any player can, on their turn, attempt a DC 25 check in Religion, Arcana, or Occultism as long as they're Expert proficiency in the given skill and within 30 feet of the main ritual circle. This is a two-action activity. If they succeed, the time to complete the ritual is reduced by 1 round (2 rounds on a critical success). Additionally, if a player succeeds in aiding the ritual, allies gain a +1 status bonus to AC and saves while within 30 feet of the ritual circle, and this area is also illuminated with dim light which dispels any darkness effect in the area. These effects last only one round, but can be maintained indefinitely through repeated checks to assist the ritual.

The encounter is a balancing act between dealing with the voidgluttons so as not to be overwhelmed by their ever-increasing numbers, while also hastening the completion of the ritual. The voidgluttons theoretically are attempting to disrupt the NPC who is the primary caster for the ritual, but they will actually target the party.

Additionally, roll a d8 on this table at the end of each round to determine the effect, if any, that the nearby conflict between neothelid and morrigna has on the battle. These affect both the party and the voidgaunts, unless otherwise specified.

1. A stray blast of the neothelid's acidic breath weapon sprays over the battlefield; everyone takes 8d6 acid damage with a DC 28 basic Reflex save.
2. The neothelid's telepathy brushes the minds of the party with whispers of the unfathomable. The voidgluttons are immune, but the party makes Will saving throws with a DC of 28. The heroes become stunned 1 on a failure, and confused for 1 round on a critical failure.
3. A wave of positive energy originating from the morrigna washes over the battlefield. The voidgluttons are immune, but the heroes are healed for 4d8.
4. Skittering spirit spiders and strands of webbing from the morrigna's wrappings have drifted over to clutter up the battlefield. Everyone must attempt a DC 28 Reflex save or take a -10 penalty to all speeds, being instead immobilized on a critical failure.
5. The neothelid briefly loses control, spreading horrifying apocalyptic visions in psychic flashes through the battlefield. The voidgluttons are immune, but the party must roll Will saves with a DC of 28. This has the effect of the *phantasmal calamity* spell, except that it deals only 8d6 damage and cannot stun a target for more than one round.
6. The morrigna briefly gains the upper hand in a dramatic fashion, inspiring the heroes with the thought of this powerful extraplanar ally fighting at their side against the forces of evil. The party gains the effect of *inspire courage* for one round.
7. The nosoi is out of its league, but still trying to be helpful. If any of the voidgluttons are invisible, the nosoi will take the Point Out action, rendering them hidden instead of undetected.
8. Nothing of note. (Though you should still describe the conflict in epic fashion.)

When the ritual is complete, the neothelid will retreat, and any remaining voidgluttons will vanish. The souls of the Roseguard will be separated from the lenses, freed to pass on to the next world. The party's good deed has been noted by the Lady of Graves. However, the Roseguard

ask to help the party finish what the Roseguard began all those centuries ago. As this will thwart Nhimbaloth if successful, the psychopomps agree. They give the party one week before they return to collect the souls of the Roseguard. If the party faces Belcorra in the Temple of Empty Death before that time, the spirits of the Roseguard will aid them!

Each member of the Roseguard provides a passive buff for the final battle against Belcorra, as well as a powerful single-use ability that anyone in the party can activate when they deem it necessary. They are as follows:

Otari Ilveshti, the Sea Hawk:

- Passive: +5 to all speeds and to Escape checks
- Active: (3 actions) as the spell *all is one, one is all*

Vol Rajani, the Rose Knight:

- Passive: Everyone gets Attacks of Opportunity
- Active: (reaction) Hero's Defiance, as the champion focus spell, except that it is a reaction

Zarmavdian, the Watchful One:

- Passive: +2 to Will saves
- Active: (3 actions) similar to the spell *time stop*, except that each member of the party, including the one who activated this ability, gets two actions before time resumes.

Aesephana Menhemes, the Huntress:

- Passive: Each hero may select one of their weapons to gain the effects of the Holy weapon property rune for this battle. This works even if the weapon is already at its maximum number of property runes, but does not stack with pre-existing Holy runes.
- Active: (1 action) as the spell *true target*

Otari NPCs

One of the best things about this adventure is the town of Otari and its cast of characters. Since the entire adventure takes place nearby, you have the entire game to build up fun and interesting interactions and relationships with the people in town. The various personages of Otari are, for the most part, not given much elaboration in the official content. This is intentional on the part of the designers, not only to save space, but to allow plenty of creative leeway for different GMs to interpret the NPCs of Otari in whatever way best fits their group.

This is how I interpreted them. My hope is that you can find my ideas helpful, or use them as a starting point for your own unique take on these characters. Listed below are the important characters of Otari. I have described the basic personality traits of each, along with their motives, any distinctive quirks or mannerisms I gave them, and any changes I made from the official content. I also made sure that almost every character has at least one associated side quest. You'll also notice that I added a few characters, and I will tell you why when we get to them. Other than what is listed below, I didn't make any changes from their descriptions in the Otari Gazetteer in the first book of the AP.

Klorte Hengus

Klorte is sociable, gregarious, and hard-working. He never wears a shirt, no matter the weather, and has a massive tattoo across his broad shoulders which reads THE LUMBERJACKER. He loves to show off his great strength and martial prowess, enjoys manual labor and the company of lumberjacks, and has great respect for his boss, Oseph Menhemes. He will respect any PC with big muscles or an obvious work ethic.

Quest: Klorte approaches the party about possible sabotage on the log flume. (This scenario is described in the Kortos Conspiracy section of this document.)

Oseph Menhemes

Oseph is serious, responsible, and a bit of a workaholic who forgets to spend time with his family. He speaks with many brief, awkward pauses in the middle of sentences or even words, as if constantly distracted. Although Oseph has been accused of having a conflict of interests (especially by Carman) due to his ownership of Otari Lumber in addition to being mayor, he in fact takes both jobs very seriously and does his best to keep them separate. Mayor Oseph loves the town of Otari, to the point that conversation with him often ends up with him giving a short speech as though advertising the town like a tourism bureau. Therefore, he will have great respect for the party once he learns that they have rescued his beloved Otari from a draconic threat.

Quest: A number of events could be said to be quests from the mayor, including his daughter's curse, dealing with Credence and Cryde, and even the entirety of the Abomination Vaults.

Dorianna Menhemes

Like her father, Dorianna is proud of her history. She admires the Huntress, Aesephana Menhemes. Dorianna is quiet, soft-spoken, and prefers solitary pursuits such as reading and music. She is both frightened and amazed by the recent emergence of her psychic abilities, and at

the start of the game she is doing her best to keep all of it a secret, at least until she figure out what is going on.

Quest: deal with the denizen of Leng that has cursed her and is draining her life force.

Ichabod Shoakes

I have added this NPC because I wanted the Menhemes manor to have a butler. Mr. Shoakes is a 300-year-old elf who has served the Menhemes family since the time of Maklanna. Because of this, he is highly valued by mayor Oseph as a living link to the town's history. Mr. Shoakes is a professional to the core – unshakable, proper, and restrained at all times. He has Legendary proficiency in Lore (Butlering), and is generally the ideal servant: capable, helpful, and trustworthy. He carries a concealed flintlock pistol and a knife, and though he is not a skilled combatant, he will go to any length to defend the Menhemes manor and its resident family.

Quest: Intruders in the manor! (This scenario is covered in the Kortos Conspiracy section of this document)

The Scribbles

I added the Scribbles to remedy a noticeable lack of funny goblins in Otari. The Scribbles got their family long ago when one of them tried to sign an official document. There are six of them, and their first names were (mostly) chosen after colors: Blue, Green, Red, Black, Chartreuse, and Fish. These goblins are technically minded, with a knack for engineering and machinery. They live inside the Giant's Wheel – literally inside it; they've rigged hammocks with swiveling mounts, and they just sleep going around and around. They are charged with the maintenance and upkeep of the wheel and the log flumes. They are good at this job, but Klorte has to keep a close eye on them, because every once in while they get some creative ideas for 'improvements.'

Wrin Sivinxi

Wrin is excitable, earnest, and scatterbrained in her manner and speaking. She is easily distracted by random things: a cloud, a leaf, a hat. She sees portents and omens everywhere. Wrin is old enough to remember when prophecy was reliable, before the death of Aroden, and 100 years later she's still frustrated by her inability to be sure about the future. Wrin can see the stars even during the day, and the reason she avoids geometric angles in her environment, particularly right angles, is that the hounds of Tindalos are after her for some time-related infraction in the past – or possibly the future.

Quest: apart from the obvious Gauntlight quest, I added a scenario in which Wrin is hosting a tea party for some visiting associates. They are a group of djinn on a tour of the Inner Sea region, stopping by to have a look at her unusual wares. She asks the party to help, and this is a good opportunity to have a strange social encounter as they try to behave correctly and entertain the outlandish guests.

Oloro Gallentine

I changed Gallentine's name and made him a man. Why? Because I wanted someone in town to be modeled after a past character of mine.

Oloro is gloomy, grim, and ominous in speech and appearance. He dresses in black and wears a perpetual frown of distaste or disapproval. He has an unnerving habit of suddenly appearing nearby, as his skulking skills have not left him since his time as a ranger. Despite his initial

impression, he is reliable, polite, and well-liked about town. He also acts as the local veterinarian, as he is an expert on animals, especially horses, which he loves.

Quest: Investigate the disappearance of Narala (this is taken from the Trouble in Otari adventure, and is described in that section of this document)

Narala

In stark contrast to Oloro, Narala is friendly, high-spirited, quick to laugh and always ready to party. Despite their opposite personalities, Narala and Oloro are close friends. The rumors of romantic involvement between them are untrue, but they have known each other for many years, and share many secrets.

Carman Rajani

Carman is grouchy, antagonistic, petty, bitter, and quick to escalate any conflict far beyond necessity. His parents and wife perished in a terrible accident nearly a decade ago, and his life has been spiraling downhill ever since, as described in the official content. He has been running for mayor the last few years in an effort to get himself some respect, and he has reached the point where he will not hesitate to play dirty.

Amicia Rajani

This might be the biggest change I made to the NPCs of Otari: I gave Carman a daughter. The effect that this has on the acquisition of Vol Rajani's blade, and on Urevian's bargain, are described in the Changes to the Vaults section of this document.

I gave Carman a daughter because I wanted him to be less of a one-dimensional character. I wanted a tense parent-child relationship for the drama. And I wanted someone in town to look up to the party and strive to be a hero in their own right.

Amicia Rajani is eighteen years old. She is sullen, angsty, and embarrassed by her father's antics. She assists him at the blacksmith and tries to reign in his self-destructive habits while at the same time maintaining a distance from him. They have a strained relationship, but they are the only family they each have.

Amicia works at the smithy with her father. She would never admit this out loud, but she admires heroes like her ancestor, Vol Rajani, and she dreams of someday being as skilled and valiant as the Rose Knight. She often goes to Vol Rajani's tomb in the Otari graveyard, and she believes she feels a sort of connection to the Rajanis of old.

Amicia will steal the Rosa Argentis, the blade of Vol Rajani, and if she is allowed to keep it, she may become a hero of Otari as the adventure progresses.

James and Carl Morlibint

James Morlibint is a nervous, hesitant, scatterbrained man who speaks and dresses more like an accountant or a bookkeeper than a wizard. He is a wizard, however, and quite a learned one at that. His husband Carl, by contrast, has a deep, sonorous voice, a grand wizardly beard, a posture and bearing of importance, and voluminous robes along with a pointy wizard hat. Carl is not a wizard, but since he is the Morlibint that looks, speaks, and acts like one, even the longtime residents of Otari must often remind themselves which of the Morlibints is actually the wizard. Carl is aware of this confusion, and he likes to exacerbate it for his own amusement, and to James's annoyance. Carl acts and dresses like a wizard simply because he thinks wizards are

cool. After all, he married one. Carl considers himself the best coffee craftsman in Otari (though he has steep competition), and it is his goal to open a coffee shop as part of the bookstore. James Morlibint's dream is to become a novelist. He won't hesitate to show the party his latest manuscript if they ask about it. He sent a draft to a publisher in Absalom, and in response they suggested that he cut several hundred pages. He considers himself a book lover first, a wizard second. "Imagination," he declares, "is the real magic!" James and Carl are both admirers of Zarmavdian, and they both are aware of the tragic true story of the Roseguard's final years. James' help will be necessary for acquiring Zarmavdian's spellbook, *Thresholds of Truth*, as described in that section of this document.

Captain Lardus Longsaddle

Intense, high-strung, and foul-mouthed, Longsaddle's service in Absalom has left his nerves, and his patience, a bit frayed. He runs a tight ship and is entirely incorruptible. However, it is common knowledge that he has monthly meetings with Yinyasmera, in which they discuss the doings of the Osprey Club and the safety of the town. Longsaddle allows a certain amount of illicit activity from the Osprey Club, so long as it is perpetrated upon visiting wealthy merchants and the like. He turns a blind eye to this because he acknowledges the role that the Osprey Club plays in keeping the town safe from *real* threats. He learned a thing or two from his time in the big city, and one of the lessons is this: you can't get rid of crime, but you *can* regulate it.

Quest: Captain Longsaddle will call upon the party to investigate the local outlaws armed with firearms that have been robbing travelers along the roads. These are the Leadbuster Lads from the Troubles in Otari adventure, and I have described how to modify this quest in that section of this document.

Jale Highstepper

I have changed this character from a female halfling to a male dwarf. Why? Because I had a funny voice I wanted to use. Jale is jolly half-deaf dwarf who shouts all the time. He is ready to break into dance at the drop of a hat, which at the present time is made difficult by his broken leg and crutches. He is a butcher by trade, but also runs the farmer's guild.

Quest: Jale's sidequest is based on 'In the Stinkweed' from Troubles in Otari. I have described how I modified this quest in that section of this document.

Magiloy Murgatroyd

Magiloy is gregarious, friendly, talkative, and excitable. Her feathers are often singed or stained with various colors from her incessant (and occasionally dangerous) experimentation in both alchemy and alcohol. She gleefully mixes these two pursuits, such that her elixirs and her beverages are often the same. Your players will undoubtedly enjoy helping Magiloy taste-test her latest experiments. You can easily find various charts and tables online for fun side-effects of her creations, but here are a couple that I used.

<https://chartopia.d12dev.com/chart/5918/>

https://www.reddit.com/r/rpg/comments/7lw1ke/100_random_potion_effects/

Quest: 'Magiloy's Mushrooms' from Troubles in Otari. You can see how I modified this quest in the Troubles in Otari section of this document.

Other Quest: If you are using Credence and Cryde, and Magiloy has a good relationship with the party, she might enlist their help in getting her a date with Kepler Credence, with potentially hilarious results.

Yinyasmera

Yin is cool-headed and relaxed, yet always ready to spring to action. She speaks in a slow drawl. She admires Otari, the Sea Hawk, after which her Osprey Club is named, and she makes sure that this thieves guild follows Otari's example by stealing only from those who can afford the loss and making charitable donations to those in need. Yin believes that she has the responsibility of making sure that no truly dangerous criminals try to set up in Otari. Yin keeps her private life very private. For example, few people in town are aware that she is happily married to Barnaby, the mysterious and reclusive culinary genius who makes the food at the Crook's Nook.

Quest: Rescue the members of the Osprey Club that went missing in the Fogfen.

Keelo Lathenar

Keelo is a dour, humorless man. He is suspicious of outsiders – a disadvantageous attribute in someone who runs the town market. His beloved wife Ayla was murdered several years ago (not several decades, as written in the official adventure) by the werewolf Jaul Mezmin. He may be suspicious of the heroes – particularly if one of them is animal-like in appearance or associated with Druidry.

Quest: Bring Jaul Mezmin to justice.

Tamily Tanderveil

Tamily, with her ever-growing collection of novelty peg legs and fake eyepatches, is an irreverent jokester who enjoys pranks and knows how to play to her usual crowd of salty old fisher-folk. She's had her fair share of brushes with death back in her pirate days (on the same crew as Magiloy), and now her goal in life is to have a roaring good time before the end. That being said, she's a recovering alcoholic who's been off the bottle for five years, and she doesn't serve alcohol in the Fishery. She serves coffee instead. She's impressed with the party if they take care of the dragon in the Menace Under Otari, and will offer to have its head mounted in the fishery alongside all the other strange creatures, so that it will be a conversation topic for many years to come.

Quest: The fishing camp quest from Troubles in Otari. See that section of this document for details on recommended modifications.

Fiver

The Thirsty Alpaca burned down several weeks ago due to a violent conflict between two sibling dragon mage kobolds. Zolgran was victorious, and went on the cause the trouble detailed in the beginner box adventure. You can read more about this conflict in the beginner box section of this document. Her brother Kolgan did not die, but survived, badly wounded, in the charred ruins. Here he used his magic to scare away the townspeople, who concluded that the ruins were haunted. They called in Wrin to investigate. Wrin discovered the kobold mage, who had forsaken his old name. She befriended him and named him Fiver, then she declared to the town that she had successfully exorcised the ghost (but they should still leave the charred ruins alone for a while). Fiver is fascinated by, and envious of, the ways of surface dwellers. Wrin has made it her personal side project to help Fiver make the adjustment and become a fully-fledged citizen of Otari. This will be tricky, as the townspeople are naturally predisposed against kobolds. Wrin might eventually enlist the party's help with this project, or they might discover Fiver on their own. Interacting with Wrin may yield some clues – for example, she periodically lights a

firework at dusk and then floats a basket of food and supplies down the Osprey river for Fiver to swim out and grab.

Quest: Help Fiver find a place in the life of Otari – and maybe even rebuild his old clan.

Lady Alymora Inkleholtz

Lady Inkleholtz is a widow with a family of children and a touch of eccentricity. She is professional and shrewd when it comes to running Whistledown Cutters, but in her off-time she becomes absorbed in studying random, obscure, some would even say ‘useless,’ topics. Her manor is full of children and cats – countless cats. Lady Inkleholtz has an uncanny knack for understanding and directing her feline army. Her major project is the establishment of an official educational institute for the children of Otari. She is looking into purchasing the lot where the Thirsty Alpaca once stood and converting it into a school.

Quest: The tax-evasion scenario, as described in the Kortos Conspiracy section of this document.

Other Quest: The party can assist her in the school project in a variety of ways, earning her gratitude and the respect of the townspeople.

Wrab Chertel

Wrab is getting old. He walks with a cane, and his voice is whispery and hoarse, as he seems to be in a constant state of poor health. He uses this to his full advantage, and those who underestimate him invariably find themselves on the short end of any business dealings with Chertel Timber. Wrab is just as wily and clever as he ever was. He loves games of strategy, and is known for being the sharpest chess player in Otari. Nevertheless, his company is struggling, and between this and his failing health, Wrab has turned to desperate measures. He has struck a deal with the Kortos Consortium, the outcome of which is described in the Kortos Conspiracy section of this document.

Quest: Although the entire sequence of events with Credence and Cryde are as a result of Wrab, he also has a quest of his own to offer the party, should they ever interact with him directly. It involves the investigation of recent disappearances in his lumber camps. These disappearances are caused by will-o-wisps, growing ever bolder. The number of will-o-wisps, and the monetary reward that Wrab offers, will depend on the level of the PCs when they take this quest.

