

HEROES OF HIGH FANTASY



CRYPT OF THE CRIMSON KING
JVC PARRY

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INSTRUCTIONS

This adventure module is designed to be played at any level and in any campaign setting. The appendix includes statblocks for all of the monsters and NPCs within this adventure at 'Beginner', 'Intermediate', and 'Advanced' difficulty ratings. Beginner difficulty rating is considered level 1-5, intermediate is 6-10, and advanced is any level 11 or higher. You are free to add more monsters than stated in each section of the encounter to make things more challenging, if needed.

We've also included this beginner / intermediate / advanced difficulty rating mechanic within the adventure itself. Various skill checks will require higher or lower numbers, depending on which difficulty setting you're running. It's presented as follows: Make a **DC 10** (beginner)/**15** (intermediate)/**20** (advanced) **Dexterity check** to unlock the door. This way you can keep the adventure flowing nicely without flipping back and forth to determine the appropriate challenge.

RESOURCES

Beginner pre-generated characters for this adventure can be found at www.nordgamesllc.com. They include: a knowledgeable, but somewhat clumsy, *dwarf rogue* and their *twin*, whose draconic bloodline resulted in their expulsion from their ancestral hall; a *tiefling barbarian*, who was a local warlord but left their clan in search of insight into their extraplanar ancestry; a *dragonborn bard* following tales of adventure, and searching for a missing friend; and a *human warlock* serving a patron who seems interested in the Children of the Crimson King.

Additionally, a digital version of the map in this module can be found at www.nordgamesllc.com. We recommend that you have a full poster-size version if you intend to use the map with miniatures.

OVERVIEW

Crypt of the Crimson King is a short adventure which should fill an average of 2-3 gaming sessions of 3-4 hours.

The adventure begins when a lone monk approaches the party and petitions them for help. He escorts them to an encampment where the rest of his order, the Children of the Crimson King, are staying. The leader of the order, Estabor, reveals that something extraplanar escaped from an artifact in the monastery, forcing the order to flee. The party can have their pick of items from the monastery, if they assist the Children of the Crimson King in clearing out their cenobium.

When the party reaches the monastery, they find that it is riddled with traps and extraplanar dangers. Upon descending into the cenobium (the monastery), they are sealed inside by the monks

under the pretence of stopping anything evil spreading from the place. In reality, the monks are blindly devoted to Estabor, who has been corrupted for decades by the influence of a ghastr calling itself the Crimson King. This ravaging being requires a constant supply of flesh for itself and its growing brood of ghouls. Since the ghastr escaped the artifact in which it was contained, it has been using Estabor and the Children of the Crimson King to send adventuring parties into the monastery to be consumed or turned into new ghouls.

The party must overcome the trapped cenobium and defeat the Crimson King before returning to the encampment to deal with the order of traitorous monks.

INTEGRATING THE ADVENTURE INTO A CAMPAIGN

Crypt of the Crimson King can be played as a one-shot adventure, or as part of a larger campaign. The pre-generated characters all have their own reasons for being nearby at the start of the adventure, though any other adventuring party could also find themselves there. It is designed to easily fit into any game world and could simply begin when the party, traveling overland through a mountain range, meet Omar (the location of the mountains and crypt itself is intentionally kept vague to allow you to integrate it into your setting with minimal work). Some other quest hooks are listed below. They can be used separately, or in any combination.

Hook #1 - The party has heard word of the fall of the monastery from folks in a nearby town and have been asked to investigate. The mayor of the town tells the adventurers that her small town was once saved by the monks when an extraplanar aberration assaulted it. With the monks displaced, they are worried that they would not be able to hold their own, should such an attack happen again.

Hook #2 - The party is travelling through a mountain range when they are approached by Omar, who is searching for someone to assist them. Omar is actually just following the orders of Estabor, who would have the party assimilated into the army of the Crimson King. Omar doesn't fully understand this, and asks the party for help regaining their lost cenobium.

Hook #3 - While travelling across a mountain range, the party discovers a colossal door, engraved with an immense, cosmological map, that hangs ajar. This is the entrance to the cenobium. The natural curiosity of the player characters should tempt them inside but, if not, consider adding a haunting chuckling coming from within. Once they enter, Estabor comes out from hiding nearby and closes the door behind them.

NOTE: Using Hook #3 allows you to skip over a lot of interactions with the Children of the Crimson King, if you are looking for a shorter overall play session.

PART 1: AN ORDER DISPLACED

The adventure begins when a lone monk approaches the party while they are travelling through mountainous territory. They are wizened and hunched, wearing a tattered crimson robe that is threadbare around their sandalled feet.

Read the following when you are ready to begin:

"Hail, fine folks! You appear an adventurous sort. My monastery and I are in desperate need of assistance from those skilled in combat and the arcane. If you are so inclined, I would escort you to our encampment in the hidden valley not far from here."

The party may have questions for the monk, which they can ask while travelling, similar to the following:

Who are you? *"You may call me Omar. I am a member of the Children of the Crimson King, a monastic order dedicated to the preservation of artifacts from other planes of existence."*

Where are the rest of the order? *"The other Children are settled in a temporary encampment, high in the mountains. We were ousted from our home - a grand monastery cut into the highest peak of this range - and are thus forced to weather this harsh environment, with little to protect us."*

What does the monastery contain? *"There are numerous artifacts kept within the walls of our sacred home. Most are of a curious nature, being from other planes of existence. Many require our constant vigilance lest they activate or deteriorate, the consequences of which could be deadly. It is essential that we return to the cenobium, forthwith."*

Who is the leader of your order? *"You may call them Estabor. They are a learned human with great understanding of the planar cycles and grand mysteries which plague our intellects. They can provide you with more information about why we were forced to leave the cenobium."*

The valley the monks have camped down in is disguised by steep outcroppings of rock on all sides, but Omar points out a hidden path, allowing a fairly easy approach.

