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NIDAL, LAND OF SHADOWS

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ON THE COVER

Caught by surprise, Adowyn and Lem face down a menacing umbral dragon as it rampages through a shadowy forest vale in this sinister cover illustration by Kiki Moch Rizky.



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CONTENT NOTE

Pathfinder Campaign Setting: Nidal, Land of Shadows details a fictional nation ruled by the clergy of an evil god focused on pain, suffering, and torture. As such, this book contains some intense concepts and content, including physical and mental torture, emotional and psychological manipulation through fear, depictions and implications of violence, and body horror. Before using this campaign setting material in your game, you should inform your players of its thematic contents and make sure to obtain their consent to its inclusion. If even one player is uncomfortable with including some of this book's concepts, you should set those portions of the book (or the entire book) aside and focus on other plots for your game.

When running games that include horrific content like that presented in this book, player consent (including that of the GM) is the most important thing to consider. Please refer to pages 190–191 of *Pathfinder RPG Horror Adventures* for an in-depth discussion of this important topic.

REFERENCE

This book refers to several Pathfinder Roleplaying Game products using the following abbreviations, yet these additional supplements are not required to make use of this book. Readers interested in references to Pathfinder RPG hardcovers can find the complete rules of these books available online for free at paizo.com/prd.

<i>Advanced Class Guide</i>	ACG	<i>Bestiary 4</i>	B4
<i>Advanced Player's Guide</i>	APG	<i>Bestiary 5</i>	B5
<i>Advanced Race Guide</i>	ARG	<i>Bestiary 6</i>	B6
<i>Bestiary 2</i>	B2	<i>Occult Adventures</i>	OA
<i>Bestiary 3</i>	B3	<i>Ultimate Magic</i>	UM

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LIVING IN SHADOW

DESOLATION FELL UPON US, AND THE MIDNIGHT LORD GAVE US SUCCOR. DEATH CAME TO HUNT US, AND THE MIDNIGHT LORD GAVE US ITS LEASH. PAIN TRIED TO BREAK US, AND ZON-KUTHON TAUGHT US THAT IT HELD NOTHING TO FEAR. BY HIS GRACE WE ARE NIDALESE. BY HIS GIFTS WE MASTER THE NIGHT.

“CHILDREN AND CHOSEN OF ZON-KUTHON, BE PROUD TO SERVE YOUR MASTER’S WILL. FIND GLORY IN THE MIDNIGHT LORD’S FAVOR. FOR ONLY WE, AMONG THE VARIED PEOPLES OF THE WORLD, STOOD UNBROKEN BY THE SHATTERING OF EARTHFALL. WE ALONE SURVIVED UNSCATHED WHEN PROUD EMPIRES CRUMBLLED, WHEN SCHOLARS FELL INTO THE IGNORANCE OF RUIN, WHEN SAGES AND PEACEKEEPERS BECAME CRUDE CANNIBALS JUST TO SURVIVE. ONLY WE WERE WORTHY OF ZON-KUTHON’S PROTECTION, AND SO IT REMAINS TODAY. ONLY WE ARE STILL WORTHY OF HIS GIFTS, AND ONLY WE CAN GIVE HIM TRUE GLORY.

“WE ALONE HOLD THE HERITAGE OF AGES. WE ALONE REVEL IN THE MIDNIGHT LORD’S GIFTS AND GRACE. WE ALONE ARE NIDALESE.”

—TRADITIONAL FESTIVAL OF NIGHT’S RETURN SERMON



Nidal is a land chained in shadow. Ten thousand years ago, when the great cataclysm of Earthfall blotted out the sun and shattered Golarion's mightiest civilizations, the ancient horselords of Nidal cried to their gods for help. Though their ancestral gods did not answer, another power did: Zon-Kuthon, the Midnight Lord, god of shadow and pain. He offered them a terrible bargain: salvation in exchange for eternal servitude. The Nidalese would find shelter from the devastation of Earthfall, but at the cost of absolute obedience—theirs, and that of all their descendants who should ever be born.

Terrified and desperate, the ancient Nidalese agreed. They bound themselves in fealty to Zon-Kuthon, and they have lived with the consequences ever since.

Today, Nidal is like no other nation on Golarion. A hundred centuries have passed since the Nidalese locked themselves into Zon-Kuthon's chains, and that toll of years has shaped the land and its inhabitants profoundly.

Literal darkness blankets the heartlands of Nidal. The immense trees of the Uskwood let little light through their canopy, and in the glittering shade city of Pangolais, the black-leaved trees cast the streets into eternal twilight. Vampires and caligni walk its pale boulevards with perfect ease, untroubled by the sun.

Nidal's culture, too, has been transfigured by the Midnight Lord's whims. The Umbral Court, led by the

three mysterious figures of the Black Triune, ensures that the people of Nidal obey Zon-Kuthon's will. They govern in murmurs and feather-light touches, for shouts are unnecessary when every whisper carries the promise of unimaginable pain. The Umbral Court and its agents bind ordinary Nidalese into servitude, using the twin whips of torture and oppressive terror, and they are pitilessly efficient.

Yet their power is not absolute. Fragile strands of rebellion glimmer across the nation. Occasionally, a Nidalese escapes Zon-Kuthon's grasp. Some believe that any bargain made can be broken, and that it might be possible to free their homeland from its cruel master's bonds. Though the evil yoke of Zon-Kuthon is strong, there are still good people who live in Nidal. Under a heavy veil of fear, these goodly people live their lives, raise their children, pay lip service as needed to the Midnight Lord, and hope against hope that salvation might someday come for future generations.

Though the nation is famously insular and unwelcoming as a rule, there is still much here to draw curious or ambitious outsiders. A great price was paid to preserve Nidal, and here—as nowhere else among known civilizations—the lore and learning of pre-Earthfall civilizations survive intact. The treasures of Nidal are strange and sharp, but they are unrivaled.

HISTORY

Before Earthfall sundered the world, the tribespeople who would one day become Nidalese were Kellid horselords. They were a tan-skinned, dark-haired people who lived a seminomadic existence, traveling to follow the seasons and the migrations of their prey and burying their dead beneath great stone cairns. Shamans were their spiritual leaders, while warlords ruled over daily life.

Most of these horselords revered long-since forgotten deities. Some worshiped Gozreh, the nature deity whose hand the Nidalese saw in the grassy plains and verdant forests alike. A few others venerated Desna, goddess of dreams and travelers, and even to this day, some Nidalese find secret hope in her despite the nation's Kuthite pall.

The ancient Nidalese had few permanent settlements, as they preferred to make use of well-stocked outposts. They had a rich culture and their horse-breeding

techniques were among the most advanced in the world. Their horses were the wonder and envy of the ancient world, and the ancient Nidalese regarded their mounts as beloved family members.

In -5293 AR, Earthfall tore the land apart. The dust of the meteoric impacts drowned out the sun, and the tribes saw that their whole way of life faced a swift end. People might flee underground and survive on roots and grubs, but horses could not. Thus, when the Nidalese shackled themselves to Zon-Kuthon, they did so at least in part to save their cherished horses: an irony whose unremembered ghost still haunts the land today.

The Nidalese leaders who tragically transformed into the Black Triune had not intended to save anyone but their own people by striking their bargain with Zon-Kuthon. Once the Nidalese secured the Midnight Lord's protection, however, they found others eager to join them. Survivors from the ruined empires of Azlant and Thassilon, as well as many other realms, straggled into Nidal seeking safety.

Almost overnight, Nidal transformed from a society of freedom-loving nomads to the last civilization in Avistan. Kuthite worship became the new locus of Nidalese culture. Under the Black Triune's guidance rose the elite Kuthite aristocrats who called themselves the Umbral Court and served as the rulers' eyes and ears. The nation withdrew from the troubled world around it. Occupied by their own increasingly inscrutable and arcane pursuits, the Nidalese had little interest in the outside world.

Cheliah's attack in 4305 AR came as a deeply unwelcome surprise. The Nidalese were accustomed to wielding their fearsome reputation as a potent deterrent against enemies. In fact, the Kuthites delighted in sending agonized, still-living trespassers back to their homes in pieces. Yet somehow the Chelaxians, under their expansionist Emperor Haliad III, were undaunted. Zon-Kuthon seemed to hold back his worst terrors from the invaders, and though the Nidalese fought with fanatic ferocity and would have continued, they finally received different orders from the Black Triune. After 30 years, Nidal negotiated peace.

In 4338 AR, Nidal formally accepted the Chelish conquest. The following centuries progressed in a period that the Nidalese call Shadowbreak, which for the first time since the nation's formation saw cultural exchange as moderate Kuthites tempered the faith's cruelest excesses, Nidalese scholars engaged more with their mortal peers, and the nation opened as never before. The House of Lies opened its doors, inviting the world's braggarts to venture into the Uskwood and tell tales too tall to believe.



NIDALESE HORSELORD

Then Aroden died, Cheliar collapsed into civil war, and Zon-Kuthon's true believers came to see why the Black Triune had ordered them to surrender 300 years before. In accordance with the Midnight Lord's wishes, Nidal threw its weight behind House Thrune's diabolical faction, and when the devil-worshippers prevailed, the Kuthites formed an alliance with their former colonizers.

The period of Shadowbreak ended abruptly. The Umbral Court turned viciously on the more open-minded Kuthites, who were purged as heretics. Dissident elements were swiftly destroyed, and once more the Black Triune ruled by lash and chain. The court established the Adamant Guard, a standing army sworn to protect Nidal from outside threats (for more about the Adamant Guard, see the Midnight Citadel section on page 32.)

Yet not all reverted to what it had been before. Nidal emerged from Shadowbreak to find itself at the elbow of a great world power. Its shadowcallers—spellcasters, often wizards who specialize in shadowy magic—walk the streets of Chelish cities. Its advisors stand high in Chelish courts. With House Thrune's favor, all seems possible for Zon-Kuthon and his faithful on Golarion.

THRALLS OF THE MIDNIGHT LORD

The god who became Zon-Kuthon was not always a monster. In the beginning, his name was Dou-Brat. He was brother to the beauty goddess Shelyn and son of Thron, the Prince That Howls, a divine spirit-wolf. After a quarrel with his sister, Dou-Brat ventured into a dark realm beyond and behind reality, where he encountered an unspeakable horror. When he returned, he was maimed, mad, and enraptured by suffering in all its forms. He had become Zon-Kuthon—the god of darkness, envy, loss, and pain. His sadism and cruelty quickly made him enemies of the other gods and goddesses, and he wounded his sister and corrupted his own father into the horrific Prince in Chains, who now serves as Zon-Kuthon's herald.

As god of law, Abadar devised a way to sidestep the divine war all knew Zon-Kuthon would incite if he went unpunished. Abadar offered Zon-Kuthon a choice to accept banishment to the prison realm of Xovaikain on the Shadow Plane for as long as the sun hung in the skies above Golarion, and in return offered him a single item from the First Vault. Patient and possessed of a strange insight, Zon-Kuthon agreed. Ages later, when Earthfall blotted out the sun, Zon-Kuthon was released from his imprisonment and allowed to claim his prize from the First Vault—the first shadow. He then returned to the Shadow Plane to make his former prison his deific realm.

Just a short time later, three of the most powerful leaders of the ancient horselords embarked upon a journey across the land with their shamans to beseech the tribal gods for salvation, praying and meditating at places where they most strongly felt the gods' presence.

When they reached a southeast stretch of plains called the Weeping Fields, the horselords' traveling party blanched. An ominous and shadowy cloud now covered the once-verdant hills, and a sinister darkness loomed on the horizon. The shamans warned their leaders that a wicked and foreboding presence lurked ahead and refused to continue. Unwilling to turn away from any possible help, even something sinister, the horselord leaders pressed on.