Brela Venkervale

Brela is distant and sad ever since the disappearance of her son several months ago (rather than an entire year, as written in the official adventure). Brela is a great singer, but she has not done much singing recently.

Quest: Find Lasda Venkervale and bring him safely home.

Vandy Banderdash

Vandy is sweet, kind, and quick to offer compliments. She speaks with an earnest, grandmotherly voice, and she somehow, in any situation, always has freshly-baked cookies on hand. Beneath her benign exterior, however, are hints of bloody steel. She mentions her experience in ‘the crusades’ from time to time, and often drops disturbing hints that she has seen enough death and pain and madness to last for many lifetimes. She is always sweet and calm, but will not hesitate to take down her trusty bronze mace from its rack in the library and march into battle with any foe or monster that threatens her library or her town. When undead are involved, a perceptive hero might notice a terrible wrath burning within Vandy’s eyes. She is unshakable.

Quest: The missing priest quest from Troubles in Otari. Suggested modifications to this quest are described in that section of this document.

Worliwynn and Spot

Worliwynn is optimistic and full of energy. She can often be found merrily playing her flute, making bright flowers grow around her. She has an animal companion, an albatross named Spot. Spot is larger than Worliwynn, and provides the little gnome with a convenient means of swift transportation. It is not uncommon to see a tiny gnome dangling from an albatross overhead.

Worliwynn is playful and adventurous, yet easily frightened, and can't stand violence. The life of an adventurer is not for her, but she loves to hear the stories. She considers herself a peacemaker.

Quest: If the party is in good standing with the druids, and if at least one of them can use primal magic, Worliwynn will ask them to assist with a ritual for the revitalization of the forest. There used to be a magical tower, called the Old Forest Aeon Tower, that hastened the growth of trees throughout the Immenwood, but it has not functioned since the death of Aroden. The party travels into the woods to meet a dryad, and this is followed by a difficult skill challenge. (Skill challenges are described in the 'Spellbook Obtainment Expedition' section of this document.)

Sasha Thane

I added this character because I wanted someone 'located' out of town, among the lumber camps to the north. Sasha Thane is a huge, hairy man. His feats of strength are legendary among the lumberjacks, and he has their respect not only for this reason, but because of his reputation for being honest, straightforward, and above all, a man of his word. Sasha Thane is the head of the Lumberjacks Union. He is soft-spoken, prefers solitude, and abhors violence. He has a little cabin of his own in the woods. He is also an ursathrope, a were-bear. Some of the older lumberjacks are aware of this, but it only increases their respect for him, as were-bears are noble creatures, and he uses his incredible strength to protect the lumber camps from monsters in the woods.

Quest: Someone in the lumber camps, aware of Sasha Thane's true nature as an ursathrope, is attempting to frame him for a terrible crime. I put this one in here just so my players have an opportunity to do some criminal investigation and possibly even have a 'courtroom drama' scene. The details are up to you.

Greenspoon the Mighty

Comic relief here. Greenspoon the Mighty is an ancient, gnarled old man from the far northern Saga Lands. His pale, scrawny body is entirely covered in swirling blue tattoos. He is the local beggar/crazy person, but is considered an essential fixture of the town by its residents.

Greenspoon will happily spin tall tales all day long about his innumerable achievements, adventures, and the epic battles that he has fought against great monsters. You can drop subtle hints that maybe, just maybe, not all of his stories are as far-fetched as everyone thinks...

Quest: The party might be able to unite Greenspoon with a wandering bard who is eager to hear his tales. Maybe the bard just wants to record all this great material that Greenspoon is constantly improvising...or maybe the bard has actually heard about a great hero in the north of a similar name and appearance...

Monsieur Franz Frangelico

I love to give new parties an obnoxious rival. Cue Franz Frangelico. He is a monster hunter who thinks very, very highly of himself. He looks down upon the heroes as 'feeble amateurs,' and sneers at Otari, calling it a rustic backwater, among other unflattering names.

He makes an appearance from the first session. If the group is starting with the Menace Under Otari, have Franz loudly laugh when Tamily gives the quest, theorizing that 'it's probably just rats,' which are of course far beneath him. "Call me if there's a dragon," he laughs, "that's really more my speed." Of course, when the party has slain the wyrmling, he will scoff and declare that he has slain far larger. That little thing hardly even counts.

In fact, Mr. Frangelico is a 6th-level monster hunter, and the party will be in for a surprise if they try to get violent with him right off the bat. Furthermore, his beautiful white stallion, Binky, is an intelligent horse. Binky is actually the brains of the operation, who might be seen rolling his eyes at his rider's braggadocio. (Binky is also the reason that Franz will not go down into the vaults, even after hearing about all the monsters and loot down there. He will not go into battle without his mount.)

Franz Frangelico's role is to annoy and goad the party, and to allow them to rub their victories and achievements in his face. Franz might participate in some of the events in the festival, being infuriatingly condescending toward the heroes.

Finally, Frangelico will hang around Otari and pick up any sidequests that the party misses or declines. Naturally, he will flaunt these victories in the party's face when next he sees them. He may even display true bravery and fight alongside the heroes in the Demontide for Otari event, described in that section of this document. He may be a pompous ass, but he wasn't lying about being a monster hunter.

Changes to the Vaults

Everyone who runs this adventure will make changes to the encounters and content to match their group. As it should be. This section is not about minor tweaks to enemies or random loot tailored to my group. (For example: it omits the fact that I gave the mitflits mud bombs and Australian accents.) It contains substantial content alterations that I believe improve the adventure, including the following:

- The addition of some traps and puzzles (according to my personal taste)
- Changes to the character, background, and motivations of several NPCs
- Several additional encounters intended to make the vaults feel more reactive and cohesive
- Alterations and additions relating to the Roseguard

In addition to what is listed below, I also added the treasure hunt with the letters, the coliseum of the Red Holiday, and a system of random encounters. All of these are listed in more detail elsewhere in this document.

First Level

The only alteration of significance I made on the first level is the addition of a character who should appear in the woods even before the party reaches the vaults. Legitimate Jack is a traveling goblin merchant who is always accompanied by a wood giant named Jodi. Legitimate Jack wears a battered top hat and a blue bow tie. Jodi carries a huge cabinet of merch on her back, and also acts as his security. Legitimate Jack is friendly, flattering, and fast-talking. His merchandise is a mixture of cheap junk that he tries to pawn off as valuable or magical, and actual magic items that are misleading, broken, or defective. Nevertheless, some of it might actually come in handy.

Here is a starter list:

- Ring of Danger Sense (loudly cries out ‘Danger! Danger!’ when the wearer takes damage)
- Tree phrasebook (speak to trees! No guarantee they will understand, or care, or react favorably. But you never know...)
- Bag of Weasels (cursed) (official item)
- Sovereign Sanitation Solution (water)
- Amulet of Flame Detection (range: touch)
- Bagpipes of Invisibility (make the user invisible when they are played)
- Cloak of Billowing (billows dramatically)
- Trapfinding Chicken (a regular chicken, good for detecting traps, single use)
- Lesser healing potions – sold at half price, but have a 30% chance of doing nothing, and a 30% chance of inflicting 1d8 poison damage
- Shiver (a hallucinogenic drug) (official item)
- Fool’s dust (causes sneezing and poor decisions)

No prices are listed because Jack will always try to squeeze as much out of the players as he thinks they are willing to pay.

Legitimate Jack and Jodi are on their way to Otari's Founder's Day Festival in search of customers. Jack is saddened to hear that he missed it, but he is an opportunist and will try to push his wares on the PCs, inventing things from his stock that they are sure to like. (His favorite saying is: "Everyone's a customer...if you're selling what they're looking for!") After the first time the PCs meet him, he will stick around in the area. He will do some trade with Wrin, and may even express a desire to follow her example and settle down his business somewhere. He's already got an idea for a shop name: Legitimate Jack's Un-Fraudulent Merchandise

What, besides comedy, is Jack's purpose? For one thing, he is the source of the dragon egg that resulted in the dragon beneath the town in *The Menace Under Otari*. (He might brag about how he pawned off that shiny rock to those gullible kobold rubes.) For another, he can bring news about how the Fogfen and surrounding area are becoming treacherous with those spooky swamplights that try to lead travelers astray. He can give clues about will-o-wisps, about the missing Osprey club members the party might be looking for, and about the Leadbuster Lads if you plan on using them later. Jack might be the party's lead to finding their base. In general, it's nice to have someone from outside of Otari to share news, rumors, and clues.

Second Level

When Wrin hears about the levels below the surface of the Gauntlight, she is both curious and suspicious. The next time the party returns to the surface level of the vaults, they will find Wrin outside, waiting for them. Demonstrate that she wants to help, but her claustrophobia prevents her from following them in. You can also take this opportunity to show that she is no pushover; maybe she comments on how she soloed a couple of slurks or some other beast on the way here. Later on in the adventure, Wrin will find a way to overcome her fears and briefly join the PCs to aid them on their journey, but for now the only help she can offer is advice.

There is a painting of a tiger beside the secret door in area B6. This is where Dr. Zacchaeus Quagmire III's first letter would have been. The PCs will likely realize this, and so the treasure hunt will begin! (You can find the full details in that section of this document.)

Beginning here in the second level, the party might notice an odd and ominous figure in bright clothes and a smiling mask watching them during tough battles. Just mention this offhand once or twice. It will surely freak them out, but it might be a while before they learn about the Cheery Man and the Red Holiday.

Add a few low-level constructs such as Clockwork Hunter or Clockwork Handler for the morloks to play with.

I added a trap in Volluk's workshop, area B2. It is a magic mirror, which reflects the room but not the players. A perceptive PC might notice that the reflection of the room contains something the real room lacks: the incomplete soulbound doll. If a PC touches the mirror, their reflection appears in the 'mirror world' and is able to grab the doll and bring it back through into reality. However, this may take a few turns because the doll is locked by chains to a work table. The lock can be picked (three DC 20 checks), or the key can be found in Volluk's chambers. The problem is that the physical body of the PC who touches the mirror, temporarily empty, becomes possessed by the lingering psychic echoes of Volluk's past victims and attacks the rest of the party. The party will have to restrain the body of their ally or disable it nonlethally.

I know there's already a trapped hallway in area B10, but I like traps, so I added another in area B8. It concerns the region with six empty ten-foot-square rooms. It will trigger when all PCs are in the six-square stretch of corridor in the middle of the aforementioned six rooms. It will also trigger when any of the doors to the six empty rooms is opened. Be sure to ascertain the exact positions of the party when one of these conditions is met. When the trap triggers, both ends of the six-square-long corridor are closed off by metal plates. In addition, metal plates drop down in the corridor itself, sectioning it into three equal parts, each connected to two rooms. The rooms are not empty; each contains a clockwork handler that will activate when the trap is triggered.

The idea here is that the party will be split into two, possibly three separate groups, each facing two weak enemies in a tightly enclosed space. The trap can be spotted with a DC 24 perception check, and players can attempt a DC 24 Reflex save to enter a different area before the panels drop down, if they are adjacent to a dropping panel. The panels are cobbled together and have hardness 5 and 25 hit points. If they are destroyed, movement between areas is possible.

If the party has been fighting their way through this level, imply that the morloks readied their automatons and armed this trap especially for the party. It is possible for the party to meet and make a truce with Graulgust before triggering this trap; in that case, it will not go off. Unless you want it to.

Third Level

The party should see Volluk from a distance in the library. He should be observed without noticing the party. Portray him as frightening and disturbing. He should be with the ghouls or some other allied creatures, making it unwise to attack him. If the party does decide to attack, he might stay long enough to cast some spells before disincorporating into worms and disappearing through a grille in the floor.

Later, when the party has cleared most of the third level and maybe even begun on the fourth level, they will have their first sighting of Caliddo Haruvex. I am making Caliddo a little more significant in this adventure, portraying him as the third and greatest of Belcorra's lieutenants that the party must deal with in the course of getting through the dungeon. Caliddo is heard

before he is seen, marching with slow, menacing purpose through the library. He will ignore the PCs unless they attack or try to impede him, in which case he drives them off (and probably terrifies them with his power) but does not pursue. If the PCs watch him, he goes to area B35 to retrieve a book. If the PCs have not discovered this secret area, they do so now. If the PCs have already taken *The Whispering Reeds*, imply that Caliddo is frustrated not to find it. Either way, if the PCs keep watching, Caliddo passes downward through the fourth floor and through the barrier to the 5th level.

Near the end of the third level, the party should hear something about a ‘sacrifice at midnight.’ They could hear it from listening in on the ghouls, from Korlok or Augrael, from Nhakazarin at the temple, or from some other source. The important point is that it should come fairly early in the adventuring day. Because the sacrifice at midnight is Lasda Venkervale, and he will be lost to the Gauntlight unless the PCs can rescue him! Shake up your players by reminding them that not everything happens on their timeline. The story is that Lasda has exhausted his usefulness to Volluk, who plans on simply feeding Lasda’s soul into the growing necromantic power of the Gauntlight. If Volluk or Lasda are questioned on this, reveal that Belcorra and the Gauntlight are both growing in power. Belcorra still plans on destroying Absalom!

Fourth Level

The door opening into area D8 has a poisoned lock trap.

I have given Volluk two spells that allow him to make good use of his poison immunity: *stinking cloud* and *gaspig marsh*. *Stinking cloud* is especially effective since it will cover the whole room, and the concealment is not as big a problem for Volluk since he has imprecise tremorsense.

When Volluk finally falls, his squirming corpse is temporarily possessed by Belcorra! (Or, to make it even scarier, have Belcorra possess a downed or deceased PC.) She is here to throw some shade at the party, since they have finally shown themselves worthy of her notice by defeating Volluk. She warns them about trespassing further, etc. She may also explain that she has blocked off the lower levels with a mighty barrier, so they might as well give up.

Volluk’s notes on the recent test of the Gauntlight can be found in his study, area D8. The notes reveal that more tests are planned for the future, but no details are given. The PCs will also learn that rescuing Lasda will not necessarily halt the functioning of the Gauntlight – indeed, already his usefulness has expired!

The encounter with Jaul Mezmin should present a difficult choice. On the one hand, Mezmin seems to be repentant. He is trying to control himself these days, and he doesn't want to fight. On the other hand, Keelo Lathenar has offered a large reward of 300 gold for Mezmin's head.

Otari presents the party with his artifact, the Cailean Key, as described in the Roseguard Artifacts section of this document. He also has a magical ring, but it is a Ring of Transposition, useless without its mate. The other ring is in Aesephana's tomb, for she and Otari were engaged at the time of his death.

The party might ask a question which has also been much on Otari's mind: why didn't the rest of the Roseguard come back for him after killing Belcorra? Otari has spent all this time wondering if his friends also died. He is happy to hear that they went on to live, found a town in his honor, and even bear descendants...but then, why did they never go back to find him, or even his body if they thought he was dead? Why did he die alone, in agony, in the dark? There are several answers:

- He appeared to perish in a way that might not have left remains.
- The Roseguard were blasted with psychic backlash when Belcorra died (her act of vengeance), which inflicted them with the empty death and somewhat scrambled their memories of the battle. Furthermore, they were filled with a dread of the Gauntlight, which remained indestructible even after Belcorra's death. (This is why they founded the town and settled nearby – to keep an eye on it.)
- Zarmavdian did return to the surface level of the Gauntlight. He cast some spells that would have detected a human corpse...and he picked up nothing. This is because Otari was both alive and deep within the vaults.

I prefer to describe the barrier to the 5th level as an intentional act of Belcorra, a sort of door which only her most trusted and powerful servants, such as Caliddo, can pass through. It may be a recent addition to the vaults, as only recently, and perhaps with Lasda's help, has Belcorra gained the power to manifest this barrier. The Roseguard artifacts can bring it down.

- Otari freely gives the Cailean Key (and explains all of this)
- The acquisition of the Cloak of the Huntress are described in the Roseguard Artifacts section of this document
- *Thresholds of Truth* must be retrieved from Absalom, as described in that section of this document
- The Rosa Argentis, the blade of the Rose Knight, is stolen from the library as described in the second book of the adventure, with the following changes:

It is Amicia Rajani, not Carman, who steals the Rosa Argentis. This could add a slight complication to the otherwise clear-cut investigation, as Carman is everybody's obvious assumption for the culprit. Additionally, it is odd that someone was able to steal it at all, for it was guarded by spells and wards to prevent theft. Yet the protective spells have burnt out, and the case was broken from the inside.

The story is that Amicia Rajani, inspired by recent threats to the town and by the party themselves, has been looking for an opportunity to take up the sword of her ancestor and be a hero. Carman covets the sword for the perceived status it gives him, but Amicia wants to use it the way the Rose Knight did. The Rosa Argentis could detect this, and it broke free of its case to go to her hand. The Rosa Argentis gains additional powers when wielded by a Rajani.

As described in the adventure, Amicia flees to a cave, expecting that her normal life is over. She plans to run away and become a hero like the Rose Knight. The confrontation with her is unlikely to end in combat, since she does not want to fight, but it may be complicated by the involvement of her father, who does not understand her motives or her actions, and is outraged. This situation could play out in many dramatic ways, but ultimately the PCs will either end up with the sword, or end up with the cooperation of one or both of the Rajanis – who are unwilling to surrender their ancestral weapon. (In my opinion, the random shade fight doesn't add much to this encounter, so I'd skip it, but that's up to you.)

It is possible that the party will end up having to accompany a Rajani or two to the barrier when they are finally ready to bring it down. You can make the breaking of the barrier very dramatic – the Rosa Argentis cleaves through the wall of necromantic energy; you feel the evil eye upon you; etc. If Carman is involved, he will make sure everyone in town knows about this heroic deed, further boosting his popularity in the ongoing election season.

Otari's ghost remains in place until the end of this adventure. He is happy to converse, reminisce, or even tell stories of the Roseguard's adventures if the PCs want to speak to him, but he is unable to give much helpful advice once the party descends beyond the fourth level. He may be bound to the party's aid in a ritual at the end of the adventure, and assist them in their final struggle against Belcorra.

Fifth Level

Starting here, Wrin Sivinxí might make an appearance to assist the party if they end up in a tight spot. She is only a sixth-level caster, but she will be armed with exactly the right magical tools for the job, almost as if she knew what the problem was. How did she overcome her claustrophobia? By painting the underside of an umbrella black, smashing a glowstone, and gluing the resulting sparkly bits to the underside of the umbrella to make a starry sky (astronomically accurate, of course). With the help of this portable slice of night sky constantly overhead, Wrin can endure a brief descent into the vaults. She has another problem, though. There is a reason she fears hard right angles: the hounds of Tindalos are on the hunt for her (for mysterious reasons you need not disclose to the players). If she remains in the vaults, in close proximity to all these corners and angles, several of these hounds will appear, and the party will have to help her fight them off.