When the party arrive at the valley, reach the following:

Stretching out before you is a lush valley of pine trees and juniper bushes around a surging stream. Scattered around the fast-flowing water are a half dozen tents. The patchwork constructions don't appear particularly suitable for long-term habitation. Milling around them are roughly twenty humanoids, each wearing a crimson-red robe, signifying their membership to the Children of the Crimson King.

Once the party reaches the encampment, they are led to the nondescript tent in which Estabor resides. Estabor, like their fellows, wears a crimson robe, though it is detailed with an edging of swirling, silver embroidery. The party may have questions for Estabor, similar to the following:

Who are you? *"You may call me Estabor. I guide the Children of the Crimson King along the pathways laid by fate through this planar timeline."*

What happened at the monastery? *"The Children were forced to leave. A dark presence escaped from an improperly conditioned artifact. Why the forces of fate chose to test the Children in this way is not clear to me at this time. When the presence revealed itself unto me, it became clear that the Children must leave."*

Where is the 'presence' now? *"The being continues to reside within the cenobium. Precisely where is not clear to me, but it seems likely that dark things are attracted to the darkness."*

What was the 'presence'? *"I cannot fathom the exact nature of the being, save that it was from a plane corrupted by an insatiable hunger felt by all those who reside there."*

What can we do? *"You must travel to the cenobium and rid that sacred place of the dark presence. The forces of fate have led you here to receive this calling. To ignore it is paramount to self-destruction."*

Party members that succeed on a **DC 15 / 20 / 25 Wisdom (Insight) check** realise that Estabor is holding something back. If pressed with a successful **DC 14 / 16 / 18 Charisma (Intimidation) check**, they reveal the following:

"That presence which lurks within the monastery is a ghast. A desperate, pitiable manifestation of insatiable hunger from a plane darkened by that same base instinct; the need to feed. It escaped from Ribcage, an artifact under my own care. How precisely the ghast emerged is not clear to me at this time."

If the party agree to help the order, Estabor escorts them to the entrance of the Crypt of the Crimson King.

PART 2: THE CRYPT

When the party arrive at the monastery, read the following:

Hidden in the mountains, built into the highest peak of the range, is a colossal stone archway. The engraved doors within display an immense cosmological map, showing the locations of numerous planes of existence relative to the material plane. As Estabor approaches, the doors grind open, moved by some supernatural force. Within is a broad staircase, leading down.

Estabor explains to the following to the party:

"You must delve deep into the mountain to find the entity that forced us to evacuate. The first level of the place is our monastic accommodation and living spaces - in short, the cenobium. Below this is a dwarven crypt which we have deigned to leave unadulterated. Beneath that, a natural cavern in the depths of which I know not what lives.

Once the party descend the stairs beyond sight of Estabor they hear the doors grind shut, plunging them into darkness. Any attempt to call for Estabor to free them fails, as does any attempt to force the doors, thanks to a magical lock. Killing the Crimson King causes this lock to fail, allowing characters to escape. Otherwise, they are trapped.

1. VESTIBULE

This area was used by the monks to greet visitors, and store outdoor gear.

When the party enter, read the following:

Signs of distress are apparent in this chamber. Various items are strewn throughout - robes, half-packed trunks, and sheets of thick canvas.

Items. Party members that search through the mess can find a single, useful item with a value of 5 gp or less with a successful **DC 10 / 12 / 15 Wisdom (Perception) check**. They must name the item they are searching for beforehand, and may not search a second time for any item (be it the same or different). Examples of valid items include a backpack, candle, crowbar, grappling hook, sledge hammer, ladder, piton, shovel, and so forth.

2. LAVATORY

This area was used by the monks as a lavatory.

When the party enter, read the following:

This small chamber serves as a lavatory.

There is nothing of note in this chamber.





3. KITCHEN

This chamber was used to cook meals for the monastic order.

When the party enter, read the following:

The acrid stench in this smoke-filled room burns your nostrils. It is uncomfortably hot within.

Smoke. The smoke is caused by a loaf of bread that was not removed from the still-burning oven when the monks fled. Removing it, and dousing the oven, allows the smoke to finally filter out through a small chimney in the ceiling of the chamber. A Tiny creature can escape the dungeon through this chimney, but the door to the dungeon cannot be opened from without, save with the assistance of a Child of the Crimson King.

4. SLEEPING CHAMBERS

These chambers served as dormitories for the monks.

When the party enter, read the following:

Bunk beds against the far wall provide accommodation for the monks who served in this cenobium. Each also has a small trunk and sparse wardrobe in which to store their possessions.

Items. Most of the chambers contain nothing but worthless possessions that belong to the Children of the Crimson King, such as robes. A party member that takes more than a cursory glance discovers a diary in a trunk that details Estabor's slowly changing behaviour in recent months (Appendix E).

5. MEDITATION CHAMBER

This semi-natural cavern was used as a ceremonial space by the Children of the Crimson King.

When the party enter, read the following:

As you enter, you are surrounded by the sound of bubbling. This semi-natural chamber has been carved in places to accentuate the sound of the natural spring which pours forth in its centre. The echoing sound is extremely peaceful. Encompassing the spring are several stone pews, marked by worn rug pathways. Several of these paths lead up to the walls of the chamber. The spring itself appears not to be fresh water, but an opaque, inky fluid. Hanging from the ceiling above it is a complex orrery.

Side Chamber Puzzle. Party members with a **passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 10 / 12 / 15** or higher can tell that the paths leading to the walls actually lead to doors made of the same stone as the surrounding walls, but that they have been sealed shut for some reason. A party member who succeeds on a **DC 10 / 12 / 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check** can deduce that the doors are linked to the orrery in some way. The same check reveals that the water should be normal, but is masked by an illusion while the orrery is misaligned.

A creature that touches the water, while inky, must succeed on a **DC 12 / 15 / 18 Wisdom saving throw**, or become blinded. The condition can be removed by a spell such as *lesser restoration* or *remove curse*. Once the orrery has been rectified, the water turns clear and any creature that was blinded by it is no longer. Beneath the water's surface is an iron crank, which can be turned to open the doors to the side chambers.

