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THE FALLEN STAR



AN ADVENTURE FOR CHARACTERS OF 3RD TO 5TH LEVEL



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THE FALLEN STAR IS A FIFTH EDITION adventure for three to six characters for 3rd to 5th level, optimized for a party of four 4th-level characters. Hidden beneath a roadside paddock, a small order of occult academics spent years preparing to summon a fallen celestial—an angel banished to the Ethereal Plane and yearning to be freed. Two weeks ago, however, before their preparations could be completed, the order was interrupted when a roving bandit gang stumbled onto their hidden shrine and butchered their membership. Can the party finish the rite and claim what the entity offers, or will they determine that some stones are better left unturned? This adventure takes place in Cartosia, but can easily be adapted to feature in any campaign setting featuring a hidden shrine beneath a roadside paddock.

BACKGROUND

The legend of the fallen star is told sparingly throughout the world—an uncommon children’s tale in some regions, a theological footnote in others. Across its permutations, the story’s essentials are the same: before history, a celestial was cast down from the heavens and lodged in the Ethereal Plane, where it has wandered ever since. Those who find one of the celestial’s scattered shrines and properly invoke it, the tale promises, may receive gifts of true power, granted in gratitude for any work that might one day see it freed.

What the storytellers do not know, and what the celestial itself may have now forgotten, is that long centuries of exile have done their work to turn the entity into something altogether different—made malevolent and strange. It listens at the shrines, constructed ages ago by adherents since forgotten, in a gentle and graceful manner, offering reward for its freedom, yet to draw it across to the Material Plane and set it loose is to flirt with ruin on the surrounding country.

A decade ago, an antiquarian named Zotastus Vannerin discovered one such shrine concealed beneath a paddock along the roadside. Over time, he gathered a small circle of like-minded scholars and took up residence on the paddock as cover, devoting themselves to translating the shrine’s writings and discovering a rite of summoning. They called themselves the Society of the Threshold, and reached six in number at their height. The youngest among them, an earnest gnome named Ipius Phidyrin, kept the order’s working journals and revered Zotastus’s vision above all else.

The Society’s work was within weeks of completion when a small bandit crew under a captain named Carlo Bigbrow stumbled upon the paddock looking for an easy mark, butchered every member of the order in their beds, and made the buildings their den. Ipius Phidyrin’s ghost lingers in the Society’s old library, gentle and patient, waiting for someone clever enough to finish what his companions began.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

There are various reasons the party may be motivated to investigate the paddock and its hidden shrine. A few of these reasons are outlined below:

Bigbrow’s Gang. Three caravans have been waylaid in recent weeks, and the wagonmaster’s guild has decided to raise a bounty. An administrator offers the party 200 gp to put down a bandit captain calling himself Carlo Bigbrow, last seen riding south off the road with maybe a dozen companions in tow.

The Antiquarian’s Letters. Zotastus Vannerin, an antiquarian of modest local repute, has not been seen at his town lodgings for nearly three months. His sister, a vintner of some standing, offers 100 gp and a cask of her best vintage for word of him, alive or otherwise. She knows only that Zotastus spent much of his time at a quiet paddock on the south road, and that his letters stopped abruptly a few months ago.

A Borrowed Codex. A local librarian lent a rare manuscript to a scholarly friend years ago—a gnome named Ipius Phidyrin, who has since gone silent. The librarian’s last correspondence with Ipius placed him at a small private library kept at a paddock off the south road. She offers 50 gp for the codex’s return, in whatever condition it is found.

GENERAL FEATURES

The site lies across three layers. A roadside paddock spreads from the road between fenced pasture and a low cliff face, broken only by a single timber shack the Society raised to lend the property a working-farm appearance. Concealed within the cliff itself, behind a curtain of vines, a sealed temple of cut stone and chambered side rooms served as the Society’s home for the past decade. Beneath the paddock, an unassuming sinkhole beneath a meeting of three boulders drops into a deeper system of natural caves, in which the shrine proper is hidden. The temple was chiselled centuries ago by hands long forgotten; the caves predate even that work. Unless otherwise stated, the features of the paddock, the temple, and the caverns below are described as follows:

Ceilings, Walls, and Floors. The cliff temple is cut from the cliff itself, with dressed walls and timber-framed doors set into stone. Ceilings in the temple range from 10 feet in the side chambers to 25 feet in the vaulted main hall. The deeper caves have rough natural walls and uneven floors. Cavern ceilings range from 8 to 25 feet.