The party might have noticed the Cheery Man watching them from time to time during their more intense fights in the upper levels, but now they can find his arena, called The Red Holiday, and volunteer for deadly combat with the promise of gold and magic items as rewards. The details for all of this, as well as the Cheery Man and the other auxiliary alterations that must be made to the 5th and 6th levels of the vaults, are found in that section of this document.

I put a shrinking trap in area B16. It triggers as the party explores the room. Everyone makes a DC 25 Fortitude save. On a success, they shrink one size category for 1 hour; on a failure, they shrink two size categories for one hour, and on a critical failure the effect lasts until the next long rest. Just for fun.

If you have Ron Lundeen's GMs Guide for the Abomination Vaults, somewhere around here is a good place to have the encounter with the "Absalom Agents," either in town or en route to the vaults. This foreshadows Cynemi and the potential value of a Rajani soul. (Ron Lundeen's *Abomination Vaults GMs Guide*:

<https://www.pathfinderinfinite.com/product/373876/Abomination-Vaults-GMs-Guide>)

Sixth Level

The party's second run-in with Caliddo Haruvex occurs on this level and/or the 5th level, whenever the party has cleared a majority of this area. This time he actively pursues the party, under the direction of Belcorra to drive these pests out of her domain. Caliddo might expressly reveal this information, or alternatively, the Cheery Man openly speculates on it as he provides a running commentary on this encounter from a safe distance. Caliddo is likely still too strong for the party to risk a direct fight. But Caliddo is also slow (I reduced his speed to 20). This encounter is intended to be a moving combat through the dungeon, a sort of horror scene in which the party attempts to flee from an implacable foe and escape to the surface. Unlike the first Caliddo encounter, he's really trying to kill the PCs this time, but they should be able to escape through a combination of spells, useful items, and greater speed. If the party tries to get cheesy and kite Caliddo, whittling down his health from a distance, he can summon the Grasping Dead hazard a single time in an attempt to lock the party down and get close. In the unlikely event that he is overwhelmed in combat, he will retreat below, and you should consider buffing him before his final battle. If the PCs escape, they will likely be paranoid when they must inevitably return, which is right and proper for a megadungeon. However, Caliddo considers his given task complete, and will not venture up to these levels again.

I also put a mirror with the Spectral Reflection hazard in area C23.

Seventh Level

So I made Urevian a Disney villain, by which I mean he has prepared musical numbers, complete with diegetic background music. (You don't have to actually sing.) I think this makes him more fun and memorable, and also more menacing in a weird sort of way. Up to you. Because of this change, however, I wanted the party to have at least two separate encounters with Urevian: the meeting in which he describes his situation and presents his offer, and later on when the party either delivers a Rajani or faces him in combat. There may be more interactions – indeed, Urevian is happy to have guests as interesting as the heroes, and he might invite them in for tea and games, all of which have a distinctly sinister, not to mention musical, undertone.

I had to make some changes to make this work. For one thing, the party does not need to collect all four-to-five pieces of the key to Urevian's door. They will *think* they have to do that, but in fact Urevian will open his door and invite them in once they've got two or three. He is not interested in ordering the other devils in the area to stand down; it amuses him to see the party and the devils try to kill each other. He will only order his devils not to attack if the party agrees to bring him the soul of a Rajani – and it is *very* difficult to lie to Urevian. In fact, he might require them sign a contract.

Since I gave Carman a daughter, there are two Rajanis in town. Either is acceptable to Urevian. Both is even better, and he promises hefty rewards for both. But he only needs one. Now, Carman isn't a very good person, but the party probably likes Amicia, and there is the familial bond between the two of them to consider. This makes Carman sympathetic. We need Urevian to sweeten his end of the deal in order for this to really be a difficult choice for the party. In addition to simply clearing the path down, Urevian promises to reveal a secret about Belcorra – specifically, her greatest weakness – if the party brings him a Rajani. What is one soul, he argues, weighed against all the destruction Belcorra could wreak if she is not stopped? If he is brought a Rajani, Urevian will tell the party that the only way to truly defeat Belcorra is to focus the gaze of Nhimbalo upon her, foreshadowing the lenses.

To tempt the party still further, Urevian might offer quite a lot of gold (say, 200-300 per PC), and a magic Quill of Passage. He may even resort to threatening an attack upon the town of Otari if the heroes remain obstinate. (He won't threaten in the first meeting.)

To discourage an immediate attack upon Urevian by a particularly righteous party, we're replacing his Barbazu guardians with Levalochs, and we're changing Urevian's stats to those of the Phistophilus devil's official statblock (which is one level higher, and more than one level scarier). Even assuming your party is running the vaults a level ahead, as mine is, this is still a very difficult encounter, and the party should be made aware of this fact. If the party refuses to consider handing over a Rajani to Urevian, they'll need to find a way to separate him from his guards, or take his guards out separately, or some other clever plan. They'll think of something. It's not supposed to be easy.

Because I like allowing my players to dig their own graves if they feel like it, I made the gogiteth in area D17 live. I also added some other powerful aberrations such as a leng spider and an irlgaunt in the empty statis chambers.

One problem I ran into with the Cheery Man was that he seemed just a little too similar to the denizen of Leng down on the 7th level. I even considered combining them, but that didn't seem right. In the end, I decided to make the simple change of switching Ysondkhelir's gender. A female denizen of Leng just seemed interesting to me.

I added a tricky puzzle to the lift down in area D3. A bored devil (possibly Urevian himself) constructed the puzzle and made it necessary to solve the puzzle before operating the lift. If the party hands a Rajani soul over to Urevian, he will unlock the lift and also offer to clear the downward stairs in area D1. If he is defeated in combat, the lift becomes available, but the party will have to clear the stairs themselves if they don't want to solve the puzzle. For puzzle-averse parties, this could be another reason to just deal with Urevian and give him a Rajani. The nine levers are visible behind the barrier blocking the lift, but the text is not.

In this puzzle, nine levers are arranged in a 3x3 grid. They are enchanted in such a way that their physical properties are obscured; neither sight nor touch nor any spell can reveal what they're made of, whether they are wrapped or painted, etc.

Note: it is important that the players understand that the actual material of the levers is different than them being 'wrapped' or 'adorned' in something (for instance, there is not a paper lever; that's just wrapping). You might want to just tell the players this, unless you enjoy watching them struggle.

Here is the text, which is revealed when the barrier falls:

The lever wrapped in leather is beneath the wooden lever,
And the lever wrapped in paper is between the stone and bone.
If the clay's beside the brass, and below the one of glass,
And the lever wrapped in cloth is right above the one in grass,
And the iron's in the center, and the bone is on the right,
And the lever painted black is to the left of one that's white;
If the bone and stone and clay are not adorned in any way,
And the paint is at the top, and the white's above the cloth,
And the brass is at the bottom, and the stone's beside the brass,
And the lever wrapped in leather is the lever made of glass,
Then you might discern the answer, if you are so very clever:
Two levers here are made of gold, so pull the golden levers!

[end text]

Answer:

wood painted black	gold painted white	bone
Glass wrapped in leather	iron wrapped in cloth	gold wrapped in paper
Clay	brass wrapped in grass	stone

(I got this one from Reddit:

https://www.reddit.com/r/DnD/comments/8mo9se/oc_feel_free_to_use_my_clever_lever_riddle/

)

Finally, there is a reaction from the depths of Gauntlight when the party deals with Urevian for good, either by defeating him or handing over a Rajani soul. The party feels a tangible aura of malice, and a sense of being watched. Regardless of whether they plan to take the lift or the stairs, make sure to warn them that they had best return to town and prepare before venturing further. The party should be aware already that the next level is much deeper down compared to the levels so far, and also more dangerous. As the GM, strongly encourage them to return to Otari to rest and stock up. This is for two reasons. The first is that this will trigger the Demontide for Otari event, which is described in detail elsewhere in this document, and this event works best if it occurs before the players reach the eighth level. The second reason is that the lift will break if the party rides it down, stranding them in the eighth level until they can find and activate the teleport circle or find some other way out.

Eighth Level

The lift breaks beyond (easy) repair if the party rides it down. (You could even turn this into a simple hazard, with the lift entering freefall during the last part of its descent, resulting in a dramatic crash!) It cannot be fixed from the bottom. They are marooned in the Darklands until they can figure a way out. And the portal chamber is pretty far from the lift.

This isn't anything new that I'm adding, but I'd just like to reiterate the importance of having Belcorra be a recurring and ever-present threat from here on out. This kind of interaction with the main villain long before the final encounter is easily one of the coolest parts of this whole adventure. My only advice is to do whatever you must to present Belcorra as a truly terrifying and dangerous foe. Oh, and make it clear that she still fully intends to install the lenses and fulcrum atop the Gauntlight and use it to light up Absalom with a necromantic apocalypse.

If you've already read my Roseguard alterations, you know that I'm making a connection between the Roseguard and the lenses. You can read all about it in that section of the document. It won't change anything about the stats of the lenses or how they are acquired.

I'm a big fan of the classic body-swap trick just for fun role-playing purposes, so I threw it in here. If and when the party defeats the nilith in area A39, it will perish in a blast of strange psychic energy, as a final act of revenge. This might deal some damage to the party, but it briefly knocks them out. When they awaken, they find that their bodies have randomly been shuffled! (For added chaos, include Murmur or other NPCs if any are nearby.) The duration of this is up to

you, but it can be a fun time for players to swap character sheets and try to play as each other for one or two less dangerous combat encounters.

Ninth Level

Dr. Zacchaeus Quagmire III can be found with the caligni in their hunting lodge, as described in that section of this document.

Ravirex is the mother of the wyrmling encountered in the Menace Under Otari. This might result in some interesting interactions, especially if Ravirex can somehow sense the death of her child on the heroes before her. Although Ravirex is a black dragon, you don't really need to change the stats. The father might have been green, and anyway, acid and poison are pretty much the same thing, right?

The vast cavern in the ninth level comes with its own system of random encounters, listed in the third book. This can be stacked on top of my custom system, which is described elsewhere in this document, since the odds for those encounters tick up slowly during times of rest, whereas the book encounters might occur while traveling through the cavern. This could potentially add up to a lot of danger – but hey, we're almost at the bottom.

If you have Ron Lundeen's GM Guide to the vaults, I recommend the 'Dragon's Brains' content, which adds a bit more lore and interaction with Ravirex. You could also take a look at the 'Duergar Kidnappers' if you want to have more interactions with the drow.

I put a bottomless pit in the B46 area, just a big one right in the intersection so that the party has to find a way over it or go around. Use the Bottomless Pit hazard, except that it's not intentionally designed as a trap.

I am adding flumphs because I love them. A small group of them hides southwest of area B48, to the immediate north of the Gauntlight. These brave space jellyfish are on a crusade to protect the universe from the Outer Gods and other cosmic horrors beyond comprehension. They have sensed a recent accumulation of Nhimbalo's dreadful power here and have gathered to do something about it. Their options are limited. Literally anything on the ninth level could crush all of them into a paste without effort, and they are well aware of this, though undeterred. There may be some initial misunderstanding between the players and the flumphs at first, since the flumphs are monstrous in appearance and the party probably has a faint aura of Nhimbalo's evil from *The Whispering Reeds* or a fulcrum lens. However, the flumphs will declare the party their 'fated champions' upon learning of their mission. The flumphs will try to aid the players in any way possible. They can provide information on the 8th and 9th levels, and they may have

some food and equipment that the players can use. The party can rest here with the flumphs standing guard. The flumphs will even bravely offer their services in combat, although they will certainly be instantly one-shot by any enemy on this level.

Finally, I'm adding one more puzzle. This is a tricky linguistics-based puzzle, and it is entirely optional. It is a sort of riddle door, similar to the one I put in the elemental chamber in The Menace Under Otari. Also similar to that one, it has an elemental theme. The door blocks area B50, and I have replaced the content of that area. If you still want to have the baited trap with the green slime – and why wouldn't you? – you can put it pretty much anywhere on this level.

Here's how the puzzle works.

A runestone stands alone before the door, with the following inscription:

<https://i.imgur.com/aMitQjo.png>

It is a cipher, not a language, and thus cannot be read with *comprehend languages* or similar magic. But not to worry! The bones of some previous explorer lie on the ground nearby. The bones have nothing of value, but they do hold a clue: an old vellum sheet with the following written in [language of choice]:

*Violence stems from chaos. Death stems from violence.
If you seek life, spurn violence. If you seek chaos, spurn peace.
Peace is greater than chaos. Wisdom is greater than might.
Use wisdom against the mighty. Use might against the wise.
Chaos is the opposite of peace. Order is the opposite of violence.*

With a DC 20 Society or a DC 25 Perception check, the party will realize that this is a rough translation of the big runestone.

The door itself is carved with the following three panels, in order, side-by-side. Naturally, the door is magical, immune to *passwall* and similar effects, and virtually impossible to break or otherwise circumvent.

<https://i.imgur.com/ATGXS8d.png>

<https://i.imgur.com/KRCIgBD.png>

<https://i.imgur.com/aAHXHsp.png>

This puzzle requires the party to decipher and understand the third panel by using clues from the previous two panels and their translation of the big runestone. The last four lines of the final panel contain the answer:

- Use fire on the wolf
- Use earth on the serpent
- Use water on the tree
- Use air on the horn

The solution is to touch these listed elements to the images in the center panel, all at the same time.

What could lie behind such an inscrutable conundrum? That, I say, is up to you. This would be a great place to put an item or plot element particularly relevant to your party, or even a plot hook for a continuation of the campaign beyond the end of this adventure.

But here's what I did. I made the room beyond a sort of elemental chamber, harkening back to the similar chamber and riddle door I placed in beginner box adventure. When the party walks through the doors, they face four guardian elementals: a Storm Lord, a Tidal Master, a Firewyrn, and a Stone Mauler. Your PCs might have a chance to negotiate, or you could just jump straight into combat. When the elementals fall, they drop runestones inscribed with weapon property runes: corrosive, flaming, frost, and shock. They also drop four armor property runes for energy-resistance of the four same elements.

But that's not all! There is an elemental shrine in the center of this room, which radiates a primal power. A PC skilled in Arcana or Nature might be able to sense that the four guardians will eventually reform (though probably not drop runestones again), and that the planar boundaries are weak here. At this shrine one can sacrifice parts of themselves in exchange for elemental powers!

- PCs can sacrifice some of their maximum hit points to gain energy resistance, with a 1-to-1 conversion. Maximum +10 resistance (and minus 10 hp) per element.
- PCs can sacrifice a skill proficiency rank (for example, reducing an Expert skill to Trained or removing proficiency from a Trained skill altogether) to gain the basic domain spell of the Fire, Water, Air, or Earth domains as a focus spell.
- PCs can sacrifice a proficiency rank of one of their saves (though a save cannot be reduced to Untrained) to gain the advanced domain spell of one of the four domains listed above.

(By the way, this puzzle is part of a larger set that I found on Reddit. You can see the full bit here if you like the idea and want to take the rune-interpretation concept even further:

https://www.reddit.com/r/DnDBehindTheScreen/comments/e7ftif/the_runes_of_norn_a_series_of_runic_puzzles_for/)

Tenth Level

Instead of dread dhuthorexes in area C16, I put a Veiled Master. Why? Because this temple was originally constructed by alghollthus. It used to be at the bottom of the sea, after all. And why did Belcorra awaken after centuries of unquiet rest? It wasn't because of a half-millennia anniversary – it was because the alghollthus (possibly this one in particular) sensed her presence within the black lens and woke her up by bringing the lens here to the temple. You can go as deep as you want with an implied connection between the Haruvex family and alghollthus. You could imply that Belcorra is merely their puppet, or a tool they are using. You could even set

them up as the central villains for a continuation of this adventure, deeper into the depths. What is certain now is that the alghollthus would be altogether pleased for an apocalyptic catastrophe to befall Absalom, and thus they have a vested interest in stopping the PCs. Be sure to make good use of the Veiled Master's extraordinary illusion powers. It might show players glimpses of the history of this temple, visions of Absalom in ruin, or other imagery intended to terrify and demoralize them. (You could also suggest that all the visions and imagery seen in the Second Challenge were also the work of this Veiled Master.) The Veiled Master will try to flee with dimension door if it realizes that it cannot defeat the heroes, but it will swear vengeance with a final ominous image – possibly of the destruction of all they hold dear.

I have made a few adjustments to the final battle. First, the lenses. The idea of drawing Nhimbaloth's gaze to defeat Belcorra is cool, and it's fun that there's a way to defeat her even without reducing her HP to 0 as normal. But there is a small problem: a party that gets lucky could possibly end the fight in one or two rounds! Three successful attacks with the lenses are all that is necessary to bring this climactic encounter to a close. Maybe you think that's fine, since the party has faced Belcorra a few times already, but I prefer to draw it out a bit. Therefore, I recommend a small adjustment: the lenses cannot be used against Belcorra until she is 'weakened' (half health). There should be some obvious sign, such as a destabilization of her ectoplasmic form or a reaction from the environment.

Second, I would have Belcorra's full complement of minions (4 elite dread wisps) even if the party defeated the ones in area C8.

Third, Belcorra is level 13. (Because I'm running the vaults heightened by one level; ignore this if you're running the levels as-written.) Slap the elite template on there, just like with her minions, but she also needs 7th-level spells. I gave her *warp mind* (her bloodline spell), *mask of terror*, and *tempest of shades*. She has three slots. Hint: *mask of terror* is really good.

Fourth and finally, I gave her a sort of lair action which occurs at the end of every round. See how area C20 is divided into eight slices? Belcorra can choose one of these eight areas of the room to activate an immediate hazard which acts exactly as Ectoplasmic Grasp except that the DCs are 26. The heroes in that area are damaged and possibly immobilized by a burst of the crackling light which surrounds the standing stones. You might rule that a PC way in the corner can avoid this effect.

You might be thinking that these changes make the fight quite a bit harder. And you are correct. But the heroes will not be fighting alone! By the time they reach this climactic encounter, they will very likely have already enacted Zarmavdian's ritual, and the Roseguard will be here to aid them. All of this is described in that section of this document.

If Belcorra is defeated in the normal fashion, by dropping her HP to zero, there is a brief window in which the party can use the lenses against her, assuming they have all three. This ends the battle as described in the adventure.

In the tragic event that the party fails to defeat Belcorra in her sanctum, possibly experiencing a TPK, you will be faced with the difficult question of what to do next. Here is my suggestion: have your players roll up new characters one level higher. These new characters will be heroes in Absalom, who must survive and escape the destruction of the city. As their friends and loved ones have all perished, it becomes a revenge plot as they hunt down the ghost queen. (We're imagining that for some reason Belcorra's ghost lingers even after her revenge is complete. Perhaps her thirst for destruction is not yet sated!) Your players will also be out for revenge, not only for their characters, but also because Belcorra didn't forget to annihilate the town of Otari as well.

Random Encounter System

No megadungeon is complete without a chance of random encounters! It is fun for the players because it adds tension and risk, and really makes the dungeon feel alive and dangerous. On the other hand, this is a combat-heavy adventure already, and you don't want to bombard your party with a constant stream of meaningless extra encounters.