The orrery is misaligned. A character that succeeds on a **DC 15 / 18 / 20 Intelligence (History) check** can recall the correct planar alignment. Otherwise, a character might discover it from scrolls or encyclopaedias in **Estabor's Chamber (Area 8)**, or from the damage relief on the walls of the **Antechamber (Area 7)**.

6. SIDE CHAMBERS

Once the puzzle above has been solved, characters can enter the side chambers.

When the party enter, read the following:

Within this small chamber is a shrine of sorts, a boulder worn smooth by the flow of water and decorated with artworks depicting various planes of existence.

Hole. Beside the altar in the northernmost chamber is a hole, which has been covered by an unlocked trapdoor. Descending the knotted rope anchored to the floor leads to the **Antechamber (Area 10)** below.

Secret Passage. Characters with a **passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 15 / 20 / 25** or higher notice a secret door built into the wall of the central side chamber. Opening it requires a successful **DC 15 / 20 / 25 Intelligence (Investigation) check**. The passage leads to **Estabor's Chamber (Area 8)**.

7. ANTECHAMBER

This chamber separates the common areas of the cenobium from Estabor's own chamber and the gallery which houses dangerous artifacts.

When the party enter, read the following:

Deep gouges in the walls of this chamber mark the passage of some foul being. They cut through what was once a remarkable relief of planar cosmology on the walls, now mostly destroyed. A heap of bones, seemingly picked clean by some creature, is piled in the corner.

Relief. A character that succeeds on a **DC 15 / 18 / 20 Intelligence check** can make out the original design of the relief, giving them the opportunity to solve the puzzle in the **Meditation Chamber (Area 5)**.

Bones. A successful **DC 10 / 12 / 15 Wisdom (Medicine) check** reveals that the bones are humanoid, and have been scratched by claws and teeth that could also be humanoid. All flesh has been removed, and even the marrow has been sucked out.

8. ESTABOR'S CHAMBER

This chamber was Estabor's dormitory and study. It was destroyed by the Crimson King when he emerged from Ribcage.

When the party enter, read the following:

Little remains intact in this chamber. A solitary bed has been broken asunder, the fur and feather-filled blankets that once adorned it torn and scattered across the room. Deep claw marks line the walls, ceiling, and floor - clear signs of a struggle within.

Secret Passage. Party members with a **passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 15 / 20 / 25** or higher notice a secret door built into the wall of this chamber. Opening it requires a successful **DC 15 / 20 / 25 Intelligence (Investigation) check**. The passage leads to the central **Side Chamber (Area 6)**.

Treasure

Scattered throughout the mess of the chamber are a few valuable belongings including an encyclopaedia of the planes (50 gp, and solution to the puzzle in the **Meditation Chamber (Area 5)**), an *amulet of proof against detection and location*, and a bronze crown etched with planar motifs (250 gp), and a key to the **Gallery (area 9)**.

9. GALLERY

The doors closest to this area are locked. The key can be found in **Estabor's Chamber (Area 8)**. Otherwise, the door can be picked with a successful **DC 20 / 25 / 30 Dexterity check** using **thieves' tools**, or a successful **DC 20 / 25 / 30 Strength check**. The area is used to store dangerous artifacts.

When the party enter, read the following:

Positioned throughout this chamber on small plinths and stands are strange items. Each is exquisitely designed, and entirely unique in its construction. Some are made of curious materials, others take a form which you would previously have thought impossible. Although they are disparate in their designs, each is clearly powerful. Every artifact in the chamber is stored behind thick glass that is etched with sigils and wards.

Artifacts. The artifacts stored here are not detailed in the adventure. Each is protected in such a way that prevents the characters from removing them, save for one, the glass surrounding which has been broken.

The broken case contains a *bowl of commanding water elementals* that is cursed. A creature must attune to the item to use it; doing so extends the curse to the creature. A creature cursed in this way can breathe air and water, but must be fully submerged in water at least once every 4 hours to avoid suffocating. Furthermore, when the bowl is used to summon a water elemental, the summoning creature must make a **contested Charisma check** with the elemental that appears. If the creature wins, they maintain control over the elemental, if the elemental wins, it attacks the creature until one or other is destroyed.

One of the glass cabinets is empty - it once contained Ribcage.



PART 3: THE DEPTHS

Descending through the hole in the northernmost **Side Chamber (Area 6)** permits access to the lower levels of the dungeon.

10. ANTECHAMBER

This chamber is trapped to deter any intruders. It features a falling staircase and false sarcophagi.

Descending the knotted rope leads characters to a circular antechamber. When the party do so, read the following:

At the end of the rope is a circular chamber. Torches line the walls in sconces, though they are unlit. Between these are statues of dwarven royals, each holding a decorated battlehammer. In the centre of the chamber, atop an octagonal plinth, is a sarcophagus which, presumably, belongs to another dwarven noble.

Torches. There are five mundane torches on the walls that can be lit or taken. Lighting the torches on either side of the northern statue while all other torches are unlit causes the secret door behind it to be outlined by magic red light (see below).

Statues. There are five statues on the walls. A successful **DC 16 / 18 / 20 Wisdom (Perception) check** reveals that behind the northern statue is a secret door. If the sarcophagus trap has activated, the statue is jostled, giving advantage on the check to discover the door. Once discovered, the door can be opened easily.

Sarcophagus. The sarcophagus is fake and trapped (see below).

SARCOPHAGUS STAIR

Mechanical trap (moderate, block)

Trigger. A creature that lifts the lid of the sarcophagus triggers the trap.

Effect. The ground around the edge of the plinth on which the sarcophagus stands drops down to form a spiral stair. Each creature standing on the floor (not the plinth) must make a **DC 12 / 15 / 17 Dexterity saving throw**. On a successful save, the creature jumps onto the plinth before they fall. On a failed save, they fall down with the floor. Creatures take different amounts of damage depending on where they stand relative to the plinth, as the spiral stair leads up clockwise from east to north.