It was the first step toward sealing Nidal's fate.

As the horselords rode on toward the looming darkness in what is now the Umbral Basin, they began to hear whispers in their minds—promises of salvation from Earthfall for their people if only they'd submit their nation's bodies and souls to perpetual servitude. Finally, a rift to the Shadow Plane came into view, and the whispers became screams. Promises of succor and dark power through submission tore through the leaders, and they looked to one another for wisdom. With that glance, they saw the obliteration that would befall their people and their beloved horses should they refuse this wicked force.

When all three leaders nodded their assent, the horselords beheld a vision of the Midnight Lord himself crawling from the rift before them, manic and mutilated. One by one, they each felt the touch of this manifestation upon their foreheads, showing fragmentary glimpses of the unspeakable horrors that lurk behind reality.

So the Black Triune was born, and so Zon-Kuthon spread his wicked grin.

Zon-Kuthon's touch imbued the horselords with a shard of that transformative power, and their humanity evaporated. The emptiness of unending shadow flooded into their eyes, the relentless cold of the void filled their hearts, and they—like the god to whom they were now pledged and bound—were denied any sensation, any warmth, except for the shock of pain and the spill of their own blood.

Ever since the Black Triune led Nidal's terrified people into the Midnight Lord's keeping, the nation has been a Kuthite theocracy. The country has no governing documents, and no charter or constitution beyond the vaguely prescriptive writings in *Umbral Leaves*, the religion's high holy book. The only true record of the Nidalese's servile contract with their evil patron is hidden behind their immortal leaders' blackened gazes.

A POPULACE IN CHAINS

All Nidalese are born into Zon-Kuthon's faith and indoctrinated in his worship from childhood. While foreigners may practice approved faiths, and small shrines to non-good gods such as Asmodeus exist for this purpose, Nidalese must follow Zon-Kuthon or pay a terrible price.

In the cities of Pangolais and Ridwan, where the Umbral Court's control is strongest, this inculcation is

THE BLACK TRIUNE

The three individuals who make up Nidal's Black Triune are mysterious scions of evil. Although they were once powerful horselord leaders, their humanity vanished when they entered Zon-Kuthon's servitude. They now remain caught between life and undeath as 10,000-year-old abominations of Zon-Kuthon's will made manifest.

The members of the Black Triune have carefully expunged all records of their former existences. No one knows their names, and few who live have seen their faces, for the members of the Triune seldom appear in public. In private audiences, they are fond of using identity-obscuring spells and shadow magic to unbalance their supplicants and further shroud their identities. Feared and revered throughout Nidal, they hold themselves remote from its day-to-day affairs.

Very few scholars have even attempted to learn more about the Black Triune's past, and most of those who have done so eventually met horrible fates at the hands of their research subjects. A few brave researchers have pieced together ancient information and disparate Kuthite ravings to determine that the Black Triune consists of the following: a cavalier who became a sentinel of Zon-Kuthon (*Pathfinder Campaign Setting: Inner Sea Gods* 202), a ranger who became an exalted of Zon-Kuthon (*Inner Sea Gods* 200), and a witch who became an evangelist of Zon-Kuthon (*Inner Sea Gods* 199).

near absolute. Sometimes this is due to a family's true devotion, but often fear drives the show. The cost of heresy is inconceivable, and watchful eyes are everywhere.

In the northern provinces and border villages outside the Uskwood, folk superstitions and quiet Desnan apostasies have crept into (or persisted within) the populace's beliefs. It is not uncommon for entire hamlets to pay little more than lip service to Zon-Kuthon. On religious holidays, such villages may appear pious, but outside the local cleric's view, many are happy to avoid the more extreme obeisance demanded by their faith. Even in Nidal, most ordinary citizens have no love for pain.

Yet they must still endure it. All Nidalese must take part in the great ceremonies—for all Nidalese, as they are endlessly reminded, belong to the Midnight Lord.

THE UMBRAL COURT

Beneath the Black Triune in the nation's hierarchy is the Umbral Court, Nidal's shadow-blessed aristocracy. There are dozens, if not hundreds, of court members at any time, with a significantly higher number of Umbral Court agents serving beneath them. (For more information on Umbral Court agents, see pages 58–59 in *Pathfinder Campaign Setting: Paths of Prestige*.)

Membership is not hereditary, but awarded based on piety and merit. No formal title attends elevation to the Umbral Court in Nidal, but foreigners who value their safety often address members as "Master" or "Mistress."

All who are elevated to the Umbral Court undergo a ritual (see *Joining the Umbral Court* on page 8) that transforms them as a mark of their risen station. Some pair this ritual with other processes that transform them into vampires, shadow creatures (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 4 238), shadow lords (*Bestiary* 4 238), or other hideous villains. Others cling to their original forms, but even then they change.

Notable members of the court include the following.

Eloiander of Ridwan (NE male human druid 15): White-haired, black-eyed, and garbed in a robe of webs continually being spun around him by living spiders, the albino master of the Uskwood presents an otherworldly figure. He leads the Shades of the Uskwood, a druidic cabal whispered to plot terrible sabotages against Cheliah, notwithstanding the Black Triune's formal alliance with that empire.

Kholas (LE male vampire sorcerer 14): The Nidalese advisor to Queen Abrogail Thrune II in Egorian is an urbane, polished sophisticate of unsettling presence but faultless manners. He dresses austere in silver-fastened dark robes that recall his origins as a shadowcaller of the Dusk Hall. Kholas places great importance on Nidal's alliance with Cheliah, which he sees as the culmination of 3 centuries of Nidalese patience. Accordingly, he has no tolerance for anything that might jeopardize this hard-won opportunity to extend Kuthite influence throughout the Inner Sea region. Kholas has only vague suspicions of Eloiander's plots against Cheliah (see page 14), but he is eager to substantiate them, and were he ever to obtain concrete proof of the druid's activities in the Uskheart, he would leap at the chance to strike down his rival.

Meleyne the Sun-Dimmer (NE female half-elf bard 9): One of the Umbral Court's most successful agents provocateur is the lovely, persuasive Meleyne, called "the Sun-Dimmer" for her specialty of destroying relationships by sowing jealousy and distrust, nurturing resentments, and undercutting her victims' self-esteem. She isolates her targets and pushes them toward vengeful self-destruction, thereby turning them into instruments of bitter envy, to Zon-Kuthon's delight. Her usual targets are influential leaders in good-aligned nations, but Meleyne has been known to casually destroy a commoner's marriage or set siblings feuding by reminding them of some old grievance, for the sheer joy of spreading misery.

Mykos Roarik (LE male vampire fighter 10): No member of the Umbral Court ranges so far and frequently from Pangolais as the deceptively gentle-mannered Mykos Roarik, leader of the quasi-mercenary Adamant Company, an offshoot of the state-run army called the Adamant Guard. Although the Adamant Company is formally sworn to the Umbral Court, Roarik's fanatics hire out to

external employers when otherwise unoccupied. Their cruelty to civilians and captured foes is legendary and highly effective in demoralizing opposing forces. More than one battle has been won simply by the Adamant Company's arrival on the field, followed by its employer's promise that a swift surrender means no one will be given to the group's mercenaries. For more information on the Adamant Company, see Other Agents of Nidal below.

Virihane of Pangolais (LE female caligni^{BS} ranger 8/rogue 2): Charcoal-gray veils fringed with spiked steel rings obscure Virihane's body and face, but not the fluid grace of her movements. She expertly hunts down adherents and artifacts of forbidden outside faiths. At present, Virihane is pursuing the *Harp of Night's Hope*, a Desnan artifact that is said to send encouraging dreams to her faithful and purge the hold of Zon-Kuthon's shadows. The harp was lost in the Uskwood when a Desnan agent, hoping to force an umbral shepherd (*Pathfinder Campaign Setting: Inner Sea Bestiary* 53) out of a loved one's body, brought it into Nidal. The Desnan was caught and tortured to death, but not before hiding the artifact. For more information on the *Harp of Night's Hope*, including its statistics, see page 39.

JOINING THE UMBRAL COURT

The details of the initiation rites into the Umbral Court often change, but its mechanics stay the same, as described in the occult ritual below. For more on occult rituals, see page 208 of *Pathfinder RPG Occult Adventures*.

ENTER THE UMBRAL COURT

School necromancy; **Level** 8

Casting Time 80 minutes

Components V, S, M (a whip made of braided strips of skin flayed from the target), SC (at least 2 and up to 7)

Skill Checks Intimidate DC 31, 2 successes; Knowledge (planes) DC 31, 2 successes; Knowledge (religion) DC 31, 4 successes

Range close (25 ft. + 5 ft./character level of the primary caster)

Target one creature

Duration permanent

Saving Throw Will negates; **SR** yes

Backlash All casters take 1 permanent negative level.

Failure The casters are immediately shunted to a single place on the Shadow Plane that is anywhere from 5 to 500 miles (5d%) from Xovaikain, Zon-Kuthon's deific realm, as *plane shift*. Within 1 round of arriving, the casters are attacked by a number of apostle kytons (*Pathfinder RPG Horror Adventures* 240) equal to the number of casters plus 3.

EFFECT

Before this ritual can be cast, the casters must reach deep into the target's mind to extract the most personally heinous torture the target could imagine, and then the casters must inflict it

upon the target during the casting. This often involves whips, spiked chains, barbed hooks, or other torturous elements usually constructed from the target's own skin and viscera. While the target endures this torture, it must recite the parable of Nidal's pact with Zon-Kuthon while the casters alternately chant epic poetry vaguely detailing the Midnight Lord's travels behind reality and the unfathomable horrors that he is capable of inflicting on the target's soul. If the target does not cower in fear at these descriptions, the ritual fails.

Upon successful completion of this ritual, the target's eyes fill with inky black shadow, and it gains the following benefits. It is immune to spells from the shadow subschool and those with the shadow descriptor, though it can choose to suppress or restore this immunity as a standard action. The target also gains regeneration 5, bypassed by good weapons and spells and silver weapons, and DR 15/good or silver.

If the target's alignment is not already lawful evil, it immediately shifts to such upon this ritual's successful completion. Further, this ritual ties a shard of the target's soul to Zon-Kuthon and his realm on the Shadow Plane. If the target commits a heretical act against Zon-Kuthon's faith, there is a 25% chance (1-25 on d%) that at a random time within 24 hours the target is transported to Xovaikain via *plane shift* into a private, eternal torment-scape of the Midnight Lord's choosing. This effect cannot be suppressed or removed.

OTHER AGENTS OF NIDAL

In Nidal, the enforcement of tenets and policies falls to other faithful agents in addition to the Umbral Court. Among the most notorious of those groups are the Midnight Guard and the Adamant Company.

Officially, the Midnight Guard is an elite force of Nidalese spellcasters who work on loan for House Thrune and the Chelish military. Members' official duties often involve helping quell Chelish rebellions in cities, but they are also covert spies for the Black Triune, passing information as needed to the Nidalese about their allies. For more on the Midnight Guard, see the *Pathfinder Tales* novels *Nightglass* and *Nightblade* by Liane Merciel.

The Adamant Company, on the other hand, works far more openly as the Black Triune's enforcers within the Uskwood and beyond. When the Black Triune's members suspect that their people might be disloyal or fomenting rebellion, they send this quasi-mercenary company to stamp out undesirables as needed. The Adamant Company and its leader, the vampire Mykos Roarik (see page 6), sometimes accept nonstate jobs when the company's resources permit.

PEOPLE OF SHADOW

Strange as they may seem to outsiders, however, humans are not the most unusual people of Nidal. Other races live alongside them, and over the centuries they have developed their own distinct subcultures in Zon-Kuthon's land.