That's why I created this system. It will slowly increase the chance of a random encounter the more time that the party spends recovering in the dungeon, but there is also a limit on how many encounters can occur. Even if you use this system, you may very well end up with only a handful of random encounters throughout the entire adventure. That's fine! It only takes a couple to really etch that valuable sense of risk and danger into the party.

Below is a list of moderate-difficulty encounters for levels 1-12. There are five 'tiers' of encounter threat in this system: trivial, low, moderate, severe, and extreme. The system is designed in such a way that a change in the party's level alters any given encounter's difficulty on a 1-to-1 basis. For example: a moderate-threat encounter for a 4th-level party would be a low-threat encounter for a 5th-level party, or an extreme-threat encounter for a 2nd-level party. Thus, we only need one list of moderate-threat encounters to be able to create encounters of varying difficulty for a party of any level.

Note: all of the creatures on this list have the Elite template unless otherwise specified. Why did I do this? Because my party did the beginner box adventure first, so I ran the vaults one level ahead. If you are starting from level one on the first level of the vaults, simply don't use the Elite template (or add the Weak template for those creatures in the list that were not already Elite), and reduce all encounter levels by one.

Here's how it works: the party has a cumulative 5% chance of a random encounter for each hour in the vaults (rounded up) that the party spends resting/healing between fights. If they take a beating and spend 80 minutes treating wounds, this is a 10% chance of a random encounter. Roll a d20, and on a 2 or lower, an encounter happens. At your discretion, if they spend a considerable amount of time doing other activities, such as searching through the library on the third level, this will also add to the ever-increasing chance of a random encounter. The chance of a random encounter resets whenever the party takes a long rest outside of the vaults. (It just keeps ticking up if they decide to try for a long rest while within the vaults, but most likely your group will retreat to Otari for their long rests, as is sensible.)

When they finally get a random encounter, roll a d10, with the following results:

- 1: trivial-threat encounter (party level - 2)
- 2-3: low-threat encounter (party level - 1)
- 4-7: moderate-threat encounter (party level)
- 8-9: severe-threat encounter (party level + 1)
- 10: extreme-threat encounter (party level + 2)

Then simply use that encounter from the table. For example, if your 8th-level party rolls an eight on the d10, they will face an elite spectral devil (the moderate encounter for a 9th-level party, which is a severe encounter for an 8th-level party).

You could remove the chance of an extreme encounter if you think that is too spicy for a random encounter system. If you don't, then make sure your players understand the strategic viability of running away.

Important: each encounter on the table can happen only once! If it is ever rolled again, replace it with atmospheric dressing, like eerie sounds, an ominous sense of being watched, or even a vision of ghosts/Belcorra. This means that there is a hard cap on the number of potential random encounters, even in the unlikely event that you roll all of them.

Finally, some of these enemies are taken from Ron Lundeen's GM Guide for the Abomination Vaults, which is available on Pathfinder Infinite. (Ron Lundeen is a Paizo developer who helped create the adventure!) (*Abomination Vaults GMs Guide*:

<https://www.pathfinderinfinite.com/product/373876/Abomination-Vaults-GMs-Guide>)

Moderate encounters for the given level (assume all have the Elite template unless otherwise specified):

- 1: Crocodile
- 2: A Nhimbaloth Priest and 2 Nhimbaloth cultists (not elite)(see GM guide)
- 3: Bounty Hunter (with silver weapons) seeking Jaul Mezmin
- 4: Ghosts (3)
- 5: Shadows (2)
- 6: Will o wisp and 4 Nhimbaloth priests (not elite)(see GM guide)
- 7: Demonologist and Antipaladin
- 8: One hellcat and two brimorak
- 9: Spectral Devil
- 10: Two dread wraiths
- 11: Two Nhimbaloth high priests, 2 will o wisps (elite)(see GM guide)
- 12: Purple worm

As you can see, I have tried to design this list to that it roughly corresponds with the occupants of the different levels of the vaults. You might also notice that there is no trivial-threat encounter for a 2nd-level party, nor an extreme-threat encounter for an 11th-level party. This is intentional, but feel free to add your own.

As for how to actually run random encounters, it will vary depending upon which creatures are involved. In most cases, the creatures should be hostile and beyond reasoning. The party may have fortified their position, giving them an advantage; this is fine. Most of these creatures will fight to the death, but some of them may retreat and perhaps even stalk the party or try again later.

The Founder's Day Festival

I added this festival because festivals are fun, and to act bridge between The Menace Under Otari and the Abomination Vaults. If you aren't running the beginner box first, you could simply start your game with this festival, and adjust the difficulty of the Deadtide for Otari event accordingly. This festival is intended to give players an opportunity to show off, try different types of challenges and systems, and get to know some of the characters in town. It also plants the seeds for various story elements which will bear fruit later.

Playing out the festival is pretty simple. Things the players can do are divided into Activities and Events, most of which are associated with a certain character and/or local business. They can do as many Activities as they want, as much as they want, as these are happening throughout the day. Events are contests or competitions, usually with prizes, in which the players can compete. I limited my players to four Events each, though you might adjust this based on party size. Go through each Event in order, stopping periodically to ask what the players are doing in the meantime. Make sure to show the personalities of the townspeople who host the various events.

Make a list of interactions and plot hooks specific to your PCs that you would like to introduce. For example, if one of your players has a connection with Yinyasmera, she might confess that some of the Osprey Club has been missing for a couple of weeks ever since they went treasure-hunting in the Fogfen. If you plan on using Credence and Cryde with the Kortos Consortium sidequest, make sure that the players notice them lurking about and possibly speaking with Wrab Chertel. And if you include Franz Frangelico, he can be a humorous foil to the PCs in many events.

Rewards and DCs

Unless otherwise specified, rewards for winning events are in the form of coupons for the associated local business, with a value roughly equal to 10 gold for first place, 5 gold for second, and 2 gold for third. If there is no associated business, it's just a plain cash prize.

Additionally, a general rule of thumb is that a roll of 26+ will secure first place, 24+ will get second, and 22+ will get third. Most events allow three attempts at the associated check. You can use this as a baseline for coming up with new events of your own.

Activities

Fortune Telling (Wrin Sivinx)

She will roll for her augury, possibly giving PCs a bonus to saves/checks for festival stuff. But she won't do a harrow reading of the PCs until they are all together. "Wait," she says. "Wait until this evening. When the stars are brighter." Scroll down to see Wrin's harrow reading of the party.

Flume Fights (Klorte Hengus)

Two combatants balance on logs as they float down the log flume, trying to push each other off. Anyone can be challenged to this popular traditional event, and it is considered bad form to refuse.

This is similar to regular 1-v-1 combat, except that the first action on each combatant's turn is an Acrobatics check to balance on the log. DC 20. Failure makes the combatant flat-footed, and critical failure means you fall!

Instead of tracking damage, different attacks inflict penalties on the opponent's upcoming Acrobatics check, as follows:

- Unarmed strike: -2 penalty
- Shove: -4 penalty
- Trip: -6 penalty

These penalties are doubled on a critical success. The flight continues until someone critically fails the DC 20 Acrobatics check and falls off the log. There is no money to be made in the flume fights, unless you place bets. Many people do.

Chess with Wrab Chertel (Wrab Chertel)

Wrab Chertel has a sack of thirty silver pieces for anyone who can beat him in a game of chess. Additionally, he is seen speaking to Credence and Cryde. If the PCs are keeping a close eye on things, they might notice Kairo Cryde winning a game and taking the money. (Chertel will pull out another pouch of coins.)

Playing chess with Wrab is a best out of five. Roll a d6 and add intelligence modifiers. Wrab's is +4.

Giant's Wheel rides (the Scribbles)

Just for fun, popular with kids. The Scribbles have rigged up seats on the wheel, essentially turning it into a small ferris wheel – one with a chance of dropping you into the river.

Crafting Competitions (Keelo Lathenar)

Many categories, all judged and sold!

Players can enter the crafting show with their own creations, or make a crafting check retroactively if they would have been working on something.

Coupons can be gained for winning, giving discounts at the market, as described in the 'rewards' section above.

Bingo and Story Time (Vandy Banderdash, with special uninvited guest appearance by Greenspoon the Mighty)

For the young and old. Vandy shares freshly baked cookies at the bingo games.

Story time includes Greenspoon the Mighty! PCs can join in and spin their own tall tales, impressing the children.

Books and Coffee (the Morlibints)

Hang out with Carl and James as they advertise for a potential upcoming expansion to their bookstore, with a small coffee shop! They are taking ideas for names, and Carl is experimenting with different flavors. (A sort of rivalry is going on between Carl and Magiloy across the way.)

Adventures in Experimental Beverages (Magiloy Murgatroyd)

Use Magiloy's drink tables to show the silly effects of her experiments. She has non-alcoholic fizzy drinks for kids as well.

Gambling and Dice

Use the following simple betting game, or come up with your own!

All participants secretly roll a d6. They can then place bets. Go around, raising, calling, or folding as normal for a betting game.

Repeat with another secret roll, this time of a d8. Another round of bets.

Repeat with a d10 and finally a d12, all secret. Remaining participants count the total of their four rolls, and the highest total wins.

Events

Caber Toss (Sasha Thane and the Lumberjacks' Guild)

Athletics check. Three tries. Simple. (see default DCs above for placements)

Archery Contest (Oloro Gallentine and Gallentine Deliveries)

In honor of the Huntress.

Participants get three chances to hit a DC 16 target with a ranged attack. On each success, the targets are moved back and the DC increased by 2. By the time it gets to 24, only two others are still in it, a hunter and a centaur. They both have a +9 ranged attack. Play it out.

Obstacle Course (Yinyasmera and the Osprey Club)

In honor of Otari Ilveshti – specifically, that one time when he led a whole squad of demon assassins on a merry chase over the rooftops of Absalom to distract them while his allies dealt with a cult of Lamashtu. As you have all heard in song.

This is a chase encounter! PCs must make a series of checks to overcome the following obstacles. Failure means retrying the obstacle.

1. Across the uneven, rolling logs! (Acrobatics, Reflex, or Perception, DC 16)
2. Down the loading flume! It has been blocked in several places, so each failed check represents lost time with a painful run-in with an obstacle. (Acrobatics, Athletics, Crafting, DC 16)
3. Swim to the pier! (Athletics, Nature, Survival, DC 15)

4. Up to the rooftops! (Acrobatics, Athletics, DC 17)
5. Down into market square, dodging dye-soaked balls of cloth thrown by children.
(Perception, Reflex, Stealth, DC 18)

If a PC failed at a single obstacle/check, they get first place. If they failed at two checks, they get second, and if they failed at three checks, they get third. If PCs are competing against each other, note their relative positions with the obstacles as the chase progresses round by round.

Wrestling and Boxing Competitions (Captain Longsaddle and the Otari Garrison)

In honor of the Rose Knight.

Best out of 5 athletics checks for wrestling. (Each check represents 1 round.)

Same for boxing, but with unarmed attacks.

Since this is a tournament, the players will fight three increasingly difficult opponents, with bonuses of +5, +7, and +9 respectively.

Riddling Contest (James Morlibint and Odd Stories)

There are ten riddles, and players have only ten seconds to come up with the correct answer! If multiple players are participating, have them write down their answers secretly and score them up only at the end. (Seven riddles correct is first place, six is second, five is third.)

1. The more you take, the more you leave behind (footsteps)
2. Forward I am heavy, but backward I am not (the word 'ton')
3. How much dirt is in a circular hole four feet deep and two feet wide? (none)
4. All about the house, with his lady he dances. Yet always he works, and never romances (a broom)
5. Where can you find roads without carts, forests without trees, and cities without houses (a map)
6. What is put on a table, cut and shared, but never eaten? (a deck of cards)
7. What is always coming, but never arrives? (tomorrow/the future)
8. At night I come without being fetched; at day I am lost without being stolen (stars)
9. What is so fragile that speaking its name will break it? (silence)
10. He who makes me doesn't want me; he who buys me doesn't use me; he who uses me doesn't know it (a casket)

Knife Throwing Contest (Carman Rajani)

As archery, but with thrown weapons.

Tree Chopping Contest (Amicia Rajani and Blades for Glades)

This is a simple damage output challenge. The logs are thick, with hardness 5 and 40 hit points. The logs cannot be critically hit, and players should still roll to attack, though the AC is only 10. If a PC finishes the log in four strokes or fewer, they get first place. five is second, six is third. PCs can use any slashing weapon, but only axes ignore the log's hardness. (They can borrow an axe.)

Mushroom Hunt (Worliwynn and the druids)

Popular with kids! Try to collect mushrooms of varying colors in the woods within a certain amount of time.

The most valuable mushroom is the golden mushroom, which flies around on dragonfly wings and is difficult to catch.

PCs can roll Nature, Survival, or Perception. They get three rolls in total, and the combined total of the rolls is their final score! (60+ is first place, 55+ is second, 50+ is third.) Each roll represents about 5 minutes of mushroom hunting.

If any of their rolls is 22 or higher, they spot the golden mushroom! They can take their score for this round or try instead to catch the golden shroom. They may employ any reasonable method to nab the flying shroom, but a check of DC 25 is required! (You might give a circumstance bonus for clever ideas.)

Every attempt to catch the golden mushroom takes one of the three rounds. The golden shroom is worth 40 points.

If no PCs catch the golden shroom, Magiloy succeeds in doing so! Unfortunately, it took her the entire time, so she does not place.

Turtle Racing (Tamily Tanderveil and the Fishery)

This isn't really a competition, but an opportunity to bet on a race. A turtle race.

The turtles had been caught, named, and painted in bright racing colors by local fishermen. The turtles' names are: Gideon, Marmalade, New Timmy, Speedy Bob, Fitzhugh McConroy, Super Toad.

And Theodore, a tortoise, presiding as judge.

Each turtle is randomly assigned a different die value (d4, d6, d8, d10, d12, d20), and all are rolled together for each leg of the race (there are three legs).

Players can lay bets on the turtles, and can roll Nature or Diplomacy try to figure out which turtle is fastest. They can even 'encourage' different turtles throughout the race using whatever tactics they come up with. (The efficacy of these tactics is up to you.)

Any bets laid on the winning turtle are paid back sixfold, or double for the second-place turtle.

The Music and Dance Competition (Brelida Venkervale and the Rowdy Rockfish)

Local band:

- Worliwynn on flute
- Jale on fiddle
- Magiloy on percussion
- Wrin on banjo
- Tamily on harmonica
- Captain Longsaddle on trumpet
- Brelida on voice (Oloro if you get lucky)

PCs can participate with their own performance. Simply roll a relevant perform check, using the base Festival DCs listed at the top.

Team Events

Sledge Pull (Lady Inkleholtz and Whisteldown Cutters)

Teams of 6.

Communal athletics check. Total of 100+ is first place, 90+ is second place, 80+ is third place

Wild Cow Milking (Jale Highstepper and the farmer's guild)

This event is based on a true story; my hometown does this on the 4th of July.

Teams of 3-4.

PCs are given a rope, a bottle, and five minutes. The chaos begins!

Can roll nature, survival, athletics, etc.

They roll three times, taking the average of their rolls as their result for the round. 60+ is first place, 55+ is second, 50+ is third.

The Performance

Mayor Oseph has hired aspiring novelist James Morlibint to write a short theatrical production for this year's festival. This production will summarize the history of the Roseguard. The purpose of this, of course, is to acquaint your players with the background lore of the Roseguard and Belcorra. You are encouraged to contrive reasons why one or more of the PCs might be invited to participate, maybe as one of the Roseguard or helping with special effects.

If none of your players are in the show, here is the default casting:

- Dorianna Menhemes plays Aesephana (she strives to play her role well, and you can begin dropping hints about her developing psychic powers)
- Carl Morlibint plays Zarmavdian (he is a natural choice, being so wizardly, although not a dwarf. He brings gravitas to the performance, and is easily the most skilled actor involved)
- Narala plays Vol Rajani (Amicia was asked, but declined. In fact, Amicia would love to be Vol, but she has stage fright. Narala has more enthusiasm than talent, but she brings energy to the production)
- Yinyasmera plays Otari (she has a knack for disguise, and is great with all the swashbuckling)
- Wrin Sivinxi plays Belcorra Haruvex (she gets really into it, enjoys being an evil sorceress)

The real Rosa Argentis is being used for the performance, to the extreme distaste of the Rajanis.

For the performance, summarize the history of the Roseguard in four short acts:

1. The rise of the four heroes (about their origins/backstories)
2. How they met, and a summary of some of their adventures
3. Their battle against Belcorra Haruvex, and its tragic conclusion
4. The founding of the town of Otari!

Announcements, Speeches, and the Cooking Contest

After the conclusion of the production, mayor Oseph takes the stage to make some announcements for the benefit of the town. Other townspeople are invited onstage.

Announcements:

- Brelde still hoping for news of her son (“please speak to me”)
- Keelo is upping the bounty on Jaul Mezmin to 300 gold pieces! (murmurs in the crowd)
- Lady Inkleholtz is planning to buy the remains of the Thirsty Alpaca and renovate it into a school (she announces some fundraising activities, donations accepted)
- Local outlaws have been waylaying travelers with firearms; watch yourself on the roads (Longsaddle makes this announcement)
- Finally, the PCs are presented and celebrated for their valiant actions taking care of some kobolds and even a young dragon beneath the city!

After this, it’s time for the mayoral speeches! This will kick off the brief yearly election season.

Credence and Cryde are seen interacting with Carman Rajani before the speeches. They have agreed to ‘support’ his election campaign in exchange for favorable policies toward the Kortos Consortium when he is elected. Credence may be seen handing Carman a paper prior to the speeches. Credence and Cryde are covered in great detail in the Kortos Conspiracy section of this document.

Mayoral candidates: Oseph, Carman, and...Greenspoon?!

Oseph gives a fine speech, casual and familiar. He seems to take his victory for granted, and states in his typical plain and simple fashion that he doesn’t have much to say; he’s been mayor for 20 years and everybody already knows what to expect.

Greenspoon doesn’t seem to understand why he’s there, and rambles about some seafaring adventure he’s had in distant fantastical lands before being distracted by the snack table.

Carman’s election speech is strangely excellent. He talks about his job as a working man, saying that he, not the rich and powerful Oseph, can relate to the working class and understand the needs of the average citizen. He points out Oseph’s conflict of interest, being mayor while owning the largest lumber company in town. Carman reminds everyone of his own heritage, and the good that he, Carman, has done for the town. Oseph’s policies have worked so far, sure, but everyone knows about the financial troubles that the lumber companies are facing. What the town needs now is fresh leadership – and to give poor old Oseph a break. Carman comes across as a simple but intelligent man, a straight shooter. He gets a few of heads nodding, and nobody is laughing at him by the end.

Afterward, PCs can join the candidates in judging the cooking contest (which is in honor of Zarmavdian, who was said to be a great cook). This is mayor Oseph’s way of rewarding them for

discovering the tomb of Aesephana. The party gets a spot at the mayoral candidate table and get to see the tension between Carman and Oseph!

They judge a variety of dishes, but the grand prize comes down to a tie between Brellda Venkervale's exquisite rhubarb pie and Barnaby's spicy fish stew. (Barnaby is the mysterious seldom-seen chef at the Crook's Nook, a reclusive culinary genius as well as Yinyasmera's husband.) Oseph suggests that the fish stew is slightly better, and Carman immediately argues for the pie out of pure contrarianism. Let the players break the tie.