Doors. The doors of the cliff temple are weathered planks bound with iron, with AC 15 and 10 hit points.

Light. The cliff temple's upper level is lit by oil lanterns fitted in wall-mounted sconces which provide dim light. The deeper caves are dark, lit only where torches, lanterns, or open flame have been set.

The following areas are keyed to the provided map of the shrine:

I. DECOY SHACK

A weathered shack stands where the paddock meets the treeline. Hay bales and a broken cart are shoved against its walls.

The Society raised this shack to lend the paddock a working farm's veneer from the road. It contains the expected props, including a rusted shovel, an iron kettle, two empty sacks, and some rope.

Encounter: Bandit Lookout. A single **thug** holds the shack, posing as a farmer for any traveler curious enough to approach. He has been told to send passers-by along; if pressed, threatened, or recognized for what he is, he'll whistle loudly to alert his companions on the first level of the shrine. A successful DC 12 Wisdom (Insight) check notes his well-kept knife, mismatched boots, and the way his eyes track the road. A party approaching with cover or other applicable means can bypass him entirely with a group DC 13 Dexterity (Stealth) check.

Trapdoor. Half-buried under a scattering of straw is a wooden trapdoor that opens into a narrow shaft. A rickety ladder descends twenty feet into the caverns below.

WHAT THE BANDITS KNOW

If the party takes the lookout alive, or otherwise captures another member Bigbrow's crew, they can be coerced via a successful DC 12 Charisma (Intimidation) check to give up what they know. Any rank-and-file member of the crew can reveal the following information below as applicable. Only Carlo Bigbrow knows more.

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- The captain is Carlo Bigbrow, bunked at the pit campsite (area 10) with five others.
- The crew's second is a heavy man named Jossa, currently picking through the shrine's upper level with another three or four men in his company.
- The bandits stumbled onto the paddock two weeks ago and found it held by a small group of robed academics—six in total, mostly old men and a gnome. They killed them in a short encounter and have squatted here since. The bodies were dragged a quarter-mile north and dumped in a ravine.
- A crewmate named Wembly went down through the campsite and into the deeper caves alone several nights ago and never returned. Carlo has since forbidden anyone from following him.
- The crew can barely read. The shrine means nothing to them beyond a place to shelter, and they couldn't care less

what the Society's purposes with it were. They do not know what the Society was truly doing here.

2. PIT ENTRANCE

A trio of mossy boulders crowds together, leaning into one another to form a low, shadowed hollow. Within the gaps between them, two wooden ladders descend into the earth.

The pit opened decades ago as the result of a natural sinkhole. The ladders drop twenty feet into the campsite below (area 10). Sound carries clearly between the surface and the cavern; any noise made here will be heard at once by the bandits below, and conversely a character who stops to listen and makes a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) can hear the sounds of casual conversation echoing upward.

3. PROTECTIVE VINES

A thick curtain of dark green vines drapes across a cleft in the cliff face, their leaves unnaturally still even when the breeze stirs the nearby grass. Some of the lower strands are slashed and broken, as if someone or something tried to hack them apart.

The vines are a magical defense feature of the shrine, fashioned by powers long pre-dating the society. A character who casts *detect magic* recognises a faint aura of abjuration and enchantment woven through the curtain. A successful DC 13 Intelligence (Arcana) check identifies the enchantment's structure and locates a thickened nodule along the central stem—a hidden trigger that, when pressed firmly, causes the vines to recoil and lie still for 10 minutes. The bandits have not found the trigger and force their way through whenever they need to pass; a creature can do likewise with a successful DC 15 Strength check or with several seconds of effortful cutting. The vines whip closed at the end of the turn and lash anyone still in the gap, requiring characters to make a successful DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or take 1d4 piercing damage.

4. TEMPLE

The space opens into a long hall, its central aisle running thirty feet to a raised dais and a tall statue at the chamber's far end. Wooden benches line the aisle in three rows to either side, a few of them overturned or shoved aside. Pale lichen creeps up the walls in green spirals.