East: **22 (4d10) bludgeoning damage** from a 40 foot drop.

South: **16 (3d10) bludgeoning damage** from a 30 foot drop.

West: **11 (2d10) bludgeoning damage** from a 20 foot drop.

North: **5 (1d10) bludgeoning damage** from a 10 foot drop.

Countermeasures. A successful **DC 12 / 15 / 17 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation) check** reveals that the sarcophagus is false, and part of the trap. Once the floor has dropped, a creature can simply walk up to the plinth via the stairs. The trap resets after an hour.

11. HIDDEN CORRIDOR

Beyond the secret door in the **Antechamber (Area 10)** is a long, trapped, corridor.

When the party enter, read the following:

Ahead of you is a long, empty corridor marked by five archways. The final archway is blocked by a stone slab, which has clearly descended from the ceiling. Crushed beneath it is the skeleton of a dwarven warrior, clad in rusted armour.

Corpse. The dwarven corpse at the end of the corridor wears a backpack which contains a gemstone worth **50 / 100 / 250 gp**, a crowbar, and a silvered handaxe.

Archways. Each of the archways is trapped (see below), though the last one has already been triggered.

SEPARATING SLABS

Mechanical trap (moderate, block)

Trigger. Beneath each archway is a pressure plate spanning the width of the corridor. Stepping on one of these plates triggers the slab in the associated archway.

Effect. A 1-inch wide stone slab drops down across the archway. Creatures beneath a slab must make a **DC 12 / 15 / 17 Dexterity saving throw**. On a failed save, the creature takes **5 (1d10) / 11 (2d10) / 22 (4d10) bludgeoning damage**. If the save fails by 5 or more, the creature takes **double damage** and is trapped beneath the slab. While trapped in this way, the creature is restrained and takes **5 (1d10) / 11 (2d10) / 22 (4d10) bludgeoning damage** at the start of each of its turns. On a successful save, the creature dodges the slab and can choose which side of the slab they wish to be on.

A creature within 10 feet of the archway, when the trap is triggered, can use their reaction to make a **DC 12 / 15 / 17 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check**. On a success, the creature can choose to slide beneath the slab.

Countermeasures. A creature can spot the pressure plates with a successful **DC 12 / 15 / 17 Wisdom (Perception) check**. The plates can be jumped, or dived, over with a successful **DC 12 / 15 / 17 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check**. The plates can also be deactivated with a successful **DC 12 / 15 / 17 Dexterity check** using **thieves' tools**.

Once triggered, the slabs remain where they are. Lifting them up to reset the trap, or free a trapped creature, requires a successful **DC 12 / 15 / 17 Strength check**, made with advantage if a tool, such as a crowbar, is used. Each 5-foot-square of slab has **AC 17; 20 hit points; immunity to poison and psychic damage**.



12. HALL OF KINGS

This area is a dwarven crypt that has been corrupted by the Crimson King. It is trapped to deter grave robbers.

When the party enter, read the following:

Beyond the trapped corridor is a second circular chamber. This area has numerous side-chambers, separated by archways. Within each of these is a sarcophagus.

Creatures. Each of the six sarcophagi contains the semi-preserved corpse of a dwarven noble, corrupted by the influence of the Crimson King, to become **six crypt ghouls**. Touching any of the sarcophagi with bare flesh causes the ghouls to emerge and attack. The ghouls understand the working of the trap (see below) and are sure to move back to their sarcophagi alcoves, if able.

Sarcophagi. Sarcophagus lids can be moved without using an action, though only one per creature per turn. Moving more than one lid in a turn requires an action. Each sarcophagus contains treasure worth 100 / 250 / 500 gp.

Characters with a **passive Wisdom (Perception)** of 10 / 12 / 14 or higher notice the sarcophagus in the eastern alcove covers a circular hole in the floor. Moving the sarcophagus requires a successful **DC 15 / 20 / 25 Strength (Athletics)** check. A creature that fails to move the sarcophagus can turn their failure into a success by taking 1 / 2 / 3 levels of exhaustion. Beneath is a circular hole leading to the **Tipping Floor (Area 13)**. The drop is 30 feet.

Ceiling. The ceiling is trapped (see below).