The Harrow Reading

After all this, Wrin asks the party to come by her tent. Describe the atmosphere in her tent, the odd symbols and items, the candles and incense, the stars overhead.

First, Wrin lays out a normal harrow spread for the party as a whole, showing their past, the present, and future. You might want to have her explain the harrow deck and how it works for your players.

I rigged the spread and used the following cards:

Good past: **The Beating** (misaligned; it was the PCs who did the beating! A reference to their victory beneath the city)

Neutral past: **The Vision** (Wrin's visions of the Gauntlight. She explains that she's seen an eerie bluish glow to the north that nobody else seems to notice...and she's been having bad omens)

Evil past: **The Tyrant** (Belcorra, though Wrin might identify it vaguely as some great evil from the past, which has relevance to the present. This is a True Match, however, so it is particularly important)

Good present: **The Survivor** (this is a reference to Otari, though Wrin will only say that the PCs will meet someone who has endured great evil. This is another True Match, also important)

Neutral present: **The Hidden Truth** (could specifically refer to *Thresholds of Truth*, but Wrin will only interpret it as an important secret that the PCs must discover – the secret being Belcorra's return!)

Evil present: **The Demon's Lantern** (the will-o-wisps, which have been seen around the Fogfen, herald Belcorra's return and the growing influence of Nhimbalo. Wrin is aware of the growing presence of dangerous lights in the Fogfen, and will make the connection)

Good future: **The Locksmith** (the PCs will open many doors which have long remained closed)

Neutral future: **The Fiend** (a great and dangerous power may aid or harm you – a reference to Urevian)

Neutral future: **The Eclipse** (Wrin will gasp and declare that this situation is more serious than she thought. The Eclipse in the evil future is a dire omen indeed. Of course, it refers to the fact that if the party does not stop Belcorra, the city of Absalom will be destroyed!)

After this, separate the deck into six stacks based on attributes. Have each PC randomly draw from whichever pile they feel most closely represents their character, and interpret that card for the future appropriately. This one is actually random.

The party and Wrin might talk for a while, but at some point, Wrin senses something. She emerges from the tent in alarm and stares to the northwest. “Can you see it?” she asks. She is surprised when the party replies that, yes, they can also see the eerie blue glow emanating from the Gauntlight, the peak of which is just visible above the trees.

The blue glow narrows into a beam, which aims itself at...the graveyard? It lingers for a few more seconds, then winks out. Ominous...

Possibly the PCs will want to investigate this right away, and set out to make the several-mile journey from their position to the graveyard. Or they might want to continue hanging out at the festival. Either way, they soon encounter an out-of-breath acolyte from the library. Hysterical with panic, he reports that the dead have risen in the graveyard! Lots of them! Some are leaping from the cliff and raining down upon the library; others are wandering the graveyard. Worse: another of the acolytes is trapped in a gardening shed inside the graveyard! If someone doesn't hurry and rescue her, she will be torn to pieces.

The PCs will probably leap to action; if they hesitate, Wrin suggests they start living up to their brand-new title as protectors of the town. The acolyte and Wrin go to warn Vandy Banderdash and the Garrison respectively.

Thus the party will arrive at the Deadtide for Otari event several minutes before backup comes, and when they arrive they will find a graveyard full of wandering dead. A shed some distance within is surrounded by zombies and skeletons. Start the party at the other end of the battlemat so that it takes at least one turn just to get close. At the end of the fourth round of combat, the shed is broken, and the poor acolyte has no choice but to try to make a break for it. Roll her into initiative and give her 12 AC and 10 HP. She isn't likely to get far without the party's protection!

If the PCs burn easily through the undead, and they might, don't give them time to rest before dropping the scalathrax on them. When the scalathrax arrives, so does backup for the PCs in the form of Wrin and Vandy. Vandy goes down the cliff to protect her library; Wrin holds off zombies so that the party can focus on the new beast without distractions. Show that Wrin is kind of a badass, shredding zombies with *spray of stars* and other spells while the party struggles with the scalathrax.

The Letters of Dr. Zacchaeus Quagmire III

In *The Menace Under Otari*, one piece of loot is only described as a ‘treasure map.’ Obviously, this is intended to provide GMs with a plot hook leading into further adventures. This chapter of *The Abomination Vaults: Expanded* is my effort to elaborate upon this treasure map idea and connect it to the vaults.

I have changed it from a treasure map to a treasure hunt. The map becomes a letter from an enigmatic character, the first in a series of letters hidden throughout the levels of the Abomination Vaults.

Dr. Zacchaeus Quagmire III is a respected archaeologist and member of the Inner Sea Historical Society, based in Absalom. Several months ago, he ventured to the Gauntlight to take a look around, and he ended up discovering the vaults below. This was not a problem for him, as he is curious, loves exploring, and is quite capable of taking care of himself. However, because a fortune telling he got from Wrin, he suspects that his nieces Theodora and Charlotte, also members of the Historical Society, will be following after him. To this end, he has left a series of clues and helpful notes throughout the Vaults. Dr. Quagmire himself can be found and rescued in the ninth level. The first note has ended up in the kobolds’ treasure hoard beneath Otari from the Menace Under Otari. If you aren’t running the beginner box adventure, you can have your party find it behind the painting of a tiger in area B6 in the second level of the vaults.

Each letter is difficult to find without the clues from the previous letter, and each is accompanied by a handful of useful alchemical items or other consumables. More importantly, each letter contains some cryptic clues and hints about what lies further below.

Wrin can describe Dr. Quagmire as halfling archaeologist who dropped by her place several months ago. At this time she already harbored suspicions about the Gauntlight, but he did not heed her warnings. Part of his fortune told that his nieces would come looking for him.

James Morlibint can also be of assistance. He can identify the tome mentioned in the first letter, and he also knows the name of Dr. Zacchaeus Quagmire III. In fact, Morlibint has one of Dr. Quagmire’s books, *Tombs and Temples*, which reveals a bit about the adventurous nature of this old archaeologist.

First letter

Location: found as loot in area 18 of The Menace Under Otari

Dearest Charlotte and Theodora,

It is with the utmost confidence that I write – confidence that you will find first this letter, and later myself. I am certain that you have not forgotten the lesson I taught you: always check the backs of paintings! And this one even has a tiger on it. Ah, you used to love tigers, Charlotte.

What a remarkable place this is! And so unexpected. You will already have observed, by the time you find this, that it is not particularly welcoming. No matter! Esteemed members of the Historical Society such as yourselves will not be fazed by such trifling difficulties, I am sure. A bit further down you may even find one or two friendly faces. It is just as I have always said: not all librarians are out to devour your rotting flesh.

You might also be cautious of ghosts, and not friendly ones like your old great-aunt Maud back at the manor. Poor souls! And so delightfully macabre. Furthermore, a rather squirmy entity is roaming about these parts, with whom I advise an approach of considerable caution.

The collection below is as extensive as it is surprising. I know you might wish to stop by and have a look, Theodora, but I'm afraid the poetry section is a bit slim. Nevertheless, knowledge is power, and I have hidden both within a certain tome you are bound to be familiar with. It is the third formally accepted treatise of Jan Dreli Kolai the Sage, whose work I know you have encountered in the course of your studies. The illustrations are lacking, alas, but the translation is quite good. I left it amid the carrels to the east. You should find it helpful.

I know that you will be careful to search for hidden passageways. I have noted quite a few myself, as doubtless you have the secret door adjacent to this painting. A respectable member of the Historical Society leaves no stone unturned! Which is why I must proceed further. Perhaps you will catch up! My old legs aren't what they used to be.

I believe one of those fascinating but unfriendly mechanisms is approaching, so I must wish you well.

Ever Onward!

Your Affectionate Uncle, Dr. Zacchaeus Quagmire III

Second Letter

Location: inside the book *Descriptions of Natural Phenomena*, by Jan Dreli Kolai the Sage, Area C36

Items: 4 fear gems, 3 antidotes (moderate)

Dearest Charlotte and Theodora,

Congratulations on dealing with those pesky ghouls. Did you meet the friendly one? The ghost in this room is a bit off her rocker, so to speak, but she'll leave you well enough alone if you pretend to sit and do some work. Why, I stayed here for a day or two, though indeed there is always a chance of a disturbance. That temple just north of here really is something, though the priests are touchy.

But my, what a library! I expect you'll want to stay and have a look around, Theodora. You may want to pay particular attention to the movements of the ghost in this very room, in fact.

Now I would hate to deprive you of the joy of discovery, but be aware that our multitudinous friend below rather enjoys poison, to which he seems to be immune. And oh, ho ho! That staircase! Marvelous. It's rare to see true class like that in tombs and temples these days. But do be extremely cautious there. Remember what I have told you: there is no dishonor in fleeing from something you are not prepared to face just yet. Just like you, Charlotte, with that river drake when you were only ten! Poor creature. It should have fled.

I left something helpful in a bottle of a particularly good Jalmeray dry white. I'm afraid I cannot comment on the vintage. Even I am not quite that old! That ghost is looking over my shoulder as I write. I don't think she's paying attention, though. Poor soul.

Ever onward!

Your Scholarly Uncle, Dr. Zacchaeus Quagmire III

Third Letter

Location: inside an empty wine bottle in the back of the wine cellar, area D4 (Perception DC 26 to notice if the PCs aren't looking for it)

Items: 4 bottled sunlight (moderate), 3 stone body mutagen (lesser)

Dearest Charlotte and Theodora,

Have you noticed anything odd about that great central column? It is quite indestructible. How interesting! There is deep magic at work here. I hope that wolf man over to the east didn't give you any trouble. That is, I hope you didn't give him any trouble. He seems rather sad. I say, what he needs is some fresh air. It is rather musty down here.

And speaking of must, you simply must have a look at the arena below! It is straight south from the large stairwell. Charlotte, I am sure you will have a wonderful time. Perhaps you have already taken care of those beasts in the secret chamber northwest of here. Rest assured, there are numerous monsters below, including many unfortunates who have undergone abhorrent experimentation.

This place has seen better days. A number of abandoned living quarters are clustered together near the middle of the level below. One of them is not quite as abandoned as you might hope! It reminds me of old granny Phyllis's cooking. I left something for you in the third bedroom counter-clockwise from that one.

Ever onward!

Your Inquisitive Uncle, Dr. Zacchaeus Quagmire III

Fourth Letter

Location: beneath the mattress in the second-southmost of the gladiator's quarters, B23.

Items: 3 ghost oil, 2 oil of object animation

Dearest Charlotte and Theodora,

The Historical Society would be in fits over this place. It just keeps going down! And hardly any indication of such extensive infrastructure on the surface. It was obviously constructed with care, and with a specific purpose and plan in mind. Quite an odd lot of characters around hereabouts, I must say. That cheery fellow, did you know, he managed to beat me at chess! Of course, he cheated. But then again, so did I.

Of all the things I expected to find below, a musical group was not among them. They aren't bad, actually. Perhaps they'll let you join them, eh, Theodora? Although I didn't see a pipe organ anywhere, nor even a harpsichord.

I suppose you noticed the security checkpoint to the west on this level? It leads to the surface! Not that I'm heading that way, mind. I must see what lies at the bottom of all this.

You'll find that much of the next level is not at all pleasant, I'm afraid. Torture, experimentation, and even gambling! Well, when you find the torture chamber, you take my advice and check beneath the loose floor tile precisely four paces north and seven west of the ferrous woman.

Ever onward!

Your Exceptional Uncle, Dr. Zacchaeus Quagmire III

Fifth Letter

Location: in the torture chamber, area C24, beneath a loose floor tile. If the PCs are unaware that Dr. Quagmire is a halfling, they may have difficulty locating the correct tile!

Items: 2 ghostly portal paint, 3 skeptic's elixir (moderate)

Dearest Charlotte and Theodora,

What a curious development! You know how I just can't stand fiends, generally – remember the incident with old Colonel Cormorant? But devils aren't so bad, as far as they go. They won't jump straight to killing you if they think they can get something from you – and that, my dears, is basic economics. Why, they're nearly civilized.

They will, however, most likely get around to killing you at some point, so be ready for that. At least it's nice and warm down here! I'm sure you two enjoyed the sauna on the arena level, despite the questionable company. Well, I left my next letter in the warmest room down here,

right under the circle. Why, I had a fine discussion with the devils in there about the theory behind extraplanar portals. That was before they got around to trying to kill me, of course, as I mentioned above.

I'm sure you'll enjoy meeting the boss devil. You always hear talk about heavenly choirs and angelic choruses and whatnot, but you never hear about the more infernal vocalists. Never fear, you'll get an earful down here! What a musical place this is turning out to be. It is just as I have always said: never judge a sinister multi-level subterranean supercomplex by the squalid ruination of its uppermost level.

Ever onward!

Your Evasive Uncle, Dr. Zacchaeus Quagmire III

Sixth Letter

Location: fastened to the underside of the suspended disc in room D7. It may require a bit of problem-solving to retrieve it, as it is suspended several feet over a pit of lava!

Items: 4 stormfeathers, 3 potions of swimming

Dearest Charlotte and Theodora,

My dears, we shall be the envy of the Historical Society when we report back with these findings! I can't wait to see the look on Professor Carlisle's bloated face. That indestructible central column – just how far down does it go? To the center of the earth? The noticeable increase in necromantic energy within it is cause for concern, without doubt.

I hope you are prepared for a change in scenery, but I won't spoil the surprise. I will only say that my next letter will be concealed within a very large specimen of basidiomycota. It will be near the ladder (you'll know the ladder when you see it), and very likely the only such specimen to be marked with the symbol of our good and honorable society.

Many and diverse are the dangers below. I suggest you keep particular watch for A.O.U.S., which, as I'm sure you remember from your lessons, means Amphibians Of Unusual Size. Be wary of the water. Be wary of the shadows overhead. Be wary, in fact, of everything.

Ever onward!

Your Increasingly Cautious Uncle, Dr. Zacchaeus Quagmire

Seventh Letter

Location: within a large mushroom in area A34, near the ladder down. It is marked with a torch and book symbol.

Items: 3 potions of shared life, 3 potions of quickness

Dearest Charlotte and Theodora,

I am afraid I may be in a spot of bother, here. I am hastily writing this letter, but my pursuers may be closing in even as I do so. I hate to admit it, but it may have been a bit reckless of me to come down this far without waiting for you.

Never fear, however! I have come out of worse scrapes than this, I am sure. There is an old hunting lodge down below, you see, and I seem to have inadvertently disturbed a group of caligni warriors.

It seems we have reached an upper region of the Darklands. All structures nearby seem built intentionally around the central column. I have reason to believe that it does indeed have a base, and that this base is not far below. One can only speculate what secrets, what mysteries it may contain!

A bit of advice if you descend to the lower level: the drow can be reasoned with; the urdefhan can not. As usual, beware of monsters, but they are particularly fierce below. As well, a ghostly spirit of extraordinary power prowls these caverns. You may have noticed. She is rather angry about something.

Ah, it seems that my time is running out. Charlotte and Theodora, I love you both dearly.

Ever onward!

Your Adventurous Uncle, Dr. Zacchaeus Quagmire III

Dr. Quagmire, I presume?

Dr. Zacchaeus Quagmire III can be found in area B26, conversing with Galudu. He is being kept prisoner, and although he is able to escape if he wants to, he has been enjoying a time of rest and education. He has even been using his remarkable skills in both infiltration and alchemy to aid the caligni community. His usefulness, wit, and irrepressibly jovial spirit have endeared him to the caligni of this area, some of whom have even come to view him as a friend in the few weeks he has stayed with them.

The PCs might not be aware that Dr. Quagmire is here, and for his part, Dr. Quagmire doesn't even know the PCs exist! If the PCs take a violent approach to dealing with the caligni in this area, play things out as usual, except that Dr. Quagmire is hiding in area B26, and starts with a negative and suspicious attitude towards the PCs. If the PCs take a peaceful approach with the caligni, they will meet Dr. Quagmire with Galudu. If the PCs specifically ask about Dr. Quagmire, the caligni will lie about his presence (PCs can detect the lie) in an effort to protect him. They might change their minds if the PCs produce his letters.

Most likely, Dr. Quagmire is happy to meet the PCs and compare notes, although he will be distressed to hear that all his letters for his nieces have been intercepted! He is able to sell a

variety of alchemical items up to level 12. If the PCs attack, he will drink a potion to become ethereal and escape into the caverns, never to be seen again. If the PCs are friendly, Dr. Quagmire will happily offer them discounts. As in his letters, his personality is enthusiastic, adventurous, and curious.

After being met, Dr. Quagmire will return to the surface to find his nieces. After the finale of the adventure, Charlotte and Theodora may appear in Otari. Having been on a completely separate adventure, they are only just now coming in search of their uncle.

The Great Absalom Spellbook Obtainment Expedition

Where is Zarmavdian's grimoire, *Thresholds of Truth*? In the adventure as-written, it is simply in the possession of Morlibint right in Otari. However, I prefer to put it in Absalom, and make it a bit more difficult to acquire. Why?

- Absalom is the city which is in danger throughout this adventure. This is the city Belcorra hates and has devoted herself to destroying. The players should at least see it once.
- You can (and should) show the players the region known as the Cairnlands. On the outskirts of Absalom lie fields of countless dead, where many sieges in the past have failed. This should drive home the threat of the Gauntlight, if its full power is ever unleashed.
- There is no real travel in the adventure as-written. This is a chance to have roadside encounters if you want them.
- The Absalom trip, as presented here, is not combat-oriented, and gives players a chance to utilize other skills.

This side quest should take a session or less. If you are concerned about your players becoming distracted in the big city, send along Morlibint, Narala, or another NPC to keep them on track. You can also simply tell your players that they shouldn't dally for too long in Absalom. At this point in the adventure they should understand the threat posed by Belcorra and the Gauntlight. You should easily be able to maintain a sense of urgency.

So. They're looking for the artifacts of the Roseguard. Three are readily available in or near Otari, but only Morlibint knows where Zarmavdian's spellbook is held: at the Athenaeum Archives, a private library of magical texts in the city of Absalom. This collection is restricted, its contents open only to certified wizards, students of the arcane, and other scholarly individuals who have received approval. Zarmavdian's tome is housed here because some of its later contents are said to be a bit...dangerous. It, along with other potentially dangerous books, are in a special guarded collection. Morlibint is certain that, with his own signed recommendation, the party will be able to gain an audience with the head librarian. However, they'll have to convince her to let them borrow *Thresholds of Truth*. If that fails, they'll be forced to resort to more underhanded methods.

The journey to Absalom can be as eventful as you like. If you intend to incorporate the Leadbuster Lads from Troubles in Otari, this may be a good time to either introduce them as highwaymen on the road, or to hint at their presence and activities.

Make sure to describe the Cairnlands when the party nears the walls of Otari. They should know by now that the Gauntlight at full power will be able to raise powerful undead over a vast area. They also know that meticulous plans have been laid for obtaining maximal strategic use of this power. Seeing the fields where millions have fallen through the ages, you might even describe a terrible vision of immense hordes of undead ravaging the city. You can further drive this home by commenting upon the large graveyards within the city walls, recalling memories of the Deadtide for Otari event.