CALIGNI

During the Age of Destiny, the people of a trading outpost called Calignos, part of the great empire of Azlant, fled into the subterranean Darklands in an attempt to escape the prophesied coming of Earthfall. Trapped underground, they eventually fell under the influence of shadowy powers that, over time, transformed them into the creatures now known to some as “dark folk.”

Now and then, a child is born to the dark folk who resembles one of the original people of Calignos. These slender, gray-skinned individuals call themselves “caligni” (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 5 66), a term derived from a long-lost homeland that none of them have ever seen. Nevertheless, the caligni speak of it with reverence, and they conceive of themselves as a people separate and distinct from the dark folk. Many caligni leave their kin and seek homes elsewhere in the Darklands or in Nidal, for Zon-Kuthon’s realm is one of the only aboveground locales they find welcoming.

Caligni are born to dark folk, and their own children, in turn, are typically darkfolk. For some of them, this is a heartbreaking result for their parents. Some adopt caligni infants whose parents have abandoned them; the worst steal youngsters from their homes or pay wicked mercenaries to do the same.

Nidal is a haven for caligni, whether they were born in the shadowed nation, adopted, or immigrated there. The shadowed lands of Zon-Kuthon present a favorable physical environment to the light-sensitive caligni, and the Nidalese reverence of creatures linked to darkness creates a welcoming cultural milieu, so they integrate easily into society. Rare is the good-hearted caligni who rejects Zon-Kuthon’s wicked religion and its servitor state outright.

FETCHLINGS

Fetchlings are the descendants of humans who were stranded on the Shadow Plane long ago. They tend toward a thin and fragile appearance, with skin and hair in shades of gray and luminous yellow eyes.

Many fetchlings call Nidal home, but they are not as seamlessly integrated into its culture as the caligni. Myths and misconceptions plague them. Because their origins bear a superficial resemblance to Zon-Kuthon’s transformation, many Nidalese believe that fetchlings must have endured similar horrors. This is incorrect, but the misunderstanding persists. Many provincial Nidalese fear and avoid fetchlings, believing that they must be as maliciously twisted as Zon-Kuthon himself. Few Nidalese villagers know that even the moniker “fetchling” is insulting to these people, who prefer to be called *kayal*, a word borrowed from Aklo that hints at “shadow people.”

For these reasons, *kayal* usually live in cities, where it is easier to blend into crowds and hide from ignorant peasants. Nidalese fetchlings tend to be intensely clannish, secular, and devoted to their own familial groups. They seldom join the Kuthite faith, but they are also greatly reluctant to cross it.

KYTONS

While kytons (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 3 170) are uncommon even in Nidal, most people recognize them and their significance on sight. Ordinary Nidalese regard kytons with abject fear. Reactions among members of the Umbral Court and their agents vary widely, depending on their current positions and activities. A kyton’s arrival may be interpreted as a glorious sign of Zon-Kuthon’s approval, an opportunity for an ambitious agent

VIRIHANE

to advance by ingratiating herself or proving her worth to the divine visitor, or an unwelcome interference in or usurpation of a mortal agent's faltering efforts. To rebels, meanwhile, a kytan is a sure and dreaded sign that their schemes have been detected and the desperate choice to fight or flee is upon them.

LIFE IN NIDAL

Although harsh in many senses of the term, daily life in Nidal is far from a static experience. The wealthy and suitably pious live in indulgent luxury in the nation's great cities, whereas villagers often eke out a living while trying to keep the ever-watching eyes of the Black Triune placated with shows of loyalty.

CITY LIFE

Outsiders often define the Nidalese by their fearsome religion, but while the Kuthite faith dominates Nidal's culture and politics, it is not the sole dimension of the people's lives. Nidal has architects and farmers, musicians and surgeons, all living their lives and raising their families as best they can under the Umbral Court's gaze.

Families in Nidal tend to be small and close-knit. Contraception has been widely practiced since the dark days after Earthfall, when the population had to be limited to survive on scant resources, and it remains routine. Few families have more than two children, but the ones they have are fiercely loved. The Umbral Court, understanding the usefulness of family attachments in keeping their citizens docile, encourages such sentiments.

Fear of attracting the ire of the Umbral Court is a constant concern. Most Nidalese are not deeply versed in their faith's particulars. They know the major holidays and prayers, but the deeper mysteries are so horrible that few ordinary citizens even want to learn them. Instead, people perform their daily prayers with great diligence and take part in dramatic displays at the holidays. Many add other, noncanonical prayers as an additional show of piety; these are sometimes used to mask subtle signs of rebellion.

The Umbral Court and its agents have a heavy presence in the cities and hold all official military and academic positions, thereby leveraging control over all major trade agreements and building projects. One cannot attain wealth or influence without the court's favor. Ambitious urban Nidalese often stage costly, elaborate displays of their Kuthite dedication when trying to curry the approval of particularly influential members of the aristocracy.

RURAL LIFE

In the villages of rural Nidal, showy displays of self-mortification are seldom seen. People lack the resources necessary to perform or survive them, and so village celebrations are simpler.

PORTALS TO THE PLANE OF SHADOW

Zon-Kuthon's long and deeply entrenched presence in Nidal has caused several rifts to open across the land, allowing the Shadow Plane to seep into the mortal world. Known portals to the Shadow Plane include a one-way gate in the dungeons of the Cathedral of Exquisite Agony in Pangolais, which allows creatures from the Shadow Plane to cross into the Material Plane; the gate in the center of Ridwan to the Deeping Darkness, a particularly vile chasm in the Plane of Shadow; the Shadowstorm, an enormous roving portal that drifts about the Umbral Basin opening and closing at random; Blacksulfur Pool south of Nisroch; Edammera's Folly in the centuries-old ruins of a wizard's lair; and the unstable, flickering rift caught behind crystal in the Moonless Mirror. Other permanent portals doubtlessly exist, but have not yet been discovered, and temporary gates to the Shadow Plane can open unpredictably anywhere in Nidal.

Whether permanent or temporary, portals typically appear as wavering panes of darkness with diffuse edges, like droplets of ink spilled into water. On the Shadow Plane, they are visible as windows of indistinct brightness. In neither case is it possible to see what lies on the other side.

For the most part, townspeople are left alone except for the guidance of a village cleric, who is most often a local zealot or a less ambitious washout from one of the cities. Two or three times per year, Uskwood druids or shadowcallers may pass through to collect the more promising youths for indoctrination, but in general the villagers live peacefully. Only when some whiff of rebellion reaches the Umbral Court do its agents clamp down. Since Umbral agents sometimes masquerade as traveling strangers to test for apostasy, strangers are typically met with caution.

Farmers remain dependent on the Uskwood's druids and their gifts to grow crops under Nidal's cloud-choked sun, which further ensures their loyalty. While wheat and rye are the country's staple crops, gasping white fish from Usk Lake supplement the Nidalese diet, as do more ordinary fish pulled from Conqueror's Bay and Nisroch Bay. The Uskwood and Ombrefell, too, produce food. Given the forests' well-known dangers, however, only the bravest or most desperate peasants venture far beneath the leaves.

THE RESISTANCE

The Umbral Court does not cow everyone in Nidal.

Here and there across the nation, in provincial hamlets and under the muted lights of Pangolais, rebellious souls dream of a day when their enslaved nation might shake off the Midnight Lord's shadow. This rebellion is small

and largely unorganized, but it exists. Its members, for the most part, are individuals who work alone or with a tiny handful of trusted comrades, and whose actions are secretive and small scale.

People find many paths that lead toward rebellion. Some seek vengeance for a terrible wrong committed against a family member. Some learn of different ideas through foreign acquaintances, such as a merchant's far-traveled trading partner or tutors teaching children of the upper classes. Others are foreigners themselves and have infiltrated Nidal for the purpose of undermining it.

And, finally, there are the Desnans: oracles and shamans who often originate from the Atteran Ranches (see page 16) to serve Desna, the goddess of dreams and luck. In some cases, Desnan worship is passed down clandestinely through the generations until the family finally acts on the doctrines. In other cases, the Desnans were outside infiltrators whose gentle and hopeful message resonated among the children of the horselords, some of whom adopted Desna's faith themselves.

Within the cities and villages of Nidal's heartlands, the rebellion acts quietly and with caution. The Desnans of the Atteran Ranches have grander plans, though. They hope to spread Desna's message of faith, freedom, and

reassurance to the populace through enchanted dreams, thereby encouraging the people to revolt en masse. They hope, also, to find a way to force umbral shepherds out of their claimed bodies and, as their highest ambition, even break the hold that Zon-Kuthon has on the Umbral Court.

RELATIONS

Nidal has a bleak reputation across most of Golarion.

As long as the nation's neighbors distrust and fear the Nidalese, the Umbral Court can be assured that those trying to flee their homeland will find no easy refuge outside. The hostility of foreigners keeps many Nidalese from even trying to escape. It also ensures that those who do flee are met by angry mobs or suspicious border patrols who promptly return them to their own government.

With Cheliax, no such machinations are necessary. Nidal's ally shares most of its views, and relations between the two countries are close and cordial. Nidal's exports are relatively few, specialized, and costly: intricately cut silver jewelry, the terrible blades and dark gemstones of Ridwan, and exotic goods harvested from the Uskwood and carried from the Shadow Plane. Few can afford such things, but Cheliax is wealthy and has wide-ranging tastes, and the Chelaxians buy all that Nidal can produce.

Nidal also sends hundreds of advisors into Cheliax and its holdings. These include master torturers, shadowcallers, and political and military experts steeped in centuries of experience using fear and dissension to hold populations in obedient terror. The Umbral Court sends them to aid in Chelish diplomatic efforts, which they do, but they also spy on their Chelish allies and subtly guide their efforts in directions that better serve Zon-Kuthon's agenda.

Nidal has few relations with its other neighbors. The Mindspin Mountains separate the land from Molthune and Nirmathas, and neither of those two nations wants much to do with Nidal.

Recently, a diplomatic delegation from Geb has opened trade negotiations with Nidal. The subject of these negotiations remains mostly secret, but rumors abound that Geb's vampires are interested in Nidalese shadowcraft to protect themselves from the sun as they venture abroad. What Nidal might demand in exchange for such secrets is unknown.



ZON-KUTHON

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TIMELINE

The following are major events in Nidal's history.

Date	Event
Unknown	Kellid tribes settle across modern-day Nidal, forming the horselord tribes.
-5293 AR	Earthfall. Meteorites smash into Golarion, shattering continents and destroying empires. The dust from their impact casts the world into a thousand years of darkness.
-5293 AR	In Nidal, three tribal leaders beg for their people's deliverance near modern-day Ridwan, close to the rift where Zon-Kuthon emerged from his exile to the Shadow Plane. They accept the Midnight Lord's offer of protection for eternal servitude, becoming the immortal leaders known as the Black Triune, and their country changes forever.
-5290 AR	Nidal, as the last refuge for humanity's scattered survivors, absorbs Azlanti and Thassilonian intellectuals. The beginnings of what would become The Chronicles in Tooth and Bone are recorded.
c. -5275 AR	The Umbral Court rises and solidifies its rule over Nidal. It becomes apparent that the members of the Black Triune are ageless. The first stone for the Cathedral of Exquisite Agony is laid in Pangolais.
-4294 AR	The Age of Darkness comes to an end, but the shadows do not fully lift over Nidal.
-4200 AR	Kuthite worshipers build a shrine overlooking the Weeping Fields, where the Black Triune struck their bargain with Zon-Kuthon. This eventually develops into the city of Ridwan.
-3803 AR	Kytons bestow <i>memory chains</i> to Kuthites, who begin building the Cathedral of Embodied Wisdom around them.
c. -3000 AR	Nisroch is founded as a coastal fishing village.
c. -1000 AR	Irogath of Ridwan develops a system of "physical philosophy" that advocates storing pain in one's own body and then releasing it into others. This becomes the foundational teaching of the Irogath Monastery.
-423 AR	The archnecromancer Mesandroth Fiendlorn begins his quest for immortality, enticing or coercing lesser magic-wielders into assisting him and infusing his descendants with various bloodline curses to force their cooperation.
-398 AR	A rift to the Shadow Plane opens in the base one of the Towers of the Fiendlorn, throwing the tower's inhabitants into disarray as their safeguards are suddenly sucked through the rift and shadow creatures flood into the laboratory. The place is sealed and abandoned and thereafter known as Edammera's Folly.