DESCENDING CEILING

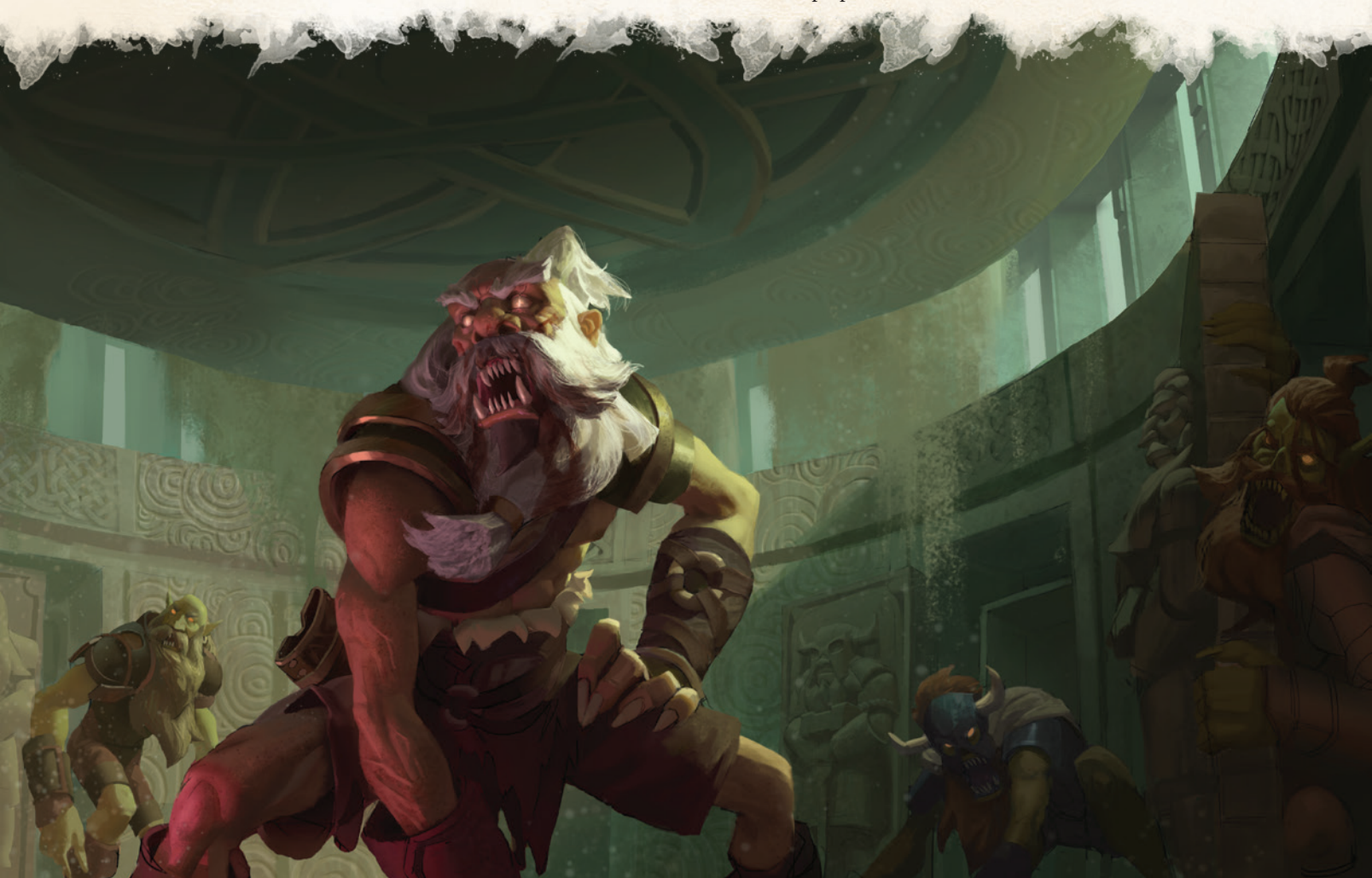
Mechanical trap (dangerous, harm)

Trigger. Opening a sarcophagus triggers the trap. The ghouls trigger this trap when they open the sarcophagi.

Effect. The ceiling descends 2 / 5 / 10 feet on each initiative 10 until it touches the floor. The ceiling begins at a height of 30 feet. This trap only applies to the central circle of the area; creatures in the alcoves are unaffected. When the ceiling is lower than a creature's height, that creature must squeeze (see sidebar). If the ceiling is lower than half a creature's height, that creature must drop prone.

A creature between the ceiling and floor when they meet has two options. If the creature is within 10 feet of an alcove, they must make a **DC 15 / 17 / 20 Dexterity saving throw**. On a failed save, the creature is crushed (see below). On a successful save, they take **half the damage** they would from being crushed (see below,) but none of the other effects, and dive into the nearby alcove. If a creature is more than 10 feet from an alcove, they must make a **DC 15 / 17 / 20 Strength saving throw**. On a failed save, the creature is crushed (see below). On a successful save, they take **half the damage** they would from being crushed (see below), but none of the other effects. Instead, the creature drops prone and must repeat the saving throw at the end of its turn, if it ends its turn between the ceiling and floor.

A crushed creature takes **16 (3d10) / 33 (6d10) / 49 (6d10) bludgeoning damage**, falls prone, and is restrained. A creature takes **16 (3d10) / 33 (6d10) / 49 (6d10) bludgeoning damage** at the start of each of its turns. A creature killed in this manner is crushed to a pulp.



Countermeasures. A successful **DC 15 / 17 / 20 Wisdom (Perception) check** allows a party member to notice scuff marks on the walls, indicating that the ceiling descends. Hammering at least four pitons, or similar objects, into the walls stops the ceiling descending past that height. Hammering each piton takes an action. Similarly, two metal poles, or similar objects, prevent the ceiling from descending if they are braced against the floor. Bracing a pole takes an action. A party member can take the weight of the ceiling, as an action, by attempting a **DC 15 / 17 / 20 Strength (Athletics) check**. On a success, the ceiling doesn't descend on the following initiative 10. Alternatively, a party member that succeeds on a **DC 15 / 17 / 20 Wisdom (Perception) check** discovers a panel in the western alcove wall that can be slid aside. Beneath this is a complex trap mechanism, which can be understood with a successful **DC 15 / 17 / 20 Intelligence (Investigation) check**. A subsequent successful **DC 15 / 17 / 20 Dexterity check** using **thieves' tools** allows the trap to be manipulated as the party member wishes.

Once the ceiling has fully descended, it remains in position for 1 minute. After this time, it rises back to a height of 30 feet at the same rate it descended. A creature can attempt to cause the ceiling to rise earlier by deactivating it using the control panel (see above).

SQUEEZING INTO A SMALLER SPACE

A creature can squeeze through a space that is large enough for a creature one size smaller than it. Thus, a Large creature can squeeze through a passage that's only 5 feet wide. While squeezing through a space, a creature must spend 1 extra foot of movement for every foot it moves there, and it has disadvantage on attack rolls and Dexterity saving throws. Attack rolls against the creature have advantage while it's in the smaller space.

13. TIPPING FLOOR

This trapped corridor was designed by the dwarves to kill intruders attempting to get into the sacred cavern below.

When the party enter, read the following:

The platform at the close end of this chamber is made of hewn stone but, after a few strides, the stone floor is replaced by polished metal. Beyond the metal floor is another stone platform, though this one looks natural rather than cut. Another hole here leads down to the levels below.