The Athenaeum Archives are, fortunately, not far from the western walls of the city. Your party might wish to find a nearby inn. I'm sure you have no shortage of inns from past games which you can insert here! I used the Wind Fisher Inn. It is easily identifiable by its windmills (which always seem to turn, even without wind), and you can rent out kites to fly at the nearby park, which is also adjacent to the Athenaeum Archives.

Morlibint's letter of recommendation will indeed get the party an audience with the head librarian, a no-nonsense catfolk named Caiaphax Yond. She is stoic, humorless, and a 9th-level wizard.

You should strongly discourage the PCs from attempting to resolve this side quest through violence. Make it clear to them that force is not the answer here. The Athenaeum Archives, a rather fancy old structure of marble and oak, is guarded by 5 wood golems. Your party could likely handle one or two in combat, but certainly not all of them, and they will each arrive in 1d8 rounds if the PCs force initiative to be rolled. Furthermore, at night there are several watchmen on patrol (using the Watch Officer NPC stat blocks).

In the event that the head librarian is attacked, she will simply *dimension door* away and call for backup. In the event that the PCs wind up in a fight they cannot win, make sure to offer them surrender. If they surrender, they are slapped with a hefty fine and prison time, as well as lifetime bans from the Archives. After a few days in the slammer, Morlibint and Vandy Banderdash will arrive to help. Morlibint puts his career on the line, guaranteeing the safety of the book and the responsible use of its contents; meanwhile Vandy makes an argument that this is a church matter, Nhimbaloth being involved. They get the book, but the PCs owe them.

That probably won't happen.

In their meeting with Caiaphax Yond, the PCs have a chance to convince her to let them borrow *Thresholds of Truth*. This takes the form of a skill challenge. In a skill challenge, players can roll any skill they think might be helpful. Encourage them to be creative, but you are the ultimate arbiter of what skills may apply here. Charisma-based skills, lore skills, and even others such as Society might be helpful, but Yond is unlikely to be convinced by a display of acrobatics. The only rule here is that any PC cannot attempt the same skill more than once. Try to make sure that all players are involved, giving everyone a chance to try a different tactic.

If the party reaches three failed checks, they lose. Yond has made up her mind and will listen to no further attempts to convince her. If the party achieves four successes before reaching three failures, Yond is convinced. She will allow them to borrow the book for a sufficient amount of time (say, a month or two).

She is not easy to convince, however! The default DC for any check made in the skill challenge is 26. If there is a wizard in the party, lower the DC for all checks to 24. If the party is behaving in a silly or irresponsible manner, increase the DCs to 28. You might adjust the DC in other special circumstances, such as if a PC is also a librarian.

If the party succeeds, congratulations! That's all. They can take the book, which is described in the Roseguard Artifacts portion of this document. Caiaphax Yond might warn the party about the potential dangers of looking too deeply into the lore of the Outer Gods. After all, it is believed that Zarmavdian went mad from his research, and removed himself from the world so as not to cause great harm in his madness.

If the party fails the skill challenge, then it's on to the heist! Heists do not have to be complicated. Since we don't want to make too big a deal of this sidequest, we will have only four simple obstacles for the players to overcome. Here they are, along with some common/obvious ways of dealing with them. Use these as a sort of checklist that the party has to fill out before they can grab the goods.

- Enter the building (presumably at night, when it's closed)
 - Pick the lock
 - Steal a key
 - Enter through an unlocked window on the top floor
- Get past the night watchmen, and the wizards/students who have stayed for some late-night studying
 - Stealth
 - Disguise
 - Deception
 - Diversion
- Overcome the magical wards guarding the restricted collection, where the dangerous books are kept
 - Thievery or Arcana checks to disable the alarms
 - Dispel magic
 - Enter by some other means than the one obvious door
- Find *Thresholds of Truth* in the restricted section. There aren't many books here, but they can be hazardous. Some of the books are dangerous because of the information they contain, others because they will explode, will try to eat an incautious player, or will threaten to sound an alarm unless they are set free. This obstacle is mainly about the time it takes to find the correct book, and is a great place to introduce complications if the heist has been going too smoothly.
 - If the party has done their research, they should know what *Thresholds of Truth* looks like, making the search much easier
 - Arcana or Perception checks can hasten the process

Then, of course, they'll have to get out with their prize. It is 2 Bulk, so someone might end up dealing with the Encumbered condition. *Thresholds of Truth* is described in the Roseguard section of this document.

Here are some potential complications you can throw at your players:

- A student studying late mistakes the PCs for new library staff and starts asking questions.
- The head librarian comes in for a bit of emergency midnight research on some serious but unrelated topic.

- A wizard's familiar notices the party's heist operation while it prowls the library in boredom. It follows along to watch, and potentially draws attention on purpose to make things more interesting.

Do not be afraid to let players find inventive ways around these obstacles. If one or more players has an ability such as invisibility that trivializes certain obstacles, great! Let them be cool. Just make sure they can't breeze past *everything*.

Finally, there is an important trick to running tense and interesting stealth encounters: having many points of failure. Consider the following scenario: a player is sneaking through the library and fails a stealth check. The GM decides that this means the guard spots them, and initiative is rolled!

This is no good. For one thing, the entire operation is essentially a failure the moment that combat breaks out. Adjudicating a stealth mission in this manner means that the entire party must roll perfectly in order for the mission to succeed! For another thing, it's not very interesting or exciting narratively. Finally, it gives few if any choices to the player who failed the roll.

Instead, consider the following scenario:

The thief attempts to sneak through the library past the patrolling guards. They fail their Stealth check! (Meaning that their result does not beat the guards' perception DC, which is 18.)

GM: The guard hears something and comes to investigate, suspicious. He is getting closer, and on the alert. What do you do?

The thief decides to place a book on the floor, hoping the guard will think it fell to make the noise, and hides in the shadows. They roll stealth. (Or the GM rolls, as this is a secret check.) They fail again.

GM: The guard is now convinced that someone is here. He calls for backup and approaches. He still doesn't see you, but he is searching the darkness and getting very close. What do you do?

The thief doesn't want to start a fight, and decides that their best bet is to slink away before more guards come. They roll stealth again, and fail again.

GM: The guard spots you, shining his lantern in your direction! 'Who goes there,' he cries, weapon drawn.

The thief decides to play dumb. They step from the shadows and explain that they are a student who fell asleep in the stacks and then got lost. They roll deception. They fail.

GM: The guard is skeptical. By this time his backup has arrived, and you are facing down two of them. He suggests, firmly, that you had better come with them. He reaches for your arm. What do you do?

Rather than try to run, the thief decides to play along for now, reasoning (correctly) that opportunities for escape may arise later, especially since their allies are still nearby.

[end scenario]

Our player just managed to fail four checks in a row, and yet the adventure continues, and the operation is not over yet. That was four points of failure. At any juncture, the situation is still salvageable. And that's the whole point: making it very difficult for the players to reach a true fail-state. Also, this would have been a very exciting moment for the player of the thief, even if they did fail every check, because they constantly had the opportunity to re-evaluate the situation, adapt, and make decisions under pressure.

Most likely, your players will fail a number of checks in the heist. That's fine. Your job is to use these failures as opportunities to ramp up tension and introduce complications, while constantly putting the ball back in the party's court by asking 'what now?'

Also, since you don't really *want* this particular operation to devolve into combat, you can be very forgiving with how many failures a PC is allowed before that becomes inevitable – if it ever does. It also helps if the watchmen are not trigger-happy. In this case, you might even decide that the *only* way actual combat happens is if the PCs start it.

And that's it! One way or another, your party will get their hands on *Thresholds of Truth*.

The Red Holiday

When I was first learning about the Abomination Vaults adventure path, I was excited to hear that it included a combat arena. I've had great success with things like that in the past. So I was disappointed to read that the arena in the 5th/6th levels is defunct, with only a single combat encounter. This is my solution. Read on if you like the idea of a more active arena in the vaults.

A couple hundred years after Belcorra's defeat, a wandering rakshasa discovered the abomination vaults, drawn by the scent of blood, violence, and death. This rakshasa had the head of a vulture, and like a vulture he was drawn to carnage. When he discovered the empty, unused arena, he set up shop and began the work of restoring it back into a fully-functioning coliseum. Both Jafaki and Urevian allowed, or even encouraged this. This outsider was never hired by Belcorra, but he nevertheless is training warriors – or at least providing combat data, as the warriors usually meet a gruesome end. The rakshasa advertises throughout the nearby reaches of the Darklands, and by special agreement with Urevian he also has the ability to transport monsters to and from special holding cells, similar to the statis chambers in the seventh level. The PCs will be unable to access the secret passageways into the Darklands, and they will also be unable to reach these special holding cells. Because of this, you need make few, if any changes to the maps.

One recommended change to the official content is that the former arena administrator, Chafkhem, was trapped in area B17 on the 5th level by this rakshasa, not Szek, though possibly he still blames Jafaki. He might give the party the rather difficult assignment of slaying the rakshasa.

The rakshasa's name is unknown, but the residents of the vaults call him the Cheery Man. This is because he typically assumes a brightly-clothed humanoid form, but he always wears an eerie smiling mask. The Cheery Man is constantly on the lookout for new competitors in his arena, and he is driven by a singular goal: to witness violence and death, and to make a big show of it in the meantime. He named his arena the Red Holiday.

The Cheery Man will begin appearing on the upper levels during dangerous fights, watching and observing the heroes. At first, he will simply flee if noticed or pursued, but as the heroes gain his interest by winning tough battles, he will begin to mock the party during fights, offering sarcastic and discouraging commentary. Eventually he will wonder out loud if they have what it takes to compete in the Red Holiday! The Cheery Man should come across as maniacal and unhinged.

When the heroes arrive at the arena, either on the 5th or 6th level, the Cheery Man will be there to introduce them to the rules, which are as follows: players can compete in solo 1-v-1 battles, or as a group against more numerous or dangerous foes. The reward in either case is gold and their choice of a magic item. For both solo and group battles, the players can choose between three difficulties: Good Odds (a medium-threat encounter), Fair Odds (a severe-threat encounter), and Dead Odds (an extreme-threat encounter). Use the tables below for suggested encounters and rewards. Make sure that the players understand the severity of a Dead Odds fight, especially in a solo battle, where a bad hero-monster matchup could mean certain death!

The party might decide to break the rules, such as by leaping into the arena to aid an ally in a solo battle. If this happens, the Cheery Man will also enter the fray, which could spell doom for the party. The Cheery Man might let them go, but ban them from future involvement in the Red Holiday. You might decide that the party can get themselves back into his good graces somehow.

The Cheery Man is the final boss of the arena. There is no need to defeat him to continue the adventure; indeed, doing so puts an end to the Red Holiday. He has the stats of an elite rajah rakshasa. As loot, he has the Bloodletting Kukri magic item (which already exists on level 6; just move it to the Cheery Man), a Cape of the Mountebank (which he uses to escape from the party if he is ever pursued outside of the Red Holiday), and a unique magic item called The Cheery Man's Mask. This mask is a worn item, and can be activated once per day by the wearer. Activating the mask is a free action which occurs at the start of the wearer's turn. It sets a waypoint in time at the start of their turn, to which they return once that turn is finished. The wearer can then take their entire turn again, possibly trying a different tactic or acting on new information. Once the two turns are finished, the wearer decides which turn is the one that 'actually' happens. This powerful and tricky item is also useful outside of combat, but will be used against the party if they ever battle the Cheery Man. The Cheery Man will require the party to prove themselves with a few battles in the arena before he accepts any challenge from them. He's not interested in easily destroying his foes. He wants a good fight.

There is typically not much of an audience in the area, but the Cheery Man takes care of that. He uses powerful illusion magic to simulate a roaring crowd filling the stands. Make sure to hype it up and describe how the crowd gasps when the heroes critically fail and cheers when a monster is slain.

The Red Holiday is designed for players level 5-8. In the table for solo battles below, each opponent represents an extreme-threat encounter (Dead Odds) for that level. Use level - 1 for a severe (Fair Odds) encounter, and level - 2 for a moderate (Good Odds) encounter. For example, a 6th-level hero who wanted a Fair Odds fight would receive an enemy from the "5" list, and an 8th-level hero who wanted a Dead Odds fight would get something from the "8" list. I recommend you randomly select one of these enemies, but you could also allow your players to choose between a few options.

Table for solo battles: moderate, severe, and extreme-threat encounters for PCs level 5-8

Creature level:

- 3: Mage for Hire, Yeth Hound, Hell Hound, Cockatrice,
- 4: Shangriol heap, Hellknight Armiger, owlbear, scalathrax, otyugh,
- 5: Antipaladin, Plague doctor, Gibtas Bounder, Giant Crawling Hand, Skaveling,
- 6: Manticore, Monster hunter, Executioner, Graveknight Captain, drider, behir
- 7: Cult Leader, Mulventok, Deathless Heirophant of Urgothoa, Greater Shadow, Chuul,
- 8: Assassin, Lamia Matriarch, Gibtanus, Skeletal Knight, Mohrg,

Here is the table for party battles, also intended for players level 5-8. These are all moderate-threat encounters for that level. So a 5th-level party who wanted a Fair Odds fight would get an encounter from the "6" list below, and 7th-level party that wanted a Dead Odds encounter would

get either four greater barghests or the Cheery Man himself. As with the solo encounters, you could select randomly or let the party choose.

Table for party battles: moderate, severe, and extreme-threat encounters for party level 5-8

Moderate encounter:

- 5: Zetogeki, two heiracosphinx
- 6: Chimera, three harpies, three trolls
- 7: Dracolisk, elite shambler troop with weak zombie hulk
- 8: Shangriol behemoth (elite), Two manticore Paaridar and a chimeric manticore
- 9: Four greater barghests (with each mutation), The Cheery Man (elite raja rakshasa, see above)
- 10: (there is no extreme encounter for an 8th-level party)

The table below lists suggested rewards for solo battles. The numbers correspond with the solo encounter chart above. I recommend randomly choosing three of the magic items listed, and then allowing the victorious hero to select their reward. Describe the items in detail, but don't allow the hero to take the time to identify the items and find out exactly what they are and what they do.

Table of rewards for victory in solo encounters

- 3: [12 gp] Cantrip deck (*message*, 5 cards), ring of discretion, rhythm bone,
- 4: [21 gp] Flask of fellowship, archaic wayfinder, skittering mask
- 5: [34 gp] Aeon stone (dusty rose prism), Hunter's bow, Retribution axe, rope of climbing, Lady's chalice, hat of the magi,
- 6: [50 gp] Healer's gloves, Sturdy shield, bag of holding, warcaller's chime of destruction,
- 7: [72 gp] Goggles of night, Grim ring, Cinderclaw gauntlet, holy prayer beads, warcaller's chime of resistance, wondrous figurine (candy constrictor),
- 8: [100 gp] Ring of energy resist (fire), Spiritsight ring, Conflagration club, lion's shield, ghoulish armor, deck of illusions,

Finally, this table is for victorious parties. They still only get one magic item, but it is more valuable. The numbers here correspond with the party encounter chart above. The magic item rewards for "5" and "6" below correspond with "7" and "8" from the solo chart. There is overlap in items, so draw both from the same pool. As with solo encounters, I recommend allowing the party to choose between three magic items randomly selected from the appropriate pool.

Table of rewards for victory in party encounters

- 5: [77 gp]
- 6: [100 gp]
- 7: [150 gp] Aeon stone (tourmaline sphere), Slippers of spider climbing, Undead scourge, slime whip, spined shield, moonlit chain,
- 8: [200 gp] Rhinoceros mask (greater), Wand of teeming ghosts (third level), Spiritsight crossbow, mithral waffle iron, folding boat,
- 9: [285 gp] Gloom blade, Dragonslayer's shield (black), rhino hide

If you use XP leveling, the Red Holiday could unbalance your game if the party spends too long there. If you are concerned about this, simply put a limit on how many solo/group encounters they are allowed.

Demontide for Otari

The first time your players take a long rest after defeating/dealing with Urevian for good, they have a dream. This works best if they are in or near Otari, and if they are together. Once they are all asleep, tell them that they awaken to a cold sense of dread, and a malevolent presence. Belcorra is here! She is furious that they have removed Urevian, slain Volluk, and generally disrupted her plans. She is here to show them what they are dealing with. Battle commences!

This is a dream sequence – but don't tell your players that! (Although you might give some hints, such as the fact that no one else seems to be around.) Use Belcorra's full stats (with the Elite template and 7th level spells, if you're running the vaults a level ahead.) She should easily defeat the PCs. To speed things up, you could have her focus whichever PC she finds most annoying. The goal here is to demonstrate her power.

When one of the PCs dies, or when most of them are defeated, they awaken from the dream! But not before Belcorra warns them that she has more than enough power to destroy everything they hold dear. Have them roll a Will save against Belcorra's spell DC, as they all just suffered from the *nightmare* spell.

They awaken to shouts and screams, the sounds of death and combat. Someone comes to apprise them of the situation. This could be Olli from the fishery shack, Wrin, who has just scouted the town in bird form, or any other NPC who you think would have a grasp of the situation. The situation is this: the town is under attack by demons! They are rampaging in the streets, killing and burning, and they are too strong for most of the town to deal with.

This is your chance to kill beloved NPCs and make the party really hate Belcorra.

The demons are centralized in four locations. You can put them anywhere in town, but you are encouraged to put them with characters or locations that your players are emotionally invested in. The attacks are happening simultaneously. The choice should be clear: the PCs cannot save everyone!

Each of the four encounters is a low-threat encounter for an 8th level party. You should add the elite template if your party is 9th level, or the weak template if your party is 7th level. Here are the encounters:

- One vrock
- Two invidiak
- Four brimorak
- One invidiak and two brimorak

Splitting the party four ways would be extremely risky, likely resulting in PC death. Splitting two ways would be more manageable, but would still result in some tense battles. Whatever they decide, the point is that they cannot save everyone.

If your party sticks together, they should breeze through one encounter, and you might allow them to deal with a second one just in time to save the day and prevent NPCs death at these two

locations. If your party splits in half, they will only have time to deal with these two encounters before the demons overwhelm the townsfolk at the other locations. In the unlikely event that your party splits further than this, deal with each encounter separately, one at a time. If PCs die, so will the NPCs they are assisting.

Once the party deals with their first fight (or perhaps two fights, if they stuck together), it is too late to rescue the other NPCs. Therefore, you might want to simply narrate the party dispatching the remaining demons in town, or better yet, have your players describe it. You could also include some of the townspeople fighting back, such as Amicia if she has the Rosa Argentis, Klorte Hengus, and Vandy Banderdash.

Aftermath: much of the town is in flames, and many are dead. The town recognizes that many more would certainly have perished if not for the actions of the party...but there are also those who argue (correctly) that demons would never have attacked the town in the first place if the party hadn't gone meddling with that lighthouse! They will try to place the blame for this disaster on the party.