-92 AR	The Umbral Court summons shadow giants and settles them in the Ombrefell as permanent residents of Nidal.
1 AR	Aroden lifts the Starstone from the sea and ascends to divinity.
64 AR	The caligni seer Fiersythe begins collecting the recorded experiences of planar travelers venturing into the dark unknown. Her collections, one of the most detailed and painstaking chronicles of mortals' efforts to chart the Dark Tapestry, are archived as the <i>Voyages into the Void</i> .
187 AR	Elith Lorin is founded as a transportation hub and river town.
4100 AR	Nidalese Kuthites travel to Jol in the Lands of the Linnorm Kings and attempt to impose the Midnight Lord's worship on the populace. This fails and the Kuthites are tortured and killed.
4305 AR	Chelish Emperor Haliad III begins the Everwar, including a Chelish incursion into Nidal. More than 30 years of fierce fighting between Cheliox and Nidal ensues.
4338 AR	Under orders from the Black Triune, Nidal surrenders to the Chelish invaders, ushering in a period of relative cultural openness known as Shadowbreak.
4354 AR	The House of Lies opens in the Uskwood.
4608 AR	The Chelish Civil War begins. Nidal throws its support behind House Thrune immediately, sending "mercenary" contingents of kyton-backed shadowcallers, as well as the Adamant Company, to support the diabolists' faction. Non-Thrune Chelish diplomats and dignitaries in Nidal are quietly assassinated.
4634 AR	Shadowbreak ends abruptly as moderate Kuthite elements are purged from the clergy and the Umbral Court. Declared heretics and apostates, they are consigned to decades of suffering in the Cathedral of Exquisite Agony and "repatriation" as kyton fodder.
4640 AR	House Thrune wins the Chelish Civil War.
4676 AR	Shadowbeasts stalk the streets of Westcrown by night, a phenomenon that Nidalese shadowcallers under Ilnerik Sivanshin and the Midnight Guard are nominally tasked with curtailing but are widely believed to encourage.
4704 AR	White Estrid, King of Halgrim, leads a raid of 15 longships on the port city of Nisroch.
4714 AR	Fiendslair, an abandoned and Abyssally warped Tower of the Fiendlorn in the Umbral Basin, is rediscovered and briefly opened in an expedition that ends in disastrous failure, leaving the tower largely unexplored.
4718 AR	The present year.



GAZETTEER

FEW VENTURE INTO THE SHADOW OF NIDAL. THAT IS WISE. IT IS A STRANGE AND OLD PLACE, CAPRICIOUS IN THE WAY THAT STRANGE OLD THINGS OFTEN ARE, AND BOUND TO TRADITIONS THAT NO HUMAN MIND EVER DREAMED. CRUELTY DOESN'T BEGIN TO DESCRIBE WHAT YOU'LL SEE THERE, NOR DOES OPPRESSION. IT IS A LAND THAT SHACKLES THE MINDS OF ITS PEOPLE IN FEAR, SO IT HAS NO NEED TO CHAIN THEIR BODIES. NOT EVEN THE PEOPLE'S THOUGHTS ARE THEIR OWN, FOR THEY GIVE THEMSELVES MIND AND SOUL TO THEIR DARK LORD.

"AND YET IT HAS A CURIOUS COLD BEAUTY, AND FASCINATIONS THAT DIG INTO YOUR SOUL AS SURELY AS THE KUTHITES' HOOKS BITE INTO THEIR SKIN. THERE IS KNOWLEDGE AND LEARNING IN NIDAL THAT EXISTS NOWHERE ELSE IN THE WORLD, AND TERRIBLE WONDERS THAT SHAKE YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF LIFE. IT IS A PLACE, FOR BETTER OR WORSE, THAT YOU WILL NEVER FORGET. YOU CAN'T. THE SCARS REMAIN FOREVER."

— OUTGOING CHELISH AMBASSADOR THELASSIA PHANDROS,
TO HER INCOMING REPLACEMENT



Nidal is a nation with a history that stretches farther into the past than most of Golarion's residents can imagine. Its rulers have outlived ages. Its historians have watched, recording all the while, as empires have risen, flourished, and toppled under their own weight. Insulated from history's turmoil under the heavy veil of Zon-Kuthon, the Nidalese have chronicled wonders and preserved artifacts that the rest of Golarion has forgotten. The mere word "ancient" has a different tone and meaning in Nidal than it does most elsewhere, for where a nation might boast to uphold of a 3,000-year-old tradition, the Nidalese scoff at cultural touchstones younger than 5 millennia. For them, Nidal has always been and it will always be.

Yet even that undersells the influence of Nidal's past on its present. The Nidalese constantly remind themselves and others of the oblivion that they escaped during the calamity of Earthfall and of the superiority that they claim their salvation from that disaster still grants them. The ways of the ancients are not locked away in dusty books here, but woven into the tapestry of everyday life. Even the poorest peasant home is likely to own a water pitcher or heirloom necklace that was made centuries, if not millennia, ago. Archaic phrases and accents are common in the provincial regions; indeed, it is a point of pride to use phrases and idioms passed

down from ancestors who lived centuries or longer before. Meanwhile, trendsetting fashions in Pangolais are almost defiant in their incorporation of old techniques and materials in each season's designs. The height of couture follows sweeping cycles in which the oldest historical trends and techniques are considered the height of sophistication.

Because of Zon-Kuthon's influence in shaping his chosen land and the thousands of years of isolation that Nidal wrapped itself in, this nation is far more uniform than most in Golarion. Cultural distinctions separate the horse-tenders of the Atteran Ranches from the Umbral Court's aristocracy of Pangolais, but these subtleties are likely lost on outsiders. In appearance and manner, Nidalese are distinctive and unlike any other peoples of the Inner Sea region.

NIDALESE CULTURE

Beneath its outward appearances, Nidalese culture is influenced by far more than its subservience to Zon-Kuthon, though its devotion to the Midnight Lord seeps into all aspects of life. Politics at the national and local levels are closely tied to the quiet power struggles playing out among members of the Umbral Court. Similarly, though unholy high holidays are celebrated throughout the nation, subtle differences locally speak to

shards of the populace's fear, defiance, or shocking zeal for their evil liege.

Nidalese fashion reflects the culture's tension between stoic silence and an embrace of pain. Clothes are gray or black, austere cut, and may be elaborately structured but never gaudily ornamented. In Pangolais, local fashion runs toward floating, layered silk and lace; in Nisroch and Ridwan, glossy or welted leather carries the requisite martial note. Piercings, tattoos, brands, and ornamental scarification are common. Moonstones, onyxes, and smoky quartzes are fashionable in jewelry, but brightly colored gems are considered in poor taste.

POLITICS IN THE UMBRAL COURT

Although all of its members are dedicated to Zon-Kuthon and have been personally transformed by his divine touch, the Umbral Court is not always harmonious or unified. Members take care to conceal their arguments from outside eyes, fostering the illusion among foreigners and the Nidalese lower classes that the Umbral Court speaks with a single god-granted voice.

In reality, however, the Umbral Court is rife with shifting political alliances, personal enmities, and bitter philosophical disputes about Kuthite theology and Nidal's place in the world. In some cases, quiet struggles for power simply reflect court members' personal distaste for each other based on petty histories or even simple squabbling. In other cases, deep personal rifts fuel the discord between court members. Regardless of their origins, these disagreements hardly ever erupt into open violence—that would disrupt the carefully cultivated image of unity that the court seeks to project to the world. But behind the scenes, members frequently plot to discredit, endanger, or even kill each other.

The two deepest true divisions are between members of the court who are pro-Chelax expansionists and those who are insular isolationists, and between adherents of the Belevais Doctrine and the court's undead contingent. Nearly all members of the Umbral Court have taken a side in at least one of the two disputes, and those two rifts are key to the dynamics of all smaller political disputes around them.

The expansionist-isolationist dispute tends to pit the court's sophisticated urbanites, as well as graduates of the School of the Pale Sun in Elith Lorin, against the Uskwood druids, who are led by court member Eloiannder of Ridwan (see page 7). The first contingent, led by the vampire sorcerer Kholas (see page 6), views the Chelish alliance as a great opportunity for Nidal to expand its reach across Golarion and shepherd more souls into Zon-Kuthon's keeping. The latter group sees no need to be concerned with foreigners at all, since they are not the Midnight Lord's chosen people and are therefore of little interest to him. Some extremists in the isolationist

camp, including Eloiannder of Ridwan, would go as far as deliberately sabotaging the Chelish alliance and driving out resident Chelaxians in order to restore the Umbral Court's priorities to what they see as their proper place.

The second point of friction centers around the teachings of the Belevais Doctrine, a Kuthite theology that holds the view that true pain is reserved for the living, as the natural purpose of pain is to warn living organisms of damage or death. Therefore, those who adhere to the doctrine believe that unliving creatures—including undead—cannot experience true pain, since they are already dead. The doctrine's believers submit that the undead's agonies are primarily spiritual or emotional and might be classified as misery, but not true pain.

The Belevais Doctrine also teaches that kytons are extraordinary among outsiders because, in some cases, they graft living flesh into their immortal bodies and are thus able to experience true pain; in other cases, kytons have warped their forms to feel true pain and adequately serve Zon-Kuthon. Ordinary outsiders, however, such as angels and demons, cannot receive the Midnight Lord's gifts because they are not mortal, the doctrine teaches.

Adherents of the Belevais Doctrine consider undead to be less dedicated Kuthites, since they believe that undead creatures are no longer capable of experiencing Zon-Kuthon's blessing in its truest form. Accordingly, they argue, undead should not be elevated above equally pious living worshipers in the hierarchies of the faith. This, naturally, causes animosity between living members of the Umbral Court who believe in the Belevais Doctrine and undead members, who often consider themselves superiorly pious simply based on the unending life they can devote to worshiping the Midnight Lord. Most undead members of the Umbral Court deeply despise those who believe in the Belevais Doctrine, viewing it as a vehicle for the living to try to usurp what they see as the true and naturally superior power of the undead. Other undead court members simply see the Belevais Doctrine as a challenge, and covet trying to convince its adherents to join the cold and powerful embrace of unlife.

The political influence of the Belevais Doctrine has waxed and waned over the centuries. At times, the Umbral Court's numbers have skewed toward more undead members, since they do not die of old age and in peaceful times can outlast many generations of mortal contemporaries. This generally spurs a rise in the number of Belevais Doctrine adherents, as living members of the Umbral Court unite against their undead peers for pragmatic reasons as much as theological ones. The resulting increase in murderous plots against the court's undead members tends to thin out their ranks to a more balanced proportion.

THE GREAT KUTHITE CEREMONIES

Zon-Kuthon's faith is the state religion of Nidal, and the major Kuthite holidays are marked across the nation with the Great Ceremonies. These are observed in every city and hamlet in the nation, and every citizen is required to participate. Even those who are secretly unbelievers find some performative way join in the public show, even if it's not as blatantly evil as the ceremony itself, or else they risk inviting an unimaginable doom. As are all of Nidal's Kuthite state traditions, the Great Ceremonies are as wicked as the religion itself.