Metal Floor. The metallic floor is hinged in the middle (the central line 20 feet from either end) and unsupported elsewhere, meaning it tips like a seesaw when unequal weight is placed upon it. Creatures can attempt to move across the floor, but run the risk of tipping the floor if they're not careful. Determine which way the floor tips by following these steps and referencing the diagram below:

+8	+4	+2	+1	+1	+2	+4	+8
+8	+4	+2	+1	+1	+2	+4	+8

- Everyone rolls initiative. The trap always acts last.
- Everyone is allowed a turn as normal to move and take an action. When moving, the entirety of the metal floor is always considered difficult terrain.
- Values are totaled for each side of the central hinge. Each "lane" of space to the right or left of the hinge has a value for each 5 feet of distance from the hinge (+1, +2, +4, +8). A creature generates that value for each space they occupy, for whatever side of the hinge they're on. This means a large creature adds +6 to the side they are on if they are stood adjacent to the hinge (2 spaces in the +1 lane, 2 spaces in the +2 lane).
- Total the amount for the left and right sides independently.
- The room tips in the direction of the side with the greatest total value.
- Subtract the lower total from the higher total, then add 0 / 2 / 4. Each creature must make a **Dexterity saving throw, the DC equals the generated number**. A creature that fails the save falls prone and slides 30 feet down the tipped floor. If this would cause a creature to fall off the floor, they must **make another Dexterity saving throw (same DC)**. On a success, they grasp the edge of the floor and hold on. On a failure, the creature falls 60 feet into **The Chasm (Area 14)** and takes **21 (6d6) bludgeoning damage**.
- Once tilted, the lane values of the higher side are reduced to +0, +1, +2, and +4 respectively. This represents the difficulty of fighting gravity and reducing the incline. You may skip this change to simplify the trap, if desired.
- Repeat the steps, as necessary.

Characters with a **passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 15 / 17 / 20** or higher notice that the floor is not exactly level, suggesting it is trapped in some way. A subsequent successful **DC 15 / 17 / 20 Intelligence (Investigation) check** reveals the mechanism of the trap, and exactly how it operates (explain the bullet points above to the successful party member).

Methods to prevent the floor tipping, such as hammering in pitons, disabling the hinge, or jumping across the metal floor, should be permitted, when reasonable.

Hole. On the far side of the metal floor is a natural alcove with a hole in the floor. This hole leads 60 feet down to **The Chasm (Area 14)**. There is no attached rope or chain, so the party members must find their own way to descend.

14. THE CHASM

This natural chamber was sacred to the dwarves who once lived here. In recent times, the Crimson King has taken the cave as his own lair.

When the party enter, read the following:

This enormous natural chamber stretches into darkness on either side of you. It is fractured in the centre by an incredible chasm that descends as far as the eye can see, bridged by a narrow, rock bridge. Opposite you, on the far side of the chasm, is a glorious throne of carved gold, inlaid with a dragon's hoard of gemstones, surrounded by moldering corpses. Sat atop is a gaunt creature with waxy skin and deep-set, crimson eyes. Although vaguely humanoid, there is something uncanny about the arrangement of the creature's limbs that disturbs you. Even at this distance, looking upon its corrupted form is nauseating. To one side of the enthroned creature is a small table sporting a bizarre artifact that looks something like a gyroscopic portal of fused bone.

If the creature notices one or more of the party members, read the following:

Slowly, the creature arises from its throne. It's lower jaw seems to unfold, falling down to it's chest as it emits a hideous, choking screech which could only be mocking laughter.

"Impressive that you've made it this far," the creature splutters, in a death-rattle-mockery of speech. "You will each make a splendid addition to the ranks of my legion. My Children continue to serve me well."

Creatures. Atop the throne is the **Crimson King**, a ghost whose intellect is far superior to others of its kind. The Crimson King has been influencing the order of monks who lived here for decades, slowly warping their beliefs to further their own machinations on the material plane. Recently, the Crimson King corrupted Estabor to such an extent that they would do anything the King desired, including releasing him from his artifact prison. Now freed, the King is amassing a legion of ghouls with which to attack the material plane.

Tactics. The Crimson King is confident in his own abilities, but would rather see the party mauled by his legion of ghouls than kill them himself. On his first turn in combat, he uses an action to awake the corpses around his throne as **six ghouls**.

On his second turn, he walks from his throne to the artifact at its side and activates the artifact. This causes crimson light to pour forth from the artifact in a 10-foot radius, and also from the bottom of the chasm. A successful **DC 15 / 17 / 20 Intelligence (Arcana) check** reveals that the artifact will open a portal to another plane of existence at the bottom of the chasm in 6 / 5 / 3 turns (see below).

On subsequent turns, the Crimson King uses abilities that control the behaviour of others (such as *command* or *dominate person*) to try and stop the party crossing the chasm successfully.

Artifact. The artifact by the throne is *Ribcage*. *Ribcage* can serve as an extraplanar prison, and also open portals to the home plane of ghouls and ghosts (see Appendix D). Currently, the Crimson King is in control of the artifact. To wrest control of the artifact, a party member can make a **Charisma check** as an action, contested by the **Crimson King's Charisma check**. If the party member succeeds, they gain control over *Ribcage*.

Ribcage has AC 15; 50 / 100 / 150 hitpoints; immunity to nonmagical damage.

Portal. Once the portal opens (see above), **ghouls** start pouring forth from it, clambering up the chasm walls. The ghouls have a climbing speed of 30 feet, and thus reach the top of the chasm after 3 turns. Once they arrive, there is little that the party can do to stop the tide - make it clear that fleeing is their best option. If the artifact is destroyed, the portal closes.

Bridge and Chasm. The chasm in this chamber is around 140-feet-long and 45-feet-wide. Before the portal is opened, it is 200 feet deep. A creature that falls down, while the portal is closed, takes **70 (20d6) bludgeoning damage**. Once the portal is open, the creature falls straight into the Plane of Ghouls, where foul death awaits. The chasm is bridged by a narrow stone ledge, approximately 10 feet wide. Any creature, without a climb speed, that moves across the ledge must succeed on a **DC 15 / 17 / 20 Dexterity saving throw**, or slip over the edge. A creature that slips over the edge must immediately repeat the Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, they lose their grip and fall into the chasm. On a success, they maintain their grip but take **5 (1d10) / 11 (2d10) / 16 (3d10) bludgeoning damage** from their slip. A creature can avoid making the saving throw by treating the ledge as difficult terrain. A creature that dashes across the ledge makes the initial saving throw with disadvantage.