The temple was raised centuries ago to a faith long outlawed in the region. The statue at the dais depicts a robed figure with arms upraised and wings folded loosely behind, eyes turned toward something unseen above—the fallen celestial as it was first worshipped, before its long exile in the Ethereal twisted it into what now waits below. A carved inscription along the dais reads, in an old form of Common: "In gratitude for the gifts to come." A character who studies the line and makes a successful DC 12 Intelligence (Religion)

check recognises the phrasing as common to ancient rites of supplication, in which devotees offered prayer in exchange for power yet to be delivered.

The Society used the temple as a place for study and quiet prayer. The bandits have stripped it of anything obviously valuable, but Jossa remains convinced something has been overlooked.

Encounter: Jossa and Crew. Jossa (a **bandit captain**) and three **thugs** are scattered through the hall. Jossa stands at the dais, tapping his blade idly against the statue's foot, though he will not look at its face—he is quietly suspicious of the temple's potential power and influence. The thugs are seated or kneeling among the benches, one to each row. The men do not take kindly to intruders and are swift to attack when confronted. If the bandits have been alerted by the lookout's whistle at area 1, or for any other reason, they take cover among the pillars and benches and ready themselves. Jossa retreats to the dais, where the statue grants three-quarters cover.

5. TREASURE ROOM

This room is a mess—an overturned bench lies splintered across the floor, a wine barrel has been rolled into the corner, and an empty strongbox lies dented and open at the room's center. A dark stain has dried onto the flagstones.

The Society kept its modest valuables here, which include offering coin, ritual silver, and a few rarer pieces from Zotastus's collection. The bandits cleared the room thoroughly after the raid, and everything of worth has been moved to the campsite below. A search of the room finds nothing but a torn ledger of donations and two broken candlesticks of base metal. A character who makes a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Medicine) check confirms that the dark stain is not wine, but blood. It marks where one of the Society members fell.

6. STUDY

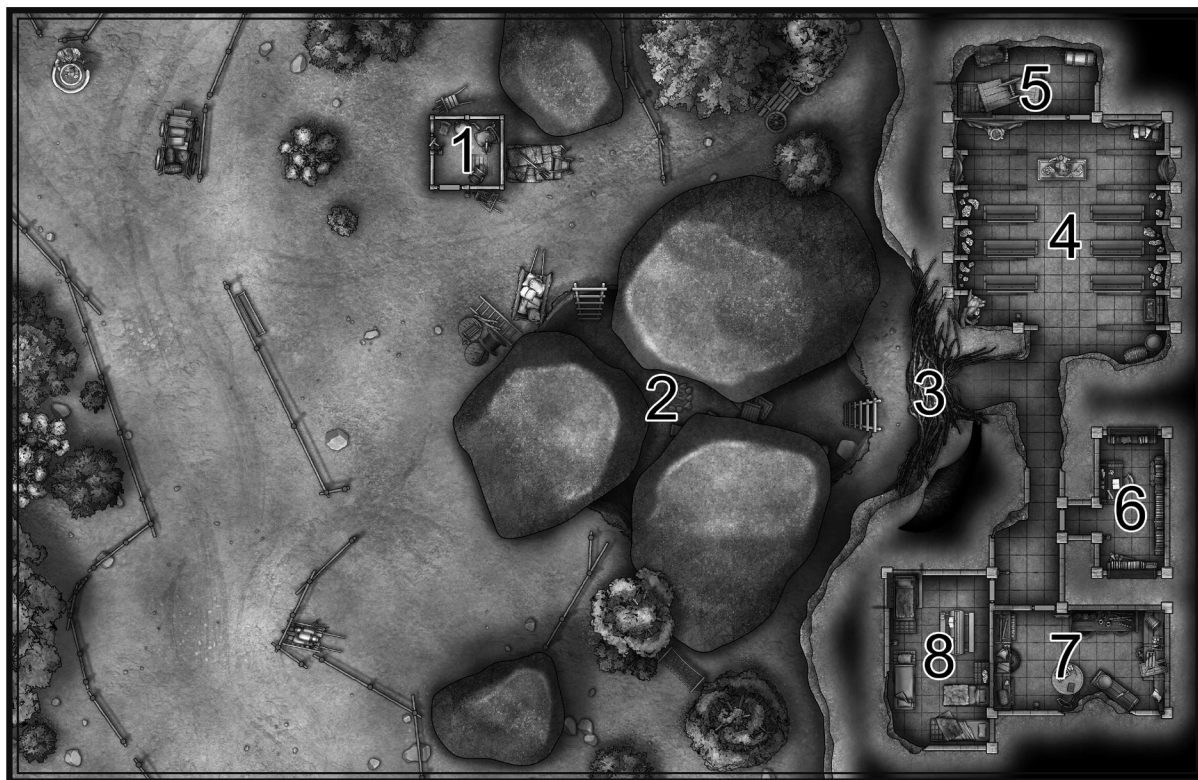
A cramped, book-lined chamber. Tall shelves line every wall, packed two and three deep with bound volumes, loose scrolls, and folios tied with ribbon. A heavy desk stands in the center of the room beneath a hanging brass lamp, its surface arranged with the careful precision of a working scholar: an open ledger, a half-burned candle, a brass chalice, and a folded prayer-cloth.