The Great Ceremonies include the following.

The Eternal Kiss: This 11-day ceremony culminates on the first new moon of the new year. For 10 days, a victim—either an enemy of the faith, a prisoner, or anyone the villagers collectively choose—is treated to the lap of luxury. On the eleventh day, that individual is tortured and eviscerated, and the Kuthites attempt to divine portents of Zon-Kuthon's will in the terrible ritual's details.

In the cities, the sacrificial victim is typically a sentient being chosen from among improperly pious villagers or a captured stranger. In villages, however, locals frequently substitute a pig or goat, or even a nonliving symbolical victim, though this last invites the Umbral Court's suspicion by default.

The Festival of Night's Return: Celebrated on the autumnal equinox, when night regains its dominance over day, this festival is marked with bonfires, mass public prayers, and a parade of flagellants in which devout worshipers parade from one end of the town's main street to the other, whipping themselves the entire way.

In villages and small towns, the bonfire often includes effigies of Shelyn or Sarenrae, signifying Zon-Kuthon's conquest of beauty and light. This is a minor deviation from proper forms, although one that the Umbral Court generally tolerates, seeing no harm in the peasants' enthusiasm and some benefit to the populace's hatred of Zon-Kuthon's divine enemies. The villagers' flagellations are done with knotted cords or leather straps, leaving little permanent damage on even the most devout, and the parade of flagellants usually ends with villagers breaking off to celebrate in smaller groups or as couples.

In urban centers, the festival is grander and grimmer. The bonfires acknowledge no other deities, for none is worthy of mention at Zon-Kuthon's great rite, and celebrants often burn the bones of the year's sacrificial victims mixed in with wooden pyres. The parade of flagellants involves much bloodier ordeals, as those seeking the Umbral Court's favor strive to demonstrate their piety in the grisliest fashion they can imagine (and because, in cities, healing spells can be bought to remedy the damage afterward). The mass prayers are augmented with terrible shows of shadow magic, and there is no celebrating at the festival's end, for none but the most

masochistic are left in any condition to do anything but collapse in exhaustion afterward.

The Feast of the Survivors: Held on the third Moonday of Lamashan, this is a harvest feast laid out on a ceremonial table made of human bones. In older times, the bones were scavenged from those who had starved in the lands outside of Nidal, and served as a cold reminder of how much his people owed him for their salvation.

In the millennia since, however, the feast has evolved as the world changed around Nidal, and today the bones are gathered from past generations who lived and died in that community. These tables signify the centuries of Zon-Kuthon's protection and the long chain of ancestors who preceded every living Nidalese in his care.

The Shadowchaining: On the first day of Kuthona, Kuthite clerics commemorate what they see as the Midnight Lord's gift of shadow animals to the Nidalese, their masters. Kuthite residents with animal companions—whether they have been tainted by shadow or not—walk through the settlement while the inhabitants kneel and recite a long ritual prayer of humility and gratitude. The animal companions freely inflict minor wounds on the people they pass, although they are not permitted to kill or seriously injure anyone. At the end of the parade, the animal companions are all set loose to tear apart some outside enemy of the faith, to the delight and catharsis of the watching crowd.

LOCATIONS

Below is information about some of the key locations in shadow-touched Nidal.

Aevolar's Crossing: Though this shallow section of the southern Usk River seems to offer a tempting ford, locals avoid it. Rusted armor and algae-clad bones litter the riverbed—all that remains of a Chelish battalion that invaded Nidal centuries ago. For more information about Aevolar's Crossing, see page 43.

Albatross: A quiet cliffside port town built on an island overlooking Conqueror's Bay, Albatross is isolated, mist-shrouded, and eerily peaceful. Its fisherfolk go about their business with Nidalese reserve, and often it seems that the only noise on the island comes from the squawking of its namesake birds: great flocks of gray-winged gulls and breeding colonies of white albatrosses. Elders of the town claim to be able to read portents in the birds' unusual flight patterns, foretelling of death, misfortune, and storms.

Albatross is not only a humble fishing village; it is also where the Umbral Court sends operatives who have committed a capital offense in the eyes of the Kuthite clergy but who, for political reasons, cannot simply be killed. Here they are exiled to the boredom of a cold, miserable island with poor food and dull company. They are forbidden to harm the villagers and thus unable to

amuse themselves even with sadism—a prospect that fills most Umbral agents with dread.

One such exile is the druid **Alkaiva of the Uskwood** (NE female caligni^B druid 7), who crossed horns with Elolander of Ridwan, lost the ensuing political battle badly, and now finds herself wasting away in Albatross, her life officially preserved thanks to two lower-ranking aunts who are members of the Umbral Court. Alkaiva wanders the cliffs aimlessly with her animal companion, the white wolf Xiaq, and spends her days training the seabirds to conduct ever more complicated and beautiful aerial dances. Alkaiva still controls a cache of hidden, incriminating secrets about Elolander, including hints about his anti-Chelish activities in the Uskheart, and she would gladly trade these for an end to her exile—if she were confident that she could reveal her secrets without ending up dead at the hands of her uncanny enemy's assassins. In fact, Alkaiva has fended off several covert attacks in the past few years, leading her to believe that perhaps the powerful druid is not content to allow her to simply while away the rest of her days.

Ash Hollow: Situated in the northeastern Mindspin foothills, near the confluence of the Usk and the Gjurn

rivers, this remote mining village of about 150 is an important source of coal for Nidal's lightless capital. It also serves as a center of trade with the dwarves of Glimmerhold in Nirmathas. It is better known, however, for the neighboring mountain Aghor Thal and its observance of The Festival of Night's Return.

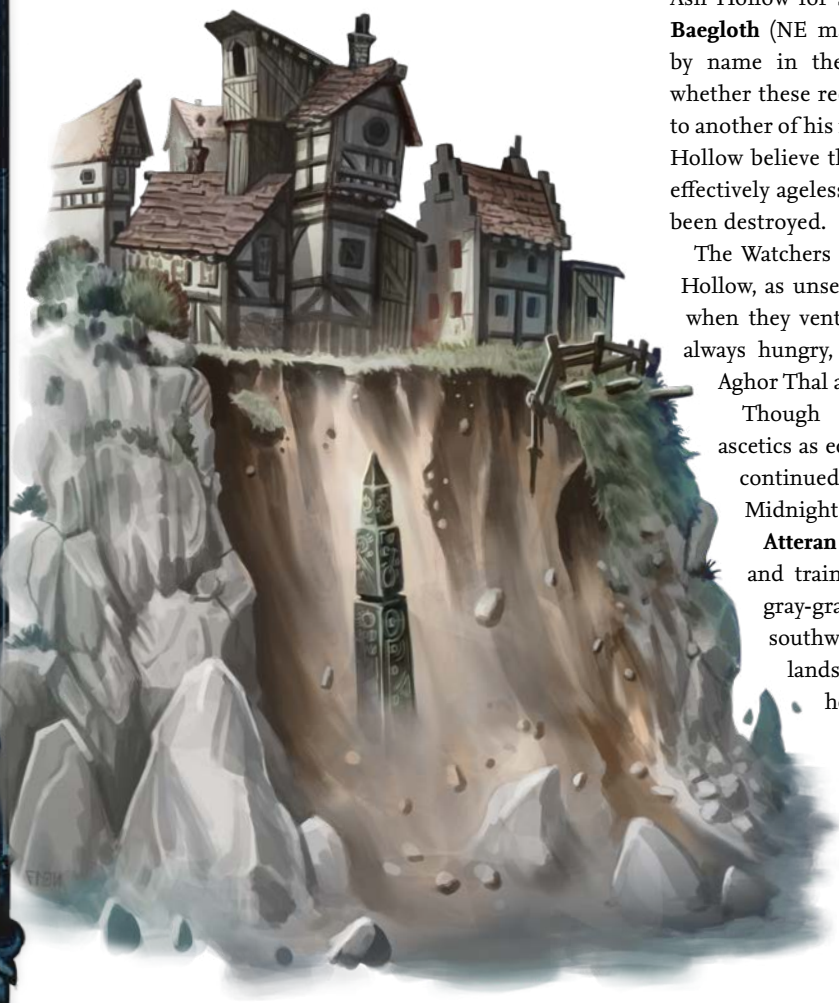
The Festival of Night's Return, held each year on the autumnal equinox, is celebrated throughout Nidal, most traditionally with burning effigies and self-flagellating processions. At Aghor Thal, it is a more sinister affair. Thousands make the pilgrimage to Ash Hollow each year, gathering in the valley and on the surrounding hillsides to see the Black Rose of Aghor Thal: a large iron crucible composed of ten concentric, overlapping panels, seated in a cave mouth on the mountain's leeward slope. During the festival, the Black Rose is heated with a great bonfire, and sacrifices are made from dusk until dawn.

Having been used in this capacity for millennia, the Black Rose of Aghor Thal long ago awakened as an evil idol (*Pathfinder Campaign Setting Occult Realms* 60). It is tended and fed by the Watchers on the Hill, a group of ascetic cultists who dwell in a ruined keep at the mountain's summit and occasionally filter down into Ash Hollow for supplies. Their leader, the inscrutable **Baegloth** (NE male human oracle^{APG} 9), is mentioned by name in the ceremony's earliest chronicles—yet whether these records refer to the same man or merely to another of his name none can say. The villagers of Ash Hollow believe that Baegloth and the other cultists are effectively ageless and will live until the Black Rose has been destroyed.

The Watchers pose little threat to the people of Ash Hollow, as unsettled as the ascetics make the villagers when they venture into town. Still, the Black Rose is always hungry, and travelers are encouraged to give Aghor Thal a wide berth.

Though many in Nidal quietly regard the ascetics as eccentrics or even heretics, the crucible's continued operation would seem to indicate the Midnight Lord's approval.

Atteran Ranches: The horse breeders, ranchers, and trainers of the Atteran Ranches claim the gray-grassed plains north of the Uskwood and southwest of Barrowmoor. On these ancestral lands, they raise dark nidarrmars, a breed of horse known for its swiftness, silence, and discipline in the face of danger, and guard the quick, wild horses called chiardmars, whose dappled gray coats are often likened to moon shadows on the grass. The people here trace their heritage back to the pre-Earthfall horselords who once ruled Nidal. They maintain many



of their ancestors' traditions, including the practice of archaic spear-wielding combat techniques and millennia-old funerary rites.

Many Nidalese in the cities also believe that the ranchers harbor Desnan dissidents trying to infiltrate Nidal. There is some truth to these rumors. **Daiye Atteran** (CG female human cleric of Desna 2) and **Odarc Blackraven** (NG male human bard 2) are two scions of leading Atteran families who have heard and been moved by the Starsong's call, though they go to great pains to hide this fact from everyone around them.

For the time being, **Vaide Atteran** (N male human ranger 4), Daiye's father and the charming patriarch of the Atteran clan, is covering for the wayward children by conducting loud and clumsy hunts for nonexistent agitators. Vaide has hired "dream hunters"—Kuthite fanatics and hired muscle from outside the Atteran Ranches—to help in this pursuit; since the outsiders are unfamiliar with the clans, it is relatively easy for the Atteran families to mislead them.

But the ruse cannot go on forever, as Vaide well knows. Sooner or later, one of the dream hunters will stumble upon the right trail, or someone from within the families will betray them. No secret stays hidden from the Umbral Court for long, and this one could well cost the region's residents everything.

Other points of interest in the Atteran Ranches include Barrowmoor (see page 44), the Cairn of Attai Horse-Speaker (*Pathfinder Campaign Setting: Tombs of Golarion* 5), Ravenscry (see page 32), the Uthori Steppes (see page 40), and Whitemound (see page 41).