CONCLUSION

There are several possible outcomes of this adventure, some that are more likely than others:

The party kills or imprisons the Crimson King and escapes the Crypt. The extraplanar entity before you crumbles into ichorous ash and is destroyed. Your valiant efforts to rid the cenobium of the foul presence is a success. Unfortunately, when you return to the encampment of the Children of the Crimson King, you find that the order has dispersed.

The party might decide to seek out the monastic order, Children of the Crimson King. Unfortunately, by the time they return to their encampment the order has dispersed. Perhaps they have travelled on to other lands in search of folks to sacrifice to their twisted patron or, perhaps, they have disbanded now that the Crimson King's material form has been destroyed.

The party kills or imprisons the Crimson King but fails to escape. Work with the players to narrate their characters' final moments as they defeat the king, but fall under the tide of ghouls summoned forth from their home plane. Try to ensure that, despite losing their characters, the players feel they have achieved something epic - the defeat of the Crimson King.

The party is thwarted by the Crypt. One by one, your corpses are animated by a powerful necrotic power, drawn from the plane of insatiable hunger. Driven by a need to feed, your muscles and bones knit together into new, hideous forms, which defy their previous physiology, in a sickening mockery of their existence. Your eyes burn with an unquenchable crimson flare as the ghast responsible for your murder walks toward each of you, blessing each new subject with the touch of a yellowed claw on the tongue. As your animated cadavers join the ranks of the army of ghouls, the scene fades to black.

When the miasma lifts, the ghast, whom you tried so valiantly to defeat, is surrounded by the Children of the Crimson King. The order, clad in their vibrant red robes, paw at the dark being, prostrating themselves before it in a parody of religious worship. The ghast turns to Estabor, and a sickening gurgle erupts from its decaying throat.

"You have served my hunger well once more, pawn, though it is not enough. Continue to scour this plane for corpses. My legion must continue to expand."

The Crimson King claims the bodies of the party for their army of ghouls, and the Children of the Crimson King are visited by their patron, as a reward. The Crimson King demands that the order continue to provide corpses for his ever-expanding legion.

Hook #1 - If the party clears out the monastery, but finds the Children of the Crimson King missing, they might return to the mayor to see if she knows anything more. Given the clues provided from the various diaries and notes within the cenobium, she might put two and two together and determine that Estabor has been corrupted by the malignant ghast overlord. This is a good opportunity for you to continue the adventure, tracking down the order with the hope to purge the malign influence from their ranks.



APPENDIX A: BEGINNER MONSTERS

CRYPT GHOUL

Medium undead, chaotic evil

Armor Class 8

Hit Points 13 (3d8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)	7 (-2)	10 (+0)	6 (-2)

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Common

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature.
Hit: 9 (2d4 + 2) piercing damage.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.
Hit: 7 (2d4 + 2) slashing damage. If the target is a creature other than an elf or undead, it must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or be paralyzed for 1 minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

GHOUL

Medium undead, chaotic evil

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 22 (5d8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)	7 (-2)	10 (+0)	6 (-2)

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Common

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature.
Hit: 4 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.
Hit: 4 (1d4 + 2) slashing damage. If the target is a creature other than an elf or undead, it must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or be stunned until the end of its next turn.

CRIMSON KING

Medium undead, chaotic evil

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)

Hit Points 82 (11d8 + 33)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, poisoned

Skills Arcana +4, Deception +2, Perception +4, Persuasion +2

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages Common

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Innate Spellcasting. The Crimson King's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 12). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *chill touch*, *thaumaturgy*, *vicious mockery*

3/day: *command*

Stench. Any creature that starts its turn within 5 feet of the Crimson King must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned until the start of its next turn. On a successful saving throw, the creature is immune to the Crimson King's Stench for the next 24 hours.

Turning Defiance. The Crimson King and any ghouls within 30 feet of it have advantage on saving throws against effects that would turn undead.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature.
Hit: 11 (2d6 + 4) piercing damage.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.
Hit: 9 (2d4 + 4) slashing damage. If the target is a creature other than an elf or undead, it must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or be paralyzed for 1 minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

APPENDIX B: INTERMEDIATE MONSTERS

CRYPT GHOUL

Medium undead, chaotic evil

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 36 (8d8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	17 (+3)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)	8 (-1)

Damage Resistances necrotic

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Common

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Stench. Any creature that starts its turn within 5 feet of the crypt ghou must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned until the start of its next turn. On a successful saving throw, the creature is immune to the crypt ghou's Stench for the next 24 hours.

Turning Defiance. The crypt ghou and any ghouls within 30 feet of it have advantage on saving throws against effects that would turn undead.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 12 (2d8 + 3) piercing damage.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) slashing damage. If the target is a creature other than an undead, it must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or be paralyzed for 1 minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

GHOUL

Medium undead, chaotic evil

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 22 (5d8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)	7 (-2)	10 (+0)	6 (-2)

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Common

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 9 (2d6 + 2) piercing damage.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (2d4 + 2) slashing damage. If the target is a creature other than an elf or undead, it must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or be paralyzed for 1 minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

CRIMSON KING

Medium undead, chaotic evil

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)

Hit Points 112 (15d8 + 45)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	17 (+3)

Damage Immunities poison

Damage Resistances cold, necrotic; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, poisoned

Skills Arcana +7, Deception +7, Perception +6, Persuasion +7

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 16

Languages Common

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Innate Spellcasting. The Crimson King's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *chill touch*, *thaumaturgy*, *vicious mockery*

3/day each: *command*, *fear*

1/day: dominate person

Stench. Any creature that starts its turn within 5 feet of the Crimson King must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned until the start of its next turn. On a successful saving throw, the creature is immune to the Crimson King's Stench for the next 24 hours.