This was the Society's working room, where every translation and theory was committed to paper. The bandits glanced in, found little they could read and less they could sell, and so left it alone. The shelves contain hundreds of volumes on planar theology, divine history, and accounts of fallen celestials. A character browsing the translation notes and who makes a successful DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check finds a marginal footnote written by a scholar three centuries dead, cautioning that the entity has been "altered beyond grace by its long absence, and must not be brought across." The Society dismissed the warning in their own marginalia as the work of "a fearful mind." The borrowed codex, if using that adventure hook, can also be found among the other volumes here.

Ipius Phidyrin's Ghost. When the first character lifts a book from the desk or otherwise disturbs the room, the air at the far end of the chamber grows cold, and a small grey shape resolves between the bookshelves—a gnome in old robes, his round spectacles perched on his nose, his hands folded politely in front of him. Ipius (a **ghost**) speaks softly and is overjoyed at the party's arrival. He is incorporeal and noncombative.

Ipius was the youngest of the Society and its most devoted believer, a gnome scholar who joined Zotastus's order at twenty-eight and gave seven years of his life to its work. He was killed in his sleep on the morning of the raid, and his spirit has lingered in the study ever since, tethered by both his unfinished labor and the entity's pull from the shrine below. He does not know either of these things; he believes only that he is waiting, and that his patience will at last be rewarded. He appears as a small, dignified figure in scholar's robes. His voice is soft and clear, with a faint lecturing cadence. He is overjoyed at the party's arrival and addresses them with the warm courtesy of a man who has waited a long time for company. He assumes the party has been sent by some allied order to complete the Society's work, and does

THE TEMPLE



not understand how long it has been since the raid. He freely shares the following information:

- The Society of the Threshold spent a decade preparing to summon a celestial that was cast out of the heavens in some ancient age and has wandered the Ethereal ever since. The celestial is gentle and patient, asking only to be brought across.
- The entity has spoken with him personally in his dreams. It promises gifts of true power to those who help it home.
- The Society's rite is complete but for the final cadence, which he (correctly) believes he has figured out in his undeath. He will share it with anyone who agrees to perform the rite faithfully.
- Zotastus and the others were murdered by "rough men" some time ago (his sense of time is poor). He grieves them, but takes comfort in the certainty that their work will not be wasted.

Ipius is tethered to the study. Any resolution at the shrine severs this tether, and his ghost passes peacefully on within a few minutes.