Auginford: The small farming town of Auginford is a quiet place where the locals are happy to live in peace and avoid the Umbral Court's eye. At present, however, the people of Auginford are deeply conflicted about whether to seek out their shadowy superiors or try to deal independently with a problem that may be beyond their means to solve. The decision lies with Auginford's autocratic sheriff, **Joene Malsten** (N female human hunter^{ACG} 4), who has been quietly seeking audiences with other regional leaders under the guise of diplomacy to figure out whether she should involve Pangolais in this mounting problem.

Almost a year ago, a heavy rainstorm caused a mudslide outside town that revealed a toppled pillar of slick, green-flecked black stone carved into sinuous patterns that seem to wriggle beneath the eye. The pillar is profoundly unsettling, but it's too large for the townspeople to move, especially as it seems to be anchored in the earth somehow. Since the pillar was unearthed, many locals have heard strangled, whispery wailing in the small hours of the night coming from inside their homes, though there is never anything to be found, and all of Auginford's chickens have been laying

leathery-shelled blue eggs with nothing but stinking slime inside. What's worse, this past spring the town's livestock also began giving birth to slimy, half-formed, long-dead offspring. As the problem escalates, Malsten and Auginford's residents have become more desperate for answers.

Barrowmoor: An intense, unnatural chill pervades Barrowmoor, where cold winds blow over immense charcoal cairns and rattle tomb decorations of flint and braided horsehair. For more information about Barrowmoor, see page 44.

Blacksulfur Pond: Southwest of Nisroch is a silent pond, fed by no visible spring or stream, that appears black from afar. Up close, its waters reveal themselves to be clear, but there is a pane of shimmering darkness instead of mud or sand at the bottom of the pool. No fish or insects disturb the water's stillness, and no plants grow within a hand's span of its shores.

This is Blacksulfur Pond, so dubbed because locals initially believed that it must contain a fissure of noxious gasses bubbling from the Darklands below, given its absence of life and the darkness at its bottom. In actuality, however, the pond's bottom is a permanent portal that opens to a mirror pool on the Shadow Plane.

Because the mirror pool does not appear out of the ordinary on the Shadow Plane, where its opaque waters obscure the pond's bottom, few of the shadowy denizens on its other side have realized that a gate to Golarion lies on its floor. As such, it is rare that anything comes through the portal from the Shadow Plane into Blacksulfur Pond—so rare that, after decades of inactivity, the Umbral Court's vigilance over the pool has waned, and now only a single local Umbral agent, **Leorel of Nisroch** (NE male human abjurer 3), is assigned with maintaining its *alarm* spells and other paltry protections. As Blacksulfur Pond is an hour's ride from the nearest town and Leorel is neither dedicated to his duties nor fond of spending time on the road, more often than not he has let the spells lapse.

Brimstone Springs: The remote village retreat of Brimstone Springs, located high in the Mindspin Mountains, is best known for its sulfurous Soulsheen Baths. The baths present a striking series of vividly colored cascades and springs that reek of toxic, leaching minerals. The Nidalese have long visited these springs to perform a series of short baths that are believed to cure a wide variety of ailments. Most infamous are the daylong poison immersion sessions that, if they don't kill the bathers, grant them visions of their afterlives at the price of leaving their skin permanently stained yellow. Most believe that these springs are naturally occurring phenomena, but the truth is that these daylong sessions condemn mortal participants to eternal torments in the pits of Hell. They are tools of a drowning devil named Reinoks, who answers to Infernal

Duke Crocell, the ruler of the Palace of Delusions in Stygia. The Soulsheen Baths' superficial resemblance to the poisoned springs of Hell has made them popular among wealthy Chelaxians as well, and the springs have become an extremely fashionable destination following the Thrune Ascendancy. For more on the Brimstone Springs, see pages 66–67 of *Pathfinder Adventure Path #93: Forge of the Giant God*.

Cairn of Attai Horse-Speaker: The final resting place of the legendary Atteran chieftain Attai Horse-Speaker, who ruled his tribe over 10,000 years ago, has long been lost under the shifting mounds of Barrowmoor. Yet legends persist that his cairn remains intact among the fog-wreathed tombs, marked only by a weathered statue and an entrance that sinks down into the earth. For more information about this cairn, see pages 4–13 of *Pathfinder Campaign Setting: Tombs of Golarion*.

Castle of the Captive Sun: Volsazni Dezarr's country home is famed even outside Nidal for the collection of light-related artifacts and holy wonders kept within its walls, and for the unusual guests that the vampiric nobleman entertains. For more information about the Castle of the Captive Sun, see page 45.

Citadel Gheisteno: The Hellknight Order of the Crux once claimed this foreboding, skull-adorned fortress as its headquarters. In 4663 AR, after uncovering incontrovertible proof that the Crux Hellknights had betrayed their order's founding ideals and the Hellknight code of the Measure and the Chain, the Order of the Scourge, backed by House Thrune and Iomedaeans, razed Citadel Gheisteno to the ground and put its heretical occupants to the sword.

Twenty-five years later, a fire-scarred replica of the citadel arose practically overnight. Lictor Shokneir, once the Crux's leader and now a terrible graveknight, reclaimed the fortress with two of his most trusted lieutenants who had arisen as graveknights in their own right. Citadel Gheisteno stands under these villainous horrors today, lonely and accursed. For more information about Citadel Gheisteno, see *Pathfinder Tales: Hellknight* and pages 15–16 of *Pathfinder Campaign Setting: Chelax, The Infernal Empire*.

Crosspine: This village on the southeastern border of the Uskwood is primarily notable for sending an unusually high number of its children into arcane and druidic disciplines. Two of its more well-known natives are the shadowcaller Isiem and the shadowcasting sorcerer Ascaros. For more information about Crosspine, Isiem, and Ascaros, see *Pathfinder Tales: Nightglass* and *Pathfinder Tales: Nightblade*.

Dauphenal Vineyard: One of the relics of Nidal's pre-Thrune Chelish occupation is the Dauphenal Vineyard in the North Plains, founded during Shadowbreak in an attempt to encourage investment in the empire's strange

new shadowy holdings. The estate's founder, a scion of a now-extirpated Chelish noble house whose name has been stricken from the records, planted the vineyard's hills with alvarino, a cultivar of grape popular in Chelax but not widely known in Nidal.

Although the hoped-for accompanying investments never materialized, the Dauphenal Vineyard was a success almost immediately. The founder was a skilled vigneron and, to the general astonishment of Chelish society, was able to coax a light but surprisingly nuanced white wine from the grapes. His descendants maintained the vineyards until they made the fatal mistake of opposing House Thrune in the Chelish Civil War. The Umbral Court claimed the property afterward, but the quality of the wine declined precipitously until they brought in a Chelish-trained vigneron and graduate of a prestigious Elith Lorin academy, **Ylise of the Pale Sun** (NE female human druid 3/enchanter 2), to oversee operations. Today, the reputation of the Dauphenal Vineyard is largely restored to its former luster, and its wine commands as high a price as ever.

Dauphenal alvarino is a finicky wine, difficult to produce but highly sought after. It is crisp and herbal, with notes of pear and lemongrass, and has a grayish luster in the glass, evocative of liquid moonstone. In Chelax and Taldor, it is particularly popular in the summers and in the southern cities. In Nidal, it is popular year round, although it is difficult for anyone outside the Umbral Court to obtain a bottle of the costly wine, which is mostly reserved for export. A bottle of Dauphenal alvarino is, therefore, a significant gift in Nidal.

Edammera's Folly: This slender spire, long sealed behind rune-scribed steel doors, was once the research laboratory of Edammera of the Dusk Hall, one of the archmage Mesandroth Fiendlorn's many ill-fated assistants. It has stood abandoned for centuries, the farmland at its feet reclaimed by wild forest. For more information about Edammera's Folly, see page 46.

Elith Lorin: Sitting astride the Usk River, the small town of Elith Lorin is home to about 1,500 souls and is one of Nidal's most picturesque settlements. Its broad market square is home to the Fountain of Shelyn's Lament, a masterpiece by the sculptor Meletir of Nisroch, and is ringed by handsome limestone buildings, a result of Chelish investment in the wake of the Everwar. The Bridge of Vainglory, another ornate remnant of the Chelish occupation, spans the Usk, connecting the northern and southern sides of the town.

Elith Lorin is one of Nidal's most important transportation hubs. Its port collects livestock driven down from the Atteran Ranches and produce from the southern plains and routes them west to Nisroch or east to Pangolais. The grand residences that once housed Chelish dignitaries have been repurposed into offices

for officials of the state, staffed by the clerks and legates who ensure that the country's needs are met. Others have been turned to darker ends. Elith Lorin plays a key role in the Black Triune's control of the unruly west, serving as a convenient meeting point for the spies of Nisroch and their directors, the inquisitors of Pangolais. A former Arodenite church, located on a hill overlooking the northern side of town, has become so notorious for this activity that it is now known locally as the "Eye of Pangolais," and residents generally know in vague terms about the espionage based here.

Elith Lorin is best known, however, for the School of the Pale Sun, whose stately, tree-lined campus dominates the town's southern side. Second in prestige only to the Dusk Hall in Pangolais, the School of the Pale Sun trains the agents, emissaries, and shadowcallers marked for service beyond Nidal's borders. The faculty is primarily Chelish, as most students require extensive instruction in the customs and mores of the wider world. The Pale Sun's few Nidalese instructors—among them Headmistress **Virexia of Pangolais** (LE female human bard [archivist^{APG}] 7)—are there mainly to monitor for seditious activity and to educate the students about various less conspicuous ways of practicing the Midnight Lord's faith wherever they tread. As at Nidal's other great academies, admission is determined by divination, and the student body draws mainly from Pangolais and Ridwan. Its graduates are styled "of the Pale Sun."

The town's overseer is **Helthir of the Midnight Citadel** (LE male human inquisitor^{APG} 5), a true believer from an old Pangolais family. His primary undertaking is to ensure that the disorder and laxity of Nisroch does not spread eastward, and he uses a broad array of powers in pursuit of that goal. Monitoring visitors are a diverse roster of informers, who also search barges and carts. Only Nidal's most important residents expect correspondence sent through Elith Lorin to remain private. The town's insular fetchling community, generally concentrated on the north bank, is the only reliable refuge from Helthir's denouncers, but it is just as suspicious of outsiders as the broader population.



VIREXIA OF PANGOLAIS

Fields of Pain's Forgetting: Hidden deep in the Ombrefell are fields of luminous mushrooms, white poppies, and other narcotic and hallucinogenic plants—including, unusually for Nidal, the powerful painkiller and muscle relaxant flayleaf. Every plant grown in the Fields of Pain's Forgetting produces some form of addictive drug, and many of them dull or negate pain.

This is not accidental. A small portion of the fields' harvest is tainted with secondary poisons and deliberately diverted to suspected black marketers, enabling the Umbral Court to find the weaklings and unbelievers who try to avoid Zon-Kuthon's gifts. Most of the drugs, however, are purified and then sent to the Umbral Court for distribution to churches, cathedrals, and independent houses of torture. Overseeing this complex operation is Mistress Cultivator **Preali**

Dhat (N female fetchling^{ARG} alchemist^{APG} 4/druid 2), who also adjudicates distribution from the fields and related requests on behalf of the Umbral Court. The mistress is grumpy and jaded, owing in large part to her lack of membership on the court, and though she professes piety in Zon-Kuthon, her lack of zeal means her political status is unlikely to change despite her considerable alchemical and cultivating talents.

Ghorvaul's Crossing: East of the Sulfur River, in a valley carved by its swift waters, a smaller and lesser-known pass leads through the Mindspin Mountains into Molthune. Ghorvaul's Crossing is guarded by a creature nearly as old as, and perhaps even more dangerous than, the shadowstorms that roll through the Umbral Basin.