It should be evident to the players that the Gauntlight is still operable, and that Belcorra still possesses the means and the will to fulfil her dream of destroying the city of Absalom. They, or an ally such as Wrin, might surmise that she hasn't done so yet because she is still building power. The players might recall reading about the lenses, and the fact that Belcorra will need them for the Gauntlight to reach its true potential.

And don't forget the funerals.

The Consortium Conspiracy

It is implied in the Abomination Vaults adventure that the encroachment of the Kortos Consortium could be a plot hook for the players. It is made more explicit in the Troubles in Otari adventure. I decided to remove the Consortium side quest from the Leadbeater Lads and give to a couple of new, original characters. This side quest consists of a handful of non-combat scenarios, in which the players will match wits and skills with some unusual foes. If that is of interest to you, then read on.

The Kortos Consortium does not have a total monopoly on lumber on the isle of Kortos, but they are looking for one. Otari is one of the last major bastions of local lumber businesses, which the Consortium finds disagreeable as the competition forces them to price their stock reasonably. For a long time, the Kortos Consortium has had the goal of incorporating the three lumber companies of Otari, and now they see the opportunity. The past few years have been rough for the lumber companies of Otari – partly due to random circumstance and partly due to the Consortium exerting economic pressure on them.

But now the Consortium has an in-road. Chertel Timber is in trouble, and although this is not widely known, the business is close to folding. Wrab Chertel has cut a deal with the Kortos Consortium: he'll support their economic takeover of Otari's lumber industry, and in return he'll be made manager of the Otari branch of the Consortium's lumber monopoly. Wrab Chertel's motives are not entirely selfish; he has children and even grandchildren to think about. Furthermore, for many people in Otari, life would continue more or less normally. But the Menhemes and Inkleholtz families will lose their businesses if the Consortium takes over, and life will become harder for the working-class lumberjacks who make up a large percentage of Otari's population. The Kortos Consortium doesn't believe in unions, sustainable work-life balance, or safe working conditions. They believe in profits.

And so, to bring their plans to fruition, they have hired two of the best in the business: Credence and Cryde. Credence and Cryde bill themselves as 'freelance accountants,' and while they are certainly unparalleled in their mastery of legal and financial matters, they also possess a variety of more discreet talents. Their business card (which can be burned to establish a brief magical line of communication with them) includes the bullet points: "books balanced," "problems solved," "no loose ends." In short, Credence and Cryde are skilled spies, saboteurs, private investigators, and even, so the rumors claim, assassins.

Credence and Cryde have taken a job from the Kortos Consortium: undermine the Whistledown Cutters and Otari Lumber companies, pressuring them to sell out to the Consortium. And unless the PCs intervene, they will succeed.

Keppler Credence is a male tengu; Kairo Cryde is a female dwarf. They are both impeccably professional in their mannerisms and behavior. They are lawful neutral, always honoring their contracts to the best of their abilities. They don't mind getting their hands dirty, but they avoid unnecessary bloodshed – not out of virtue, but out of a sense of professionalism. They dress in fine dark suits, nearly identical. Keppler Credence wears a broad dark hat and carries a sword cane; Kairo Cryde wears dark, circular spectacles and carries a briefcase. Credence does the

talking; Cryde handles the paperwork. They often communicate in sign language because Cryde is mute. In terms of class, Credence is an investigator with many skills and an uncanny ability to make accurate deductions about people and situations, so that he nearly seems psychic. Cryde is a wizard who casts her spells using fulus, or strips of paper with symbols written upon them. If you don't want to learn the fulu rules, simply flavor her spellcasting as using these papers. It's pretty much like casting from scrolls, but without the need for verbal components. She also has a calligraphy wyrm familiar named Callisto, who often takes the form of a golden fountain pen.

Although they have stats, which can be found at the bottom of this section, Credence and Cryde are intended to present a different kind of challenge to the players than combat. For one thing, they will go to great lengths to avoid direct combat, even though they are easily capable of defeating a low-level party, as this would draw attention and is simply messy. For another thing, it may be difficult for the party to justify direct violence against Credence and Cryde since they generally give the appearance of doing things legally. For example, if they are found breaking and entering into someone's house, they will produce a warrant. (The warrant is fake, but only a PC with Expert proficiency in Society has a chance of detecting this.)

Additionally, Credence and Cryde are both very intelligent. If you, like me, are not very intelligent in real life, you'll need to use some tricks to get this across to your players:

- Credence will seem to know a lot about the PCs even if they have just met, as a result of his deductive skills
- Cryde keeps her spell fulus in her briefcase, and she seemingly has exactly the right spell for any given situation
- C&C do their research; after their first encounter with the PCs, they will become aware of the party's backgrounds, relationships, and weaknesses – including material for leverage or blackmail
- C&C never appear to be surprised by anything, and always give the impression of being in full control of the situation

The Consortium Conspiracy consists of five simple scenarios that may be brought to the attention of the party. If the party intervenes (successfully) in three out of the five – congratulations! They have thwarted the Kortos Consortium...for now. If you think that five is too many, you could do best of three instead. The scenarios are intended to be fairly short (a session or less in length) and open-ended; let the players figure out how to deal with them. It is up to you to decide what constitutes a 'success' or 'failure.'

Here are the scenarios, listed with ideas for how the party might become aware of them, a bit of background, and some ideas of how they might respond.

Whistledown Tax Fraud

Whistledown Cutters has been audited. Credence and Cryde, on falsified authority, have investigated the inner financial workings of this lumber company, and found that the numbers don't add up. Lady Alymora Inkleholtz has been committing tax fraud. She has not been doing

this for selfish reasons; rather, she has been eating financial losses so that she needn't cut her workers' pay. Additionally, she is investing a lot of money into her dream of having a real school in Otari, with real education for its children. Despite these sympathetic mitigating circumstances, Credence and Cryde feel they have no choice but to report the fraud to the proper authorities, putting the company on financially shaky ground...unless Lady Inkleholtz signs a deal with the Kortos Consortium. Not only will C&C forget the tax fraud, but the Kortos Consortium is prepared to make a large financial contribution toward her school project.

This, of course, is blackmail and extortion. Yet Lady Inkleholtz is considering it. She would not be signing away her entire company (not yet), but making the deal would grant the Kortos Consortium an uncomfortable degree of leverage over her business. She knows this, but wonders if her school project, and the continuing livelihoods of her workers, are not worth it.

The PCs might become aware of this by hearing rumors, by observing an obviously tense interaction between Lady Inkleholtz and C&C, or even by a direct run-in with the Lady herself, who is understandably upset about the situation.

The PCs might conclude that this really has nothing to do with them, and they would be correct, but the more perceptive of them might suspect that this is merely one step in a much larger and more sinister scheme. (If they don't suspect this, an NPC such as Wrin who learns of the situation might voice this idea.) If the PCs decide not to act, score up a win for Credence and Cryde, and afterward drop some obvious clues about the true motives of C&C. For instance, the PCs notice them in a nighttime meeting with a shadowy informant, reporting that the economic takeover of this town will be 'simple.'

If they do decide to act, what might they do? They can't un-commit Lady Inkleholtz's tax fraud, but an enterprising party might invent a new business plan for Lady Inkleholtz, propose some sound investments, argue for leniency from the local authorities (in this case, Oseph Menhemes), or even simply convince her that taking the deal is a bad idea – though she is unlikely to agree without a very convincing argument! (You could use a skill challenge for the effort of convincing her, as described in the Absalom sidequest section of this document.)

Again, it is your decision what makes a 'success.' This is one of the trickiest out of the five scenarios, and it's fine for Credence and Cryde to get a 'win' right away, as this ramps up the tension for future encounters.

Paper Planes and Piracy

As part of their project to sabotage the lumber companies of Otari, Kairo Cryde has been writing instructional letters to a pirate of her acquaintance who sails the nearby seas. In these letters, she describes the route, defenses, and cargo of the lumber barges leaving Otari. She delivers these letters by folding them into highly durable magic paper planes, which she launches over the city. These paper planes unerringly fly out to meet Captain Bellafide of the *Dread Design*. They are written in the Gnoll language, as Captain Bellafide is a gnoll.

Several successful raids have already been carried out on the lumber barges, and most of the good lumber, which the pirate vessels can't carry, is dumped into the sea. Mayor Oseph and Lady Inkleholtz are already aware that an unusual volume of piracy is crippling their businesses.

Some NPCs in Otari have noticed these planes, and might point them out to the players. You could even have a player notice them. They are infrequent, only appearing when a merchant vessel leaves Otari laden with lumber, an event which happens on average several times a week in the busy summer season.

Stage one of this scenario should be the attempt to catch one of these planes, which can be as difficult and amusing as you like. Stage two is finding out what the paper plane says, and where it is headed. Stage three is figuring out what to do about it. Even if the players can trace the planes back to Kairo Cryde, it will be nearly impossible to prove her authorship. Possible solutions could include alerting the Absalom Navy and thus laying a trap for Captain Bellafide, assigning allies to watch the skies and take down these planes whenever a barge leaves (maybe offering a reward), or even catching a letter, altering its contents in a way designed to solve this problem, and then releasing it again.

Mischief in Menhemes Manor

Credence and Cryde are always on the hunt for informational leverage. They have already discovered Lady Inkleholtz's tax fraud, but Mayor Oseph's financial records are squeaky clean. His professional and private lives have both been remarkably free of scandal, in spite of accusations made by Carman Rajani and other malcontents. But everybody has secrets, especially the powerful. Therefore, Credence and Cryde have decided to utilize their considerable capacity for stealth and subterfuge by sneaking into the Menhemes manor in search of the compromising documents they are certain they will find.

If they succeed, they will locate receipts for a number of large, discreet payments to Oseph's younger brother, Joseph Menhemes, who has recently begun a milling business in Maravon. Oseph has been generously funding his brother's up-and-coming business project. Oseph views this as a shrewd investment, and it is perfectly legal, but Credence and Cryde will be able to spin these payments as nepotism from a rich lumber tycoon, as well as violations of a number of obscure regional finance laws. This could potentially cause a lot of trouble for Otari Lumber by frightening away investors and tarnishing Oseph's well-earned reputation for fairness.

Last night, Credence and Cryde broke into Menhemes manor. They are very sneaky, but miscalculated the threat posed by Ichabod Shoakes, the manor's aging but perceptive butler. Mr. Shoakes noticed the open window, and the unlocked office door, and the smell of fresh ink (which always seems to hang about Kairo Cryde). He could not locate the intruders, but he strongly suspects their presence, and although nothing was stolen, he believes they might try again.

If the party has already assisted Dorianna Menhemes, they no doubt have the trust and gratitude of the entire Menhemes family, and Shoakes will ask them to investigate. If you run this adventure while Dorianna is ill, the PCs might be approached for assistance while they are in the manor speaking to her. You might even have Dorianna, who is after all psychic, be the initiator, asking the party to investigate the strange and sinister presences she sensed within the manor the night before. If this scenario coincides with the investigation into Dorianna's illness, the party might erroneously conclude that her illness is the work of Credence and Cryde! If they confront C&C about this, C&C are insulted. The relationship between Dorianna's illness and the mission of their current contract is oblique at best, and they would not harm an innocent teenage girl without a very good reason.

However you choose to introduce the scenario, the party has a few options. They might attempt an investigation to determine who broke into the manor and what they were looking for. If they do this, they might deduce that the intruders were interrupted in their efforts, and are likely to try again. In either case, a stakeout is the probable result, the party attempting to lay a trap for the intruders. In this reversal of the typical stealth encounter, it is the party who are standing guard. To make things simpler, you could have the bulk of the Menhemes family traveling when this happens, or even visiting someone overnight due to the possibility that violence might occur in the manor. This way, the manor is empty save for the party and Mr. Shoakes, who aids them in standing guard.

Credence and Cryde's stealth modifiers are listed in their entries below. Additionally, they will likely be invisible. Their goal is to reach either the mayoral office or the lumber office, and have a look through the paperwork. (Oseph has an office for each of his jobs, each in a different wing of the manor, as an aid to keeping them separate from each other.) They might try tricks such as putting PCs to sleep magically, distracting them with illusions, or even making a commotion somewhere in the hopes of luring the whole party to that location while the other of them goes for the paperwork. Credence and Cryde will avoid direct combat if possible, and in the event that they become cornered or are forced to retreat, they will flee using magical assistance (*fly*, *dimension door*, or *invisibility* are good options). Don't forget that Kairo has a calligraphy wyrm familiar, named Callisto, who is very cute and might also try to distract or mislead the party.

It is up to you whether the party's efforts are sufficient for success. If either Credence or Cryde reaches an office and has a space of about ten minutes therein, they will find the aforementioned sensitive documents. If the PCs disrupt their plans and catch them in the act, forcing them to flee, Mayor Oseph will realize their goals and will take precautionary steps, making it impossible in the future for C&C to discover any potentially-compromising documents.

The Loading Flume Fire

As part of their goal of sabotaging the lumber companies of Otari, Credence and Cryde have set their sights on one of the town's most prominent features: the loading flume. It would be very costly for Oseph Menhemes to replace if something were to happen to it, and in the meantime normal shipping of lumber would be slowed. If the loading flume were to suffer an unfortunate

accident, the Kortos Consortium could step in and offer a predatory loan, or even rebuild the flume out of their own enormous pocket in exchange for controlling stock options in Otari Lumber.

This one starts with Wrin and Klorte Hengus. The two have an unlikely friendship, and Klorte has always been the type who wants to get his fortune told. This time, Wrin foresaw a terrible disaster in his future – the log flume all aflame! Concerned by this possibility, Klorte went to inspect the flume...and he noticed odd symbols scratched like graffiti onto some of the main support posts. After asking around, Klorte also heard from locals that someone had recently been seen lurking about the flume at night. When Klorte returned the next day, he found even more strange symbols, as well as odd papers pinned to the ground with nails, which disintegrated when he tried to move them. Fearful of the involvement of ghosts or the supernatural, Klorte returns to Wrin to ask for advice, who in turn directs him to the PCs.

The truth is that Credence and Cryde have been preparing a magical ritual that will turn the loading flume into a mass of crumbling ash. The ancient and well-treated logs of the flume would be rather difficult to light with a normal fire, unless that fire were large indeed, and even then only a section of the flume might fully burn. C&C are aiming for something a little more dramatic and complete. They intend to frame this disaster on local outlaws – possibly the Leadbuster Lads, if you're using them – but their planted evidence will be to no avail if the PCs catch them.

It won't be too difficult for the party to creep up on Credence and Cryde in the night as they are preparing to conduct their ritual. The PCs might notice Kairo Cryde throwing her fulus on key points of the structure, then returning to a ritual circle which they have cleared on the rocky ground beneath the flume. Naturally, the party will step in to interrupt the proceedings at some point. Credence and Cryde know that they cannot both conduct the ritual and fight the party; furthermore, security will no doubt be tight around the loading flume after this. So, they activate the partially-completed ritual, and flee! They make sure to flee in such a way that the PCs are able to chase after them, because their plan is to lure the party away from the loading flume long enough for the partially-completed conflagration ritual to do its work.

The players have a choice: attempt to chase Credence and Cryde across town (in which case you should run a short chase sequence), or stay and attempt to stop the spread of the fire on the flume (in which case you should run a skill challenge, as described in the spellbook-heist section of this document). You can discourage them from attempting to split the party and do both by pointing out that half the party is probably not enough to stop the spread of the fire. Unless, of course, you don't mind running a chase and a skill challenge concurrently.

Of course, even if caught in the chase, the freelance accountants prove too slippery to detain for long. If the party chased Credence and Cryde, the loading flume goes up in flames and this counts as a victory for the Kortos Consortium even if the party succeeded in the chase sequence. At this point, Credence and Cryde might be getting truly annoying by all of the party's interference in their plans. In fact, your players may have already bested them several times before, leading them to suspect they'll have to report this project as a failure to their clients. Even if this is the case, there is one more card they can play...

The Rigged Election

This scenario, which makes a good finale to the Consortium Conspiracy arc, should take place prior to the party's dealings with Urevian. In fact, it is ideal if this scenario comes up just before Urevian makes his offer and requests the soul of a Rajani. The party might be tempted to kill two birds with one stone.

Throughout the business with Credence and Cryde up to this point, the party may have noticed their involvement with Carman Rajani. Indeed, they may be suspicious of this ever since Carman's oddly eloquent mayoral campaign speech. Throughout the adventure thus far, you could also drop hints and clues that Carman's current election campaign is going very well for him. He has been making generous (suspiciously generous) contributions to a number of charities and funds, which has rapidly increased his popularity across wide swaths of the voting populace. He has made several powerful speeches. He has seemingly cleaned up his act, and rumors of his various positive qualities are swirling through the town. With Mayor Oseph busy with a struggling business and distracted with the illness of his daughter, Carman Rajani increasingly seems like a real contender for the upcoming election day. (If Credence and Cryde succeeded in discovering Mayor Oseph's compromising donations to his brother, this will also be detrimental to his campaign.)

Of course, this is all thanks to a lot of behind-the-scenes work from Credence and Cryde. They have laid the groundwork for Carman's victory in the upcoming election, but they aren't going to leave it to chance. They intend to make sure that Carman becomes mayor, and there are plenty of ways that a mayor essentially owned by the Kortos Consortium can pave the way for the Consortium's economic takeover of the town. Imply that Credence and Cryde, being clever and extremely well-versed in legal minutiae, will be able to find all sorts of loopholes and technicalities through which Carman could abuse his power. If you need an example of this, reveal that it is within the mayor's power to make things very difficult for unions, including the lumberjack's union headed by Sasha Thane, which is one of the Consortium's biggest obstacles.

The players may very well have figured all this out already, in which case they may take the initiative on this one. But if they don't, it is Amicia Rajani, Carman's daughter, who comes to them with her concerns. By this point, the PCs have dealt with her already, and she probably trusts them. She knows that her father has been meeting frequently with those shady accountants, and she suspects what they are doing with the election. Amicia doesn't believe her father will be a good mayor, and more importantly, she doesn't believe that her father will be happy as mayor. She thinks he's just trying to prove himself. (This is true, but not the whole story. Carman is motivated by his pride, but also by a desire to be someone that his daughter can look up to, someone she can rely on. There are possibilities here for dramatic, heartfelt character development.)

Credence and Cryde have a simple plan: rig the election votes to make sure Carman Rajani wins. Election day is a holiday, and every eligible person who wants to vote simply drops by the Otari

Garrison, and casts a ballot under the watchful eye of Lardus Longsaddle. Traditionally, the voting ends at sundown, but technically it lasts until midnight, and Longsaddle is a stickler for technicalities. Therefore the garrison is open, but mostly empty, from dusk till midnight. The paper ballots are all kept in a locked wooden box, and Lardus, along with a few of the senior garrison officers, count the votes in the morning, tally them up, and announce the results. Otari is a small enough town that this is all a fairly casual operation. They usually get fewer than a thousand votes.

Credence and Cryde intend to infiltrate the garrison at night and verify that Carman won the election. If he did not, they will alter an appropriate number of the ballots. The party, of course, can try to prevent this, and possibly succeed.