Turning Defiance. The Crimson King and any ghouls within 30 feet of it have advantage on saving throws against effects that would turn undead.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) piercing damage.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) slashing damage. If the target is a creature other than an elf or undead, it must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or be paralyzed for 1 minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

APPENDIX C: ADVANCED MONSTERS

CRYPT GHOUL

Medium undead, chaotic evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 75 (10d8 + 30)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)	11 (+0)	13 (+1)	8 (-1)

Saving Throws Con +5, Int +0, Wis +3

Damage Resistances necrotic

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages Common

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Keen Smell. The crypt ghouls has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell.

Stench. Any creature that starts its turn within 5 feet of the crypt ghouls must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned until the start of its next turn. On a successful saving throw, the creature is immune to the crypt ghouls's Stench for the next 24 hours.

Turning Defiance. The crypt ghouls and any ghouls within 30 feet of it have advantage on saving throws against effects that would turn undead.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The crypt ghouls makes two attacks: one with its bite, and one with its claws.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature.
Hit: 11 (2d8 + 3) piercing damage.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.
Hit: 10 (2d6 + 3) slashing damage. If the target is a creature other than an undead, it must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or be paralyzed for 1 minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

GHOUL

Medium undead, chaotic evil

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 36 (8d8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	17 (+3)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)	8 (-1)

Damage Resistances necrotic

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Common

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Stench. Any creature that starts its turn within 5 feet of the ghouls must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned until the start of its next turn. On a successful saving throw, the creature is immune to the ghouls's Stench for the next 24 hours.

Turning Defiance. The ghouls and any ghouls within 30 feet of it have advantage on saving throws against effects that would turn undead.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature.
Hit: 12 (2d8 + 3) piercing damage.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.
Hit: 10 (2d6 + 3) slashing damage. If the target is a creature other than an undead, it must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or be paralyzed for 1 minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

CRIMSON KING

Medium undead, chaotic evil

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)

Hit Points 127 (15d10 + 45)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)	19 (+4)

Saving Throws Dex +8, Con +7, Int +7, Wis +8, Cha +8

Damage Immunities poison

Damage Resistances cold, necrotic; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, poisoned

Skills Arcana +7, Deception +8, Perception +8, Persuasion +8

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 18

Languages Common

Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)

Innate Spellcasting. The Crimson King's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 18, +8 to hit with spell attacks). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *chill touch*, *thaumaturgy*, *vicious mockery*

3/day each: *command*, *dominate person*, *fear*

1/day each: *circle of death*, *geas*

Stench. Any creature that starts its turn within 5 feet of the Crimson King must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned until the start of its next turn. On a successful saving throw, the creature is immune to the Crimson King's Stench for the next 24 hours.

Turning Defiance. The Crimson King and any ghouls within 60 feet of it have advantage on saving throws against effects that would turn undead.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Crimson King makes three attacks: one with its bite, and two with its claws.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature.
Hit: 17 (2d12 + 4) piercing damage.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.
Hit: 15 (2d10 + 4) slashing damage. If the target is a creature other than an elf or undead, it must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or be paralyzed for 1 minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

APPENDIX D: NEW ITEMS

This appendix contains information about new magic items presented in the adventure.

RIBCAGE

Wondrous item, artifact

Ribcage is a gyroscopic creation of fused bones and crimson light that swirls and grinds of its own accord. It was forged by ghouls on their home plane of eternal hunger, but made its way to the material plane after the Crimson King became imprisoned within it many centuries ago. Since then it has passed hands numerous times, normally when their owner is so corrupted by the Crimson King within that they commit some atrocious act and are hunted down.

Ribcage doesn't require attunement, but the last creature to use it remains 'in control' of the artifact. In order to wrest control of the artifact from a creature, the seizing creature must succeed on a contested Charisma check with the creature currently in control of Ribcage.

Imprison. You can use an action to cast a version of the *banishment* spell. A creature banished in such a way is imprisoned within Ribcage. The artifact can hold only one creature in this manner. A creature not native to the plane on which the spell is cast does not return to their home plane, but becomes trapped within Ribcage.

Open Portal (1/Day). You can use an action to open or close a portal to the Plane of Eternal Hunger, the home plane of ghouls and ghouls, within 300 feet of Ribcage. The portal functions as if created by the *gate* spell.

APPENDIX E: DOCUMENTS

MONK'S DIARY (SLEEPING CHAMBER (AREA 4))

[...]

Day 314. Estabor continues to work tirelessly upon Ribcage. I cannot be sure as to what their intentions are with this strange artifact. It is the opinion of myself, and of the other Children, that Ribcage should be returned to the gallery.

[...]

Day 326. Estabor continues to act strangely. They have been seen talking to themselves by several of our number, but deny the allegations when pressed. It is becoming ever harder to understand their motives.

[...]

Day 341. Something has changed in Estabor. Were once they appeared calm and sage, they now seem possessed. Driven by something. We can only assume that Ribcage is having some foul effect on them. The other children and I have decided to confront Estabor tomorrow.

Day 342. As expected, Estabor did not take kindly to our suggestions that Ribcage be returned to the gallery. It seems unlikely we'll be able to sway them on this matter. We can only hope that Estabor sees that the forces within the item are corrupting and chooses to return it themself.

[...]

Day 356. Last night I heard screaming from Estabor's chamber. I do not know what they are attempting, but whatever sanguine ritual is taking place here must be stopped. I will confront them one final time before I leave the order.

Day 357. All hail the Crimson King.

Day 358. All hail the Crimson King.

Day 359. All hail the Crimson King.

[...]



CRYPT OF
THE
CRIMSON KING



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Something foul has emerged in the depths of the monastery occupied by the mysterious Children of the Crimson King. Will you discover its source, or be consumed by its unsatiable hunger?

This 2-3 session variable difficulty adventure is designed to be played at any level, and can be easily tailored to fit any fantasy campaign setting.