Ghorvaul's Crossing is home to the Speakers of the Ehrotai, a charnel colossus (*Pathfinder Campaign Setting: Inner Sea Bestiary* 10) created a few years after Earthfall, when the last of the Ehrotai tribe bowed to the truth that they could not survive in this harsh new world. These people refused to seek refuge with the Nidalese, as their long-standing enmity had taken on a bitter new intensity when the Nidalese surrendered to Zon-Kuthon. Death, the Ehrotai believed, was preferable to serving such a master.

They did not want their tribe's traditions to die with them, however, and so the spirit-speakers and shamans of the Ehrotai gathered in

a ritual suicide that was meant to enable their ghosts to preserve the memories of who their people had been. The intent was benign, but the result was not. The elders of the Ehrotai rose as a many-limbed monstrosity, their minds and bodies bound together in a hideous amalgam. They kept their memories and traditions, but perverted with the all-consuming horror of undeath.

Over the centuries, the Nidalese have reached an agreement with the Speakers of the Ehrotai. Shadowcallers bring occasional sacrifices—often of sentient beings—to the charnel colossus, who allows the Nidalese to ask it one question (usually pertaining to what the colossus has observed or who has passed through Ghorvaul's Crossing recently, but sometimes relating to older lore) for each of the unfortunates thus added to its collective bulk. Particularly worldly victims occasionally merit multiple questions or more in-depth answers, and it is common for jaded Kuthites to volunteer for consumption in search of one last extraordinary experience.

The Speakers of the Ehrotai have no loyalty to Nidal, and the charnel colossus can be persuaded to accept the same bargain of information—or, alternatively, safe passage—to anyone who brings it an adequate sacrifice. Those who fail to pay tribute, however, find an implacable foe in the pass.

Godsblood Crevasse: Southeast of Ridwan, in the hissing wastes of the Weeping Fields, is a deep, snaking fissure filled with crimson-tinged smoke that rises almost to the blackened stone walls on either side. Known as Godsblood Crevasse, it holds an unnaturally rich deposit of gems known locally as pigeon's-blood rubies. The Nidalese have mined those rubies for centuries without exhausting the find, leading many to believe that the rubies are not natural stones but a divine gift from Zon-Kuthon to his people. As a result, the rubies are among the only colored gemstones that are considered a mark of high taste as well as divine favor when incorporated into Nidalese high fashion.

Even so, nothing beyond the fine quality of the stones betrays any hint of otherworldly origin. The crevasse itself, however, is undoubtedly magical: the smoke that fills it is so caustic and poisonous that it kills any living creature within minutes. Accordingly, the Nidalese use alchemically petrified skeletons to mine

Godsblood Crevasse. Overseeing this unsettling labor force is **Grenda of Elith Lorin** (LE female graveknight^{B3} fighter 9), a vicious sadist and former Midnight Guard member who transformed into a graveknight upon her ascension to the Umbral Court.

Most of these skeletons are voluntarily bequeathed. The Kuthites allow citizens to sell their labor after death, which generally entails raising their remains as skeletons or zombies to work in environments that would be too hazardous for the living, such as Godsblood Crevasse. The caustic fog destroys even these unliving laborers after a few years or even months, however, and the mine's overseers are unscrupulous about how they secure new skeletons when their supply of volunteered corpses runs low.

Grayfrond: Near the western edge of Usk Lake, where the lake outflows to the Usk River, is a deeper basin where the water is curiously cold and the surrounding vegetation is frost blighted. Fisherfolk occasionally report seeing ice glimmering in the depths, and though this is widely dismissed as a drunkard's folly or a trick of the luminous water, they are correct: there is a frozen fiefdom deep beneath the waves.

This is the home of **Kialuk**, a gallupilluk (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 4 224) exiled from her northern homeland after a vicious fight with her sisters over a stolen child. Injured and desperate, Kialuk fled south, driven onward by hostile locals until she finally reached Usk Lake. There she

built a miserable hovel in the lake's too-warm waters, only slightly improved when Kialuk accosted an unlikely party of traveling Kuthite merchants and stole several crates of liquid ice (*Pathfinder RPG Ultimate Equipment* 108), enabling her to freeze her hovel to a more comfortable temperature for the foreseeable future. This display of cunning, combined with Kialuk's naturally irascible personality, has cowed the lake's lesser inhabitants, including several merrows and scraggs. Kialuk has taken to her newfound role as a lake queen, but she fears that when her dwindling supply of liquid ice runs out, the warm environment will force her to find a new lair. Desperate to keep her status quo, Kialuk has begun sending minions into the forest and



KIALUK OF GRAYFROND

down the rivers in search of anything—or anyone—who could make her frozen environment more permanent.

Hall to the Broken Dream: This unsettling fortress in the southern Mindspin Mountains appears to have been hewn from solid shadow. Its deep gray walls are strangely blurry, and the few locals to have glimpsed the place tell stories about strange rituals taking place under the watch of cruel kytons. For more information about the Hall to the Broken Dream, see page 47.

Hesperix Manor: Northeast of Ridwan, on the lip of the Umbral Basin, stands a lonely gray manor built in the pre-Throne Chelish style of a century ago, all geometric forms and graceful symmetries. This is Hesperix Manor, once the home of the Chelish diplomat Perevill Hesperix, whose family lost their home and their lives after the Chelish Civil War. Ownership of the property then reverted to the Umbral Court, whose members had little use for such an out-of-the-way manor and in whose care it languished for decades. Thirty years ago, however, the formal Umbral agent **Celefin of Pangolais** (LE female half-elf wizard 15) purchased the manor, and it has served as her home ever since.

Celefin is a vocal adherent of the Belevais Doctrine (see page 14) and believes that true Kuthite suffering, and therefore worship, is the domain of the living. This is not a popular view in certain circles of the Umbral Court, which includes several high-ranking undead members. Thus, despite years of petitioning, Celefin was never promoted from Umbral agent to full-ranking member of the Umbral Court. When it became clear that the political opposition to her candidacy would not lessen within her lifetime, Celefin withdrew from governmental service altogether and retired to Hesperix Manor in disgust.

In the 3 decades since her retirement, Celefin has devoted her energies to researching and disseminating strategies and weapons that can be used against the undead. She regularly publishes treatises on the subject, using a false name and relaying the manuscripts through intermediaries, and has struck up an unlikely correspondence with a number of Pharasmins and Sarenites in other countries who share her interest.

The Umbral Court is aware of her activities but chooses to ignore them, as Celefin is not actually flouting Nidalese law and is of sufficient loyalty and power that any forceful reprimand would be too troublesome to be worthwhile. However, there are several individual members of the court who take a less charitable view and who would gladly see Celefin punished for her temerity.

House of Lies: A sprawling, fortresslike estate overlooking the Usk River in the northwestern Uskwood houses the so-called Guild of Liars, a loose society of storytellers and con artists that gathers

every 5 years to regale each other in a competition of untruths. The House of Lies was founded during the Shadowbreak's period of cultural openness, but unlike many other such endeavors, the Umbral Court has allowed this one to stand. For more information about the House of Lies, see page 48.

Icebow Bridge: The village of Icebow Bridge, though quaint and darkly scenic, is unremarkable except for its single claim to fame: it holds the Library Without Light, a collection of pre-Earthfall texts that the fleeing survivors of Azlant and Thassilon carried with them into Nidal. The writings are not organized around any specific topic or locale; they are simply a near-random assortment of books, maps, records, and scrolls selected solely on the basis that their original owners felt that these, above all their other possessions, were most worth preserving for posterity.

Accordingly, the Library Without Light is written in a hundred different languages, most of which have been dead for centuries, and covers subjects ranging



from obscure religious rituals to genealogies of noble houses that ceased to exist millennia ago. It holds maps of continents shattered beyond recognition in Earthfall and detailed notations on the mating habits and migration patterns of species that have been extinct for ages. Virtually nothing in the library pertains to anything recognizable in the world today, since even the farthest-sighted predictions of its ancient seers were negated when Aroden's death put an end to reliable prophecy on Golarion.

Despite its lack of immediate relevance to the modern world, the Library Without Light draws seekers and scholars from far-flung lands, for its records contain many details, seemingly trivial or irrelevant at the time, that are of great significance to people chasing clues about present mysteries. Moreover, it is one of the few sources for accurate maps of pre-Earthfall empires, and skillful scholars can extrapolate present-day locations from the old ones. Scholars from across Nidal and even beyond petition to study at the Library Without Light. No one, however, is permitted access to the library without the express approval of Master Librarian **Hale Craggox** (NE male human investigator^{ACG} 4/wizard 2), the arbitrator of its records, who has an enormous staff of acolytes and apprentices at his command.

Because of the wealth of knowledge contained in the Library Without Light, and because the library draws foreign visitors who can be plumbed for knowledge about the outside world and sometimes persuaded to pay for assistance in navigating the library's collections, Icebow Bridge is considered a desirable posting for ambitious Umbral agents and members of the Umbral Court. It usually hosts at least one full member of the Umbral Court and three or four agents, and the quality of its lodgings and amenities is correspondingly higher than one might expect from a village of its size.

Irogath Monastery: Carved into the lower reaches of the Mindspin Mountains stands Irogath Monastery, a retreat for Kuthite ascetics dating back thousands of years. Many of its students have won renown across Nidal as scarred monks (*Pathfinder Campaign Setting: Horror Realms* 12–13), spreading the Irogath Monastery's fame.

The monastery consists of dozens of interlocking chambers chiseled into the mountainside, opening as often from above or below as by standard doors. Its outer chambers are designed with minimalist purity to encourage stoicism and the unflinching contemplation of life's sufferings. The reading rooms have neither desks nor lecterns; only bare benches, for the knowledge contained in the monastery's books is meant to be discomfiting to absorb. Bedrooms have alcoves cut into the walls but no pallets to soften them, and the food is exquisite but served in tiny portions. Icy water flows through many rooms, channeled from the mountain's snowmelt and diverted

through layered kinetic sculptures that transform the streams into dazzling displays of light, steel, and water.

Kuthite visitors flock here throughout the year but are not permitted to venture beyond the outer chambers. Only those who wish to truly test their mastery over pain and fear petition the monastery's leader, Mistress **Merinda the Striped** (LE female human monk [scarred monk] 8) to enter the inner chambers. It's said Mistress Merinda can look into the eyes of a petitioner and immediately know her devotions to Zon-Kuthon and heresies, regardless of the hopeful's arguments or any augmenting magic.

According to rumor, the inner chambers of the Irogath Monastery can be cut off from air, sealed into pitch darkness, flooded with water or noxious vapors, or otherwise made lethal. Some have lattices of spiked chains strung over abysses instead of solid floors. In deeper caverns, it is said, the maimed but living remains of previous contenders, maddened by agony and envy, try to tear down newer challengers.

No one speaks publicly of what, exactly, the reward for braving such hazards might be. Those who pass the monastery's trials are sworn to silence on the matter. Yet those who bear the spiked-chain Irogath brand on their backs have performed such extraordinary feats of fierceness and fortitude that the monastery never lacks for aspirants making the pilgrimage to its doors.

Kayalhi: Nearly all of the approximately 175 residents of Kayalhi are fetchlings, making this village unique in Nidal, where the kayal otherwise tend to live in small, tight-knit families spread throughout larger cities (see page 8 for more information about fetchlings in Nidal). Here, visiting humans are viewed with a wary eye, if not outright suspicion. The fetchlings of Kayalhi enjoy a surprisingly peaceful and prosperous existence, in no small part thanks to the village's hardscrabble and self-sufficient outlook.