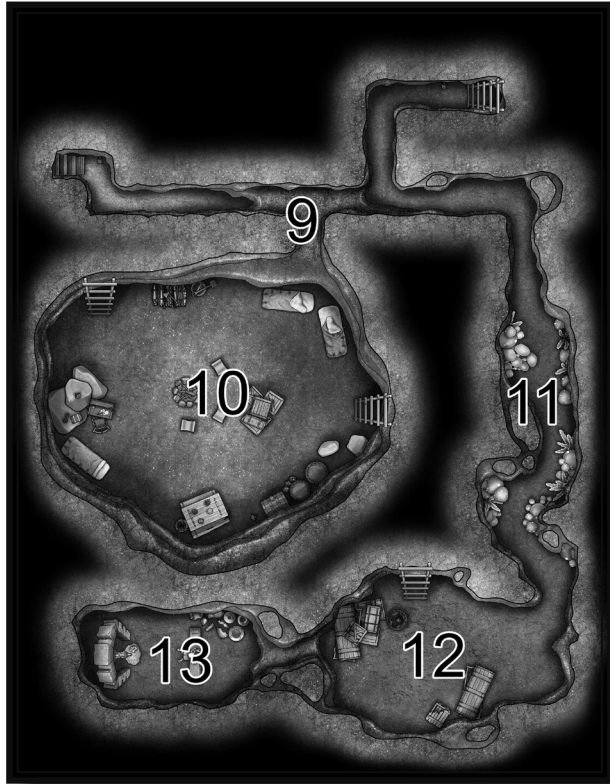
Reading Ipius. The party may pick up on a few clues that give them reason to doubt Ipius' sincere account. A successful DC 14 Intelligence (Religion) check applied to the summoning cadence Ipius teaches recognizes its older syllables as similar to those found in binding contracts and compulsion magic, rather than the open invocations of celestial worship.

Furthermore, a casting of *detect evil and good* or similar magic identifies Ipius as a good-aligned spirit, but also registers a faint deathly presence rising from somewhere in the temple's lower level.

The Summoning Rite. Beneath the open ledger, a character finds a working draft of the rite the Society was preparing: an arrangement of invocations, gestures, and offerings in three phases. A character who makes a successful DC 14 Intelligence (Arcana) or (Religion) check confirms that the rite is genuine and nearly complete, but lacks a final cadence: the closing call that will draw the entity across the Threshold. The cadence is not in any book in this room. Ipius knows it.

The Banishing Rite. Stacked beside the desk are six volumes of careful work on the older liturgy carved into the temple and shrine, comprising the Society's translation notes. A character who studies the notes for ten minutes and makes a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check realizes that the same rite, performed with two inversions—a sigil drawn counterclockwise, and the final invocation spoken with the entity's older true name (recorded twice in the notes)—would constitute a banishment rather than a summoning: a permanent return of the entity to the Ethereal with no possibility of recall. The Society did not realize this. Neither does Ipius. A character who shares the discovery with him distresses him deeply, but he will not interfere.

THE SHRINE



#7. ZOTASTUS'S CHAMBER

A cluttered work-chamber: shelves hold tools, glass flasks, and small instruments; a heavy desk in the center is scattered with papers. The desk's drawers hang open, and loose pages have drifted to the floor.

This was Zotastus Vannerin's personal study. The bandits searched it for coin and moved on; what remains is scholarly clutter they did not understand. Searching the desk turns up Zotastus's personal journal. It largely records antiquarian notes, but the final entries chronicle the Society's growing nearness to the rite. The last, dated weeks before the raid, reads: "It listens kindly. I trust this. The others trust me to trust this. We are near the threshold now." Tucked into the back are three folded letters from his sister Yula, pressing him to come home for her daughter's name-day. He had not replied to any of them.

8. DORM ROOM

Four bunks line the west wall and southeast corner of this small room. The bedding is tangled and dark with old blood, and a wash-basin has overturned on the floor.

This is where most of the Society was killed. The bandits found the order in their beds and dispatched them where they lay or as they rose. The attackers already searched the

room and took anything of obvious value—a few rings, a pouch of silver, an engraved knife—now stashed at area 10.

Trapdoor. A trapdoor below the northernmost bunk reveals a ladder descending to the chambers below.

Ipius's Cot. The bottom bunk tucked into the southern corner belonged to Ipius Phidyrin. The chest at its foot holds folded robes, a few small books on plane-touched theology, and a pair of wire-rimmed spectacles. A character who handles the spectacles feels a faint, lingering warmth.