But the twist is that meddling with the ballots was not necessary for Credence and Cryde. Their campaign assistance (and simple bribery) was effective, and Carman Rajani really did win, though by a slim margin. The PCs would have to investigate the ballots to determine this, and might opt to meddle with the results themselves! If they don't, Carman Rajani will be announced as the next mayor of Otari, much to the consternation of Captain Longsaddle.

This counts as a big win for the Kortos Consortium, and heralds troubling times for Otari, since even on his first day Carman may show worrying signs of letting the position of mayor get to his head. Because of this, the PCs might be more willing to consider Urevian's offer. Alternatively, Carman might be brought to his senses by the combined efforts of the party and his daughter. How all of this plays out is up to you.

Concluding the Consortium Conspiracy

If you plan on doing a simple best-of-five for this arc, you must make it very clear when the party has either won or lost, both in the individual scenarios and for the whole thing. Win or lose, Credence and Cryde should leave town. Win or lose, Credence and Cryde have come to harbor professional respect for the party's skills and tenacity. They have no hard feelings, even if the party has thwarted them at every turn. Whatever the outcome, they will give the players some business cards, in the hope that the players know who to call if they ever find themselves in need of 'freelance accountants.'

It is also possible that Credence and Cryde can assist the party in dealing with devils on the seventh floor of the vaults – or vice versa! The devils and the freelance accountants are a match for each other when it comes to writing and deciphering complicated contracts. Either will be happy to analyze any contracts provided by the other – for a fee, of course. They will both automatically succeed at finding all the hidden clauses and fine print.

What about rewards? Most side quests mentioned in this document offer substantial rewards in the form of loot and treasure, but Credence and Cryde are not intended to be looted, or even faced directly in combat. I suggest that you hand out some narrative rewards for a party's success in the Consortium Conspiracy. What this looks like will vary from game to game, but a narrative reward is something in-game that furthers the goals of the heroes, even side-projects that have

nothing to do with Belcorra or the vaults. Maybe one of them wants to open their own shop someday. Maybe one of them is looking for romance. Whatever it is, you can have events play out in their favor as a result of 'saving' the town from the schemes of the Kortos Consortium. This often means a lot more to your players than a pile of gold.

Credence and Cryde stats

These are a rough sketch of the stats I used for Credence and Cryde. You might adjust them as necessary for your game. I don't go deep into their gear or combat stats here, as these enemies are not intended to be fought directly, much less looted. As mentioned above, they should be played with the assumption that they have the foresight and equipment necessary to avoid a deadly combat engagement in any scenario.

Keppler Credence (Investigator 8)

Perception: +18

Languages: many

Skills: Acrobatics +15, Deception +15, Diplomacy +13, Intimidation +15, Stealth +15, Thievery +15, Society +18, Legal Lore +18

Str: +1 Dex: +3 Con: +0 Int: +4 Wis: +2 Cha: +3

AC: 25 Fort: +12 Ref: +15 Will: +14

HP: 70

Speed: 25

Melee: +1 striking exquisite sword cane +16, 2d6+3 damage (+2d6 with strategic strike)

Kairo Cryde (Wizard 8)

Perception: +12

Languages: many

Skills: Acrobatics +12, Arcana +18, Deception +14, Stealth +14, Thievery +12, Accounting Lore +18

Str: +0 Dex: +2 Con: +3 Int: +4 Wis: +2 Cha: +2

AC: 24 Fort: +13 Ref: +14 Will: +14

HP: 82

Speed: 20

Special: calligraphy wyrm familiar.

Suggested spell fulus that Cryde has at the ready (possibly in duplicate, for herself and Credence):

1st: *alarm, charm, feather fall, fleet step, illusory disguise, jump, pest form, pocket library*

2nd: *comprehend languages, darkness, dispel magic, illusory creature, invisiblity, knock, shrink,*

3rd: *clairaudience, glyph of warding, haste, invisibility sphere, locate, mind reading, secret page, shrink item, lightning bolt*

4th: *clairvoyance, creation, dimension door, fly, freedom of movement, veil, chromatic ray, wall of fire*

Integrating the Beginner Box and Troubles in Otari

The Menace Under Otari, the short adventure from the Beginner Box, makes a great introduction to The Abomination Vaults, but it was not written with the vaults in mind. How to tie the two together? Here is how I did it. I made these changes in accordance with my expansion and rework of the Roseguard lore, as described in that section of this document.

Here is the set-up: the party receives Tamily's missing-fish quest only a week or two before the upcoming Founder's Day Festival, the biggest yearly event in Otari. This adds urgency to the quest: they have a time limit, because Tamily has an upcoming shipment of fish she needs to store. The garrison can't help with her problem because they're busy patrolling the roads, which have been plagued by highwaymen of late. As the party goes about town, make it clear that everyone is preparing for the big upcoming festival.

Throughout The Menace Under Otari, make sure that the players have many reasons and opportunities to meet important NPCs in town before the festival. For example: they might take a strange magic item to the wizard; they might realize that Vandy will have something to say about the undead; they might consult Wryn on strange things they find, and so forth. This will be easier if one or more PCs is from Otari, as they will already possess in-game knowledge about helpful NPCs.

Wrin Sivinx has gathered the party – this is premise for The Abomination Vaults. It doesn't need to be the case if you're starting with Menace, but you can still build up to Wrin's involvement and Gauntlight. She may drop ominous hints about her troubling visions and disturbing dreams. At the Festival she will ask the party to investigate the Gauntlight, but you can begin laying the groundwork from the first interaction with her.

Other narrative seeds you can begin planting include:

- The Osprey Club members who went treasure-hunting in the Fogfen have not returned. If any PCs have a connection to Yinyasmera, she will express concern.
- The PCs should meet Dorianna if they go to speak with Oseph Menhemes. You could drop early hints regarding her emerging psychic powers, and the fact that she's been having nightmares/not sleeping well recently.
- Brelde Venkervale is distraught over her missing son. As described in the NPC section of this document, I prefer to have Lasda's disappearance be a more recent event, only a few months ago.
- Keelo Lathenar believes that Jaul Mezmin, werewolf murderer, is still at large. As described in the NPC section of this document, I think it works better if the murder happened only a few years ago, rather than decades. Most people think Jaul is long gone, but not Keelo Lathenar, who burns with vengeance.

First Floor

The biggest change on the first floor is the crypt (area 5). It contains the long-forgotten tomb of Aesephana Menhemes! This does not alter any of the mechanics of the undead fight, or the loot found in the area. The stone coffin in the center of area 5 bears the inscription: “Here lies Aesephana Menhemes, the Huntress. May she rest in peace.” Or something similar. The tomb cannot be opened, as it is magically sealed. There is an obvious indentation where some kind of key object must be placed to unlock the tomb. A player native to Otari might recognize it’s shape as that of Aesephana’s holy symbol, which is owned by mayor Menhemes. He occasionally wears it to important events, including the upcoming Founder’s Day Festival. The mayor is passionate about the town’s history and proud of his own lineage as Aesephana’s descendant; he will be overjoyed to learn of the existence of this tomb.

But there is something wrong here. This crypt is filled with a dark aura, which will be immediately obvious to any cleric, psychic, or similar sensitive type in the party. In fact, anything that dies in this area becomes undead – a point which you can drive home by describing undead snakes, spiders, and other cave creatures crawling aimlessly around the floor of this area. The dark aura is coming from Aesephana’s tomb. You might suggest that the players consult the local cleric about this. Vandy Banderdash, an enemy of all undead, will come to the tomb straight away once she is informed. She will effectively cordon off the area and attempt to purify the tomb. She will fail. Aesephana’s tomb must be opened, and whatever dark entity is inside dealt with, before the area can be purified. However, this encounter is far beyond the abilities of a first-level party. Vandy is sure to warn the party about this, and in any case, they won’t be able to deal with the tomb until they get the key. The tomb encounter is described in the section of this document dealing with the Roseguard artifacts.

Since we have put Aesephana’s tomb on this level, change the coin puzzle to be Erastil-themed rather than Abadar-themed. Since ‘trade’ is one of Erastil’s themes, there is no need to alter the coin puzzle itself. I made the treasure room contain a shrine to Erastil, which gives *true strike* as a once-in-the-next-hour ability if an appropriate offering is made.

Second Floor

Area 15 on the second level should lead into the third level of the vaults, as recommended in the first book of the adventure path. Replace the xulgaths in this area with a grothlut. This will foreshadow the fleshwarping later on in the vaults, and might cause the PCs to start asking questions that will be relevant later. If the PCs explore the long passage to the third level of the vaults, they will encounter the gibbering moulder and may even unwisely attempt to fight it. Feel free to suggest that they shelve this mystery for now, especially as it clearly has nothing to do with their current fish-theft quest.

Area 14 is sealed by a magical door of dark stone. The door is covered in hundreds of tiny sigils depicting all sorts of objects: a sword, a crown, a key, a tree, a cloud, and so on. These sigils light up with a soft blue glow when touched, but when four have been thus activated, they wink out. Four blocks of runic dwarven text are inscribed into the door. These are riddles, and if the four sigils representing the answers are touched, the door will open.

Here are the riddles:

No legs have I to dance
No lungs have I to breathe
No life have I to live or die
And yet I do all three.

I sing with no song
I cut with no knife
I fly without rest
I die without life

Three lives have I:
Gentle enough to soothe the skin
Light enough to ride the wind
Hard enough to break the stone

I watch the birth and death of kings
I last beyond all living things
I touch the land; I know the sky
Yet even I will someday die

The answers are fire, wind, water, and a mountain. When these sigils are touched, the PCs can access area 14. Two of my players had special connections to elementals, so I made this more of a social encounter than a combat encounter. When the fire elemental emerges, it is not immediately aggressive, and the players may try to communicate with it – an attempt unlikely to succeed unless they speak Ignan. Nevertheless, the fire elemental may give the party a vision of the past: a dwarven wizard with a large stone-bound tome, standing in this room as he binds the four elementals.

This, of course, is Zarmavdian's room. The floor is inscribed with mysterious arcane symbols and runes. It is obvious that this is some kind of ritual chamber, but it is not obvious what it was for. Morlibint will be very interested to hear about this place. He will also be able to help with the riddles, if the players get stuck. If the party requires a dwarven interpreter, this is a great opportunity to introduce Brelde Venkervale.

In the kobolds' living quarters, area 17, I included a non-aggressive kobold defending a clutch of eggs, which the party will find after cleaning up the rest. This kobold can provide all the usual information as described in the adventure, but she will also provide a tough choice: will the party allow this kobold to flee with her eggs?

There is a bit of extra lore that the party might learn as well. When the kobold tribe acquired the dragon egg (which they bought from a traveling goblin merchant that the party will meet later), they had two leaders: Kolgan and Zolgran. These two were siblings, and both were mages. However, they disagreed about raising the dragon to destroy Otari. Kolgan not only thought this plan risky and unlikely to succeed, but he was less hostile towards the townsfolk of Otari.

Kolgan was curious about the surface dwellers, and he had dreams of establishing friendly relations and even trade with the people of Otari. This disagreement turned bitter, and ultimately it resulted in a magical duel. This duel occurred just a few weeks ago, and it resulted in the burning and collapse of one of the surface dwellers' buildings. This, of course, was the Thirsty Alpaca. Zolgran emerged victorious, but the fate of Kolgan is unknown. Kolgan is now called Fiver. He is the kobold currently hiding in the ruins of the Thirsty Alpaca, who has been befriended in secret by Wrin, as described in the NPCs section of this document. He will later be grieved to learn of the consequences of his sister's actions for his tribe, but he still harbors idealistic dreams of kobolds and soft-skins living in harmony together. If the party showed mercy and allowed some of the kobolds to escape, this dream might eventually become a reality.

For the 'treasure map' that the party finds after defeating Zolgran, use the first letter of Dr. Zacchaeus Quagmire III, found later on in this document. This letter found its way here from the vaults, and is the beginning of a linear treasure-hunt sidequest down through the layers of the vaults. The party will likely not understand its significance until later.

Finally, make sure to describe the wyrmling as having some kind of distinctive marking or feature, such as vivid blue stripes down one side. Why? Because when the party finds the dragon in the 9th level of the vaults, it will have the same distinctive markings! Yes, Ravirex is this dragon's father/mother (whichever).

When the party finishes this adventure, they probably have a few days to a week before the festival. If they need something to do, they could receive Tamily's fishing camp sidequest. Otherwise, introduce the downtime mechanics. On to the festival!

Troubles in Otari

The short adventure Troubles in Otari consists of a number of quests for characters level 2, 3, and 4. It is intended to be a possible continuation of The Menace Under Otari, but it can also be a good source of extra material for the Abomination Vaults. However, you probably don't want to just run the entire Troubles in Otari before starting the vaults, as the party will end up way over-leveled. Running it concurrently is an option, but if you are using XP leveling it will eventually have a similar effect, skewing the balance of the game by giving your players a couple of extra levels.

In my game, I chopped up the quests from Troubles in Otari, simplified them, and used them as optional side-quests to be offered to the players at certain levels. The key is in simplifying the quests. They should appear to the players as short but rewarding interludes between big dives into the vaults. I would suggest that no single quest from Troubles in Otari should last more than a session. It is entirely up to you how to modify the quests, but here's how I did it.

For the fishing camp quest, which functions as Tamily's side quest, I simply removed a lot of the less interesting monsters such as the rats, and also the random boar/crocodile encounters. The oozes are good because the party will face oozes later. I recommend switching out the giant

centipedes for a centipede swarm, as that will teach the party about fighting swarms (useful for when they met Volluk). Keep the web lurker as a sort of ‘big boss’ for the area.

Oloro Gallentine’s side quest is the missing courier from chapter 2 of Troubles. The basilisk encounter is all that is really necessary here, but you can add in the kobolds if you like. For an interesting twist, have petrified kobolds in the area as well, along with *two* basilisks, and have the kobolds join forces with the party to defeat them. The party might need to make some choices about who to un-petrify with the basilisk blood, with Narala also being an option.

Magiloy’s side quest is the ‘Magiloy’s mushrooms’ bit from chapter 2. This is a simple three-room dungeon. It’s full of undead, and there is already plenty of that in the vaults, so you might shorten it a bit, focus more on traps than enemies, or even bring in some of the enemies from chapter 3 of Troubles.

Klorte’s side quest regarding the flume fires is now in connection with Credence and Cryde, not the Leadbuster Lads. See the Kortos Conspiracy section of this document for the details.

The ‘In the Stinkweed’ quest from chapter 2 is now in connection with Jale Highstepper of the Farmer’s Guild. I modified it so that instead of rescuing a herbalist the party is investigating a mysterious blight on the crops. I also made this a higher-level encounter and used regular shamblers rather than stinkweed shamblers. I also involved an arboreal reaper who could be reasoned with.

The Leadbuster Lads are now one single, large quest, which is given to the party by Captain Longsaddle. The Lads do not work for the Kortos Consortium (that’s Credence and Cryde now); instead, they are simply a dangerous group of outlaws and highwaymen. I gave them all different types of firearms for fun. All four of the Leadbuster Lads are together in Maunder Castle, but a clever party might be able to split them and deal with them separately. If the party faces all four Leadbuster Lads together, it will be a difficult encounter.

‘Under the Three-Eyed Gaze,’ chapter 3 of Troubles, is a side quest given to the party by Vandy Banderdash. This is a tricky one because it’s hard to split up, and it’s probably too big to run as-written in the midst of the Abomination Vaults. My solution was to drastically simplify it, leaving only my favorite bits. After all, more dungeon is not what you need if you’re running the Abomination Vaults. So here is what I kept:

- All the puzzles and hazards
- The harpies
- The gargoyles and mimic pranksters
- The final temple encounter

Leveling

If you use XP leveling and put in all these side quests, not to mention the others I’ve included in this document such as the Kortos Conspiracy, you may find that your players are overleveled for

the vaults. Maybe this is fine for your party, especially if you intend to run a low-lethality game, but for most groups you will want to make adjustments. One option is to use the slow-leveling rules. Make sure to talk to your players and decide how to handle this together.

If you use milestone leveling based off of progress through the vaults, you will have to be careful to space out the sidequests so that your players don't end up doing a dozen sessions of side content without leveling up. If you use milestone leveling, you need to ensure that players are motivated to complete side quests. This would be a bigger problem in a system like 5e, but Pathfinder 2e gives plentiful rewards in the form of magic items and gold (which is useful in this system), and this can make the pursuit of side quests feel worthwhile even if they don't directly contribute towards gaining levels. There are also narrative rewards to consider, but those will depend on your players.

Either way, if you begin with the Beginner Box adventure and then move on to the vaults, consider slapping the Elite template on everything in the vaults, thus raising the effective level of the entire adventure by 1. Note that the Elite template is not a perfect leveling conversion; lower-level enemies might end up feeling stronger than intended. Its effects are most potent on single boss monsters, and you might want to add an extra enemy or two rather than use the Elite template on a monster this is already party level +3. This is a more balanced solution, but requires more work. Overall, though, the Elite template should work out all right, especially if your party has five players, or if they are experienced. You might want to avoid upping the level of the vaults and running it as-written, with your players a level ahead, if:

- Your group wants a low-lethality game
- Your group is inexperienced or new to the system
- Your group has three players

Be sure to make this decision with your players.

List of Side Quests

This resource is intended to help you manage side quests throughout the adventure. It does not include any side quests which take place inside the vaults, or which are necessary for the advancement of the plot. These are the extra side quests that you might sprinkle into your game for variety. I have listed them with a suggested level, although many of them can easily be adjusted in terms of difficulty, and I have tried to spread them out so that a party isn't overwhelmed by a ton of front-loaded side quests.

If you are using milestone leveling, you might need to make sure that the side quests give adequate rewards in gold or magic items. This should not be an issue with those taken from the Troubles in Otari adventure, but consider varying kinds of rewards (narrative, monetary, or even minor permanent buffs) for completing other side quests. This list assumes you are using the Kortos Conspiracy scenarios and other material included in this document. Details about these quests can be found there, in the Troubles in Otari section of this document, or in the list of NPCs up at the top.

Level 2

Family Tanderveil: clear out the fishing camp

Magiloy's Mushrooms: the three-room mini-dungeon

Level 3

Oloro Gallentine: investigate the disappearance of Narala

Alymora Inkleholtz: tax fraud problem (Kortos Conspiracy)

Level 4

Vandy Banderdash: the missing priest

Paper Planes and Piracy (Kortos Conspiracy)

Level 5

Lardus Longsaddle: deal with the Leadbuster Lads

Fiver: he thinks he is ready to join the people of Otari

Ichabod Shoakes: intruders in the manor (Kortos Conspiracy)

Level 6

Wrab Chertel: missing lumberjack investigation

Klorte Hengus: the loading flume fire (Kortos Conspiracy)

Level 7

Jale Highstepper: deal with aggressive plants

Amicia Rajani: the rigged election (Kortos Conspiracy)

Level 8

Worliwynn: assist in forest rejuvenation ritual

Wrin Sivinx: tea party for visiting djinn

Level 9

Sasha Thane: framed for murder

Greenspoon: a wandering bard appears...

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