9. HIDDEN TUNNEL

This tunnel is a narrow ledge cut into the upper wall of the cavern, running close beneath the ceiling like a stone duct. From its southern lip, one looks down some fifteen feet to the wider chamber (area 10) below. The bandits have not noticed it; their attention is on the ground, and the ledge is shadowed and easy to miss from below. Climbing up from below requires first spotting the ledge with a successful DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check, then DC 10 Strength (Athletics) to ascend.

10. CAMPSITE

This wide cavern is carpeted in old straw and bedrolls. A stone-ringed firepit smolders at the center, throwing red light onto piled firewood, stacked crates, and a rough drinking-table set with tin cups. Two ladders lean against the north and east walls.

The Society once used this space as a common area during their leisure hours. The bandits have heaped their gear over most of the order's remaining traces and turned the cavern into a barracks.

Encounter: The Crew. Carlo (a **veteran**), a **scout**, and four **bandits** are present here. If the alarm has not been raised, the bandits are scattered. Two are off-watch in bedrolls, two more are seated at the drinking-table, one tends to the fire, and Carlo is crouched over a small map at the crate stack. If alarmed, the crew may be crouched behind cover with weapons drawn or may have already rushed to the floor above to meet the party as applicable. Carlo himself is a balding, big-eared man with a prominent brow and the watchful manner of a soldier who has lost more fights than he cares to remember. He runs his crew with rough loyalty, fights cautiously when pressed, and surrenders before he dies. Carlo trusts no party not in his pay; tense words may be exchanged before combat, but his crew will draw weapons before they would ever be convinced to let the party push them around. If captured, bested in combat, or otherwise made to talk, Carlo is able to share more than his men:

- He went down to the deepest chamber himself several nights after Wembly disappeared, and found the man dead at the altar there. He has told no one in the crew.
- Since arriving at the paddock, he has been visited by quiet dreams of a soft voice promising gold and ease.
- He figures the Society's work as something arcane and unwise, and had been uncertain about planning to break camp within a few more days.

Treasure: The Stash. Among the crates near the eastern wall, the bandits have piled everything they took from the cliff temple: 320 sp, 180 gp, a pair of silver candlesticks (50 gp), an engraved knife from Zotastus's effects, three small rings (30 gp together), and a leather satchel containing an oil of slipperiness and four vials of holy water the Society had kept for the rite.

II. OVERGROWN TUNNEL

The walls and floor of this winding passage are crowded with pale, glowing mushrooms and feathery ferns, lit from within by a soft blue-green phosphorescence. The growth thickens toward the center of the tunnel until little of the original stone is visible.

The fungi and ferns are a natural cave ecology, predating the caverns above by ages and unrelated to the Society's work. They are difficult terrain throughout the passage; a creature that disturbs them releases a faint puff of luminescent spores. They are harmless, but linger on clothing for an hour and shed dim light. A character who carefully harvests the more uncommon specimens over ten minutes can gather alchemical samples worth up to 25 gp to the right buyer.

12. ANTECHAMBER

The cavern serves as a rough threshold, its uneven floor cluttered with stacked crates and a few barrels. A narrow tunnel opens in the western wall, winding some dozen feet to a chamber beyond.

The Society used this chamber to store the bulk of their ritual supplies. The bandits passed through briefly during their first sweep, found nothing they recognized as coin, and moved on; everything remaining they overlooked or thought un worthwhile. The crates contain dried provisions, casks of oil, spare lanterns and sconces, two bolts of unbleached linen, a sealed jar of incense, and a tightly-wrapped bundle of unmarked silver chalk.

13. HIDDEN SHRINE

The short tunnel opens into a low-ceilinged cavern barely a dozen feet across, its walls dressed in pale cut stone older than the temple above. At its far end stands a square altar of weathered basalt beneath an archway of similar construction, their surfaces carved with overlapping spirals and looping syllables in a dead tongue. A bronze bowl rests at the altar's center, blackened

with age. A bench faces the altar; slumped atop it is the skeleton of a man in road-worn leathers.

The shrine is the heart of the site, raised in an age when the fallen celestial was still spoken of openly. It exists at a thin place in the world, where the Ethereal lies closest, and where the entity can hear what is said and answer in turn. The skeleton belongs to Wembly, the bandit who descended alone. His flesh has not decayed but evaporated, leaving the bones dry and faintly warm. He carries a tinder-box, a dropped torch, and a purse of 8 sp. He had come down alone, drawn by the same soft dreams that now trouble Carlo's sleep, and simply stood at the altar and asked the voice for what it had promised him. Bound still within the Ethereal, the entity answered in the only way the thin place allowed, reaching through the threshold to draw the life from him where he stood.

The Entity's Voice. The entity hears every word spoken in this room and replies in kind when addressed, in soft and courteous Common from no particular direction. It cannot lie about its origin (it remembers, dimly, having been a celestial) but lies freely about its present nature and the cost of its freedom. A character who succeeds on a DC 18 Wisdom (Insight) check while listening senses the rehearsed kindness of a thing that has learned what people want to hear.

The Rite. Performing either rite requires the working draft from area 6, the basic components (incense, chalk, an offering for the bowl), and ten minutes of uninterrupted recitation. Either form of the rite may be reattempted upon failure, though each failed rite causes every participant to take 1d6 psychic damage.

- **Summoning:** the final cadence is the closing call taught by Ipius; at the rite's end, the rite leader must make a successful DC 14 Intelligence (Arcana) or (Religion) check. On success, the entity manifests (see below).
- **Banishing:** the same rite is performed with two inversions: the sigil is drawn counter-clockwise (a character must make a successful DC 12 Dexterity check to inscribe cleanly), and the closing call is replaced with the entity's older true name from the translation notes (a character must make a successful DC 14 Intelligence check to pronounce the name correctly). On a successful conclusion, the entity's voice rises into the chamber in confusion, then in alarm, then in a long thin scream as it is pulled fully and finally back into the Ethereal.

The Entity Brought Forth. If summoned, the entity manifests at the altar as a tall, gaunt figure floating just above the floor. Its head is a bleached skull crowned by pale, tendril-like growths that drift as if underwater; its body is wrapped in tattered grey cloth that unravels at the hem into worm-like strands. A second face looks out from beneath the cloth at its chest; sleeping and child-like. Behind it, the air darkens into the vague suggestion of folded wings, deeper than the cavern's shadow. It thanks the party in the same kind voice

they have already heard, and asks what gift they would like in gratitude for its freedom.

- **If the party accepts**, each character receives a blessing or supernatural gift (see DMG) at GM discretion. The entity walks out through the cavern wall and is gone from the site. Consequences (see Aftermath section) begin within twelve hours.
- **If the party refuses**, or attempts to bind the entity rather than receive its gift, it withdraws politely. The shrine remains open to it for one day, after which the rite must be re-performed.
- **If the party attacks**, the entity uses **wraith** statistics. The entity is bound to the immediate site for twenty rounds after manifestation, after which it fades back to the Ethereal of its own accord. Within that window, it pursues threats freely through the caverns and the shrine. A party that reduces it to 0 hit points before it fades severs its tether to this place forever; otherwise, the rite must be re-performed if the party wishes to engage it again.

AFTERMATH

A party that summoned the entity and accepted its gifts soon begins to see what its freedom costs others. Within twelve hours of the rite, every bird within a mile of the paddock falls dead from the sky. Within three days, livestock and small game follow. Within a fortnight, the corruption reaches the nearest village, where milk sours in the udder and people's fingernails turn black. The entity does not return to claim further tribute; it simply continues drifting aimlessly across the Material Plane, leaving stains of malevolence in its wake. The gifts it granted the party persist, untouched by the consequence, and cannot be returned.

A party that banished or slew the entity instead severs the shrine's connection to the Ethereal permanently. The voice falls silent. The site is rendered inert, left to be reclaimed by another group or to weather by the elements. Ipius's ghost passes peacefully within minutes of the rite's completion whether the entity was summoned or banished.

A party that walks away leaves the threshold open and listening. The entity's voice continues to whisper into the dreams of any who linger near the paddock; Ipius remains tethered and waiting; and a future visitor may yet complete the rite. The party may return at any time to finish their work.

REFERENCES

This work includes material taken from the System Reference Document 5.1 (“SRD 5.1”) by Wizards of the Coast LLC and available at <https://dnd.wizards.com/resources/systems-reference-document>. The SRD 5.1 is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode>.

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