Perhaps curiously, the village's fetchlings are not particularly pious, and they show no ambition of impressing Pangolais or appeasing the human Nidalese. Still, the severe gaze of the Umbral Court rarely turns upon them or seeks its children for service. The village's solid political status is the work of Kayalhi's Chancellor **Zelvith** (LN female old fetchling^{ARG} mesmerist^{OA} 4), who travels to the Nidalese capital regularly to sing the Umbral Court's praises, present evidence of Kayalhi's loyalty to the state, and generally do everything she can to keep her people safe from the Kuthites.

Most of the village's fetchlings think little about the sacrifices and hard decisions the chancellor makes to ensure that harrowing fates never befall the settlement. The chancellor herself encourages this perception, and she speaks little about the horrors she's seen in the nation's capital. In reality, in addition to her diplomatic lobbying, Zelvith runs an elite network of anonymous

spies stationed abroad, and it is primarily this flow of useful intelligence that keeps Kayalhi safe. Soon, however, the elderly Zelvith will need to find a replacement to bear her responsibilities, lest the village's fate be left spiraling toward certain doom.

No matter the resolution to this impending dilemma, however, fetchlings across Nidal know of Kayalhi and take pride in its existence. In recent decades, most major towns and cities have established an inconspicuous tavern or other gathering place informally called "the local kayalhi." Here, fetchlings can eat, drink, and be at ease among their own kind. Kayal weddings, new-baby celebrations, anniversary parties, and memorial services are often held at the local kayalhi.

Local kayalhis also serve as a crucial economic and social support for the fetchling community, and they serve as valuable clearinghouses for gossip. Information about Umbral Court crackdowns, superstitious locals who might make trouble, or other potentially helpful or dangerous tidbits are swiftly passed through the fetchling grapevine, which has its deepest roots in the local kayalhi.

Lost Lodge: Centuries ago, a small cult of Desnans built a secret lodge in the depths of the Uskwood, using a ritual of veil structure (*Pathfinder RPG Occult Adventures* 214) to conceal it from the albino druids who hunted them in that dark wood. Precious relics of their faith were stored there, as well as supplies, weapons, and all the information they could find on the plans and vulnerabilities of their Kuthite foes. Despite their caution, which protected the lodge itself from discovery, the Kuthites tracked the Desnan cultists down and, over several years, either destroyed or forced them into hiding. When the last of the Desnans died, their safe house fell into obscurity, for there was no one left who could see it. To the eyes of the uninitiated, the site appeared to be merely empty forest.

To prevent any future Desnans from returning to the Lost Lodge, the Uskwood druids set a nest of deathwebs (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 3 65) and other ageless guardians to dwell in the forest where they believed the lodge to be. As the years went by, however, the safe house's very existence was forgotten, and the druids turned their attention to other matters.

Today, the Lost Lodge is almost completely unknown to history, for the Kuthites have taken pains to strike it from their record books. Only a few mentions

survive in scattered writings and in a single trapped memory in the Cathedral of Embodied Wisdom in Pangolais. Even the Uskwood druids no longer remember why the deathwebs haunt that part of their forest, and all other guardians have been forgotten entirely.

Moonless Mirror: High in the cliffs overlooking Nisroch Bay is a gleaming crystal pane, slightly domed and easily 25 feet in diameter, behind which darkness seethes like a pot of boiling pitch. Known as the Moonless Mirror, this is a relic of the early days of the Everwar, when Chelish naval forces saw a portal to the Shadow Plane open in the cliffs before them and assumed it was some Nidalese defense. Naval wizards bombarded it with counterspells and abjurations, and when their arcane assault ended, they saw the glimmering half-circle embedded in the blasted cliffside.

The Chelish wizards' fusillade successfully contained the portal, but the dazzling display drew the curiosity



YISAOTHAİ THE OİL-TONGUED

of Yisaothai the Oil-Tongued, a shadow lord dark naga (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 4 238, *Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 211), who carved out a fiefdom on the Shadow Plane behind the Moonless Mirror and has lurked there ever since, whispering to any mortal who passes by with promises of power and wealth if only someone would break the mirror that holds him back. No one has taken Yisaothai's bargain yet, but a young fisherman named **Wyldon** (N male human expert 1)—being lovelorn, penniless, and desperate to win the affections of a local beauty—has been sorely tempted to try.

Soon, the naga may not even need Wyldon to escape. The Moonless Mirror's crystal is impervious to age, but the surrounding cliffside is not, and centuries of erosion have damaged the surrounding rock enough that the mirror shakes looser every day.

Nightbinder's Wharf: Just outside Nisroch, screened from the city's view by strategically planted stands of black-leaved trees, is Nightbinder's Wharf: a fortified quay where Nidalese shadowcallers and other agents board foreign ships for service abroad. Some Nidalese druids with shadowy or powerful animal companions take commissions from wealthy benefactors, members of the Umbral Court, or even foreign dignitaries to participate in special assignments abroad where their fearsome reputations and magics are of great advantage.

Most foreigners who offer such contracts are Chelish, either emissaries of House Thrune or wealthy private citizens seeking an unusual edge in business or personal security. Few other governments have both the means and the desire to use Nidalese enforcers, although occasional clandestine arrangements do occur. In general, however, non-Chelish visitors to Nightbinder's Wharf are individuals or private organizations whose governments might not be happy to learn of their plans.

Because of this, and because even the governmentally sanctioned operations have obvious security concerns, Nightbinder's Wharf is located outside Nisroch to insulate its activities from prying eyes.

The Umbral Court maintains tight secrecy around the location, and would-be spies—as well as innocent people who stumble into the area unknowingly—tend to vanish without a trace.

Nisroch: Gloomy, salt-stained Nisroch is perhaps the most joyless and forbidding of Nidal's cities, in large part because it is the primary port and point of access for foreigners. As such, the Umbral Court selectively fosters certain aspects of Nisroch to create a grotesque and nightmarishly exaggerated impression of the nation and its people, thereby deterring outsiders from lingering in Nidal or interfering with its workings. Known as the Maw of Shadow, Nisroch is deeply divided along economic lines, with the mighty Usk River separating the darkly graceful villas of the rich from the desolate hovels of the poor. For more information about this brutal and teeming city, including a full-page map, see pages

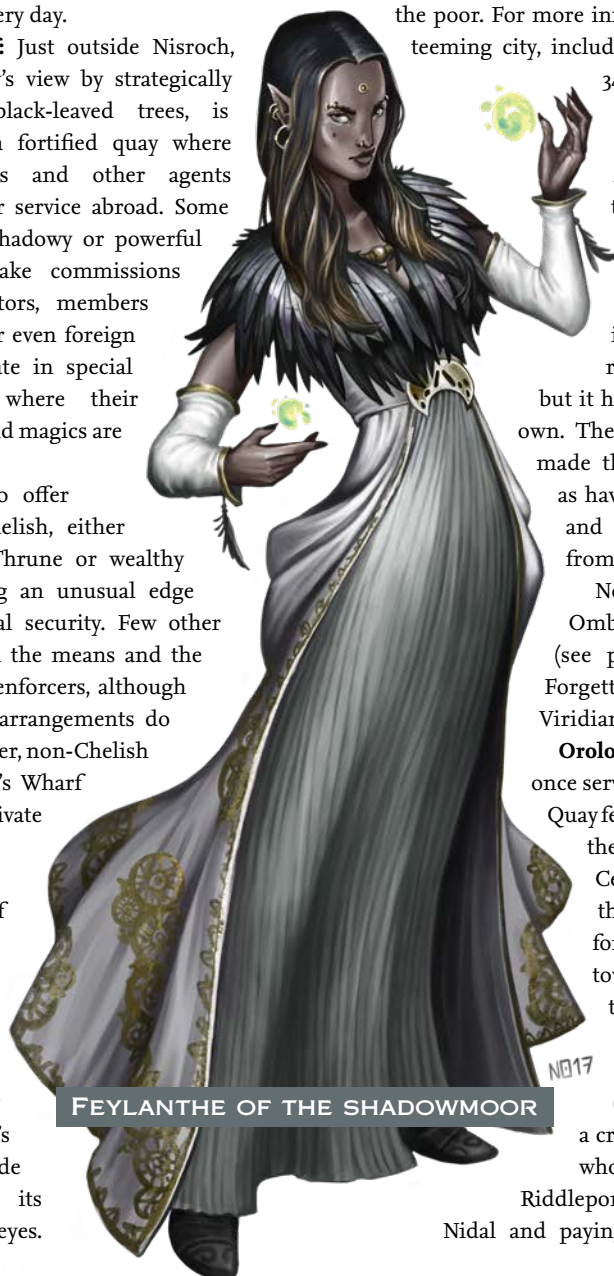
34–43 of *Pathfinder Campaign Setting: Cities of Golarion*.

Ombrefell: South of the Atteran Ranches and north of the Uskwood, the Ombrefell spreads its dark boughs across a wide swath of Nidal. This old and shadowed forest is smaller and less fearsome in reputation than the Uskwood, but it harbors relics and dangers of its own. The Xoskerik shadow giants have made their home here for millennia, as have forest drakes, malevolent fey, and a small delegation of druids from the Uskwood.

Notable locations in the Ombrefell include Soth-Silir (see page 36), the Fields of Pain's Forgetting (see page 19), and the Viridian Forge (see page 40).

Orolo's Quay: A derelict town that once served as a bustling seaport, Orolo's Quay fell into disrepair and neglect with the settlement of coastal Varisia. Centuries have passed since then, and the crumbling Chelish fortress that once anchored the town has largely been abandoned to seabirds and smugglers.

The current leader of those smugglers is **Brovos Gulltongue** (CN male half-orc brawler^{ACG} 6), a crude but cunning Varisian pirate who made so many enemies from Riddleport to Magnimar that fleeing to Nidal and paying superficial obeisance to the



FEYLANTHE OF THE SHADOWMOOR

Midnight Lord seemed safer than staying in the Varisian Gulf. Today, Brovos and his gang (creatively named “the Gulls,” a name which Brovos is quite fond of and is quick to pummel people for mocking) oversee a ragtag operation that mostly smuggles illicit food and liquor into Nidal and rare drugs and oddities out.

Occasionally, if the price is high enough and he can be persuaded that the Nidalese authorities won't look too closely, Brovos smuggles people as well, but he dislikes taking risks that might upset his comfortable but precarious perch in Orol's Quay or draw the ire of the Umbral Court. Those who seek his aid are well advised to hone a sympathetic story first. Brovos has a soft spot for helping runaway slaves and the needy elderly, since he fancies himself a bit of a people's hero. He's also susceptible to flattery, and the pirate considers himself a ladies' man, notwithstanding his habit of propping his muddy-booted feet on the dinner table and his fondness for eating live fish chased with swigs of Riddleport scorpion rum (a gift that works almost as well as a good story in winning Brovos's favor).

Smugglers and outlaws are not the only dangers in Orol's Quay, however. In addition to local sharks and venomous jellyfish, a colony of incutlis (Pathfinder RPG Bestiary 4 157) has made its home amid the submerged ruins of the old harbor. They occasionally seize isolated smugglers and refugees to use as zombies. Unexplained disappearances and random violence are hardly unheard of in any outlaws' settlement, and so far no one has noticed anything unusual to indicate the incutlis attacks. The aquatic horrors are careful to strike only at night or on days masked by heavy sea fog, and as of yet no one has gotten a clear view of the zombies and escaped to tell the tale.

Pangolais: Under the black leaves of the Uskwood, the hushed city of Pangolais glitters in a thousand shades of gray. Luminous white-cobbled streets run like rivers of dimmed moonlight underneath sharply arched, rose-windowed cathedrals and grand academies. Ancient libraries hold the collected wisdom and wrenching laments of Earthfall's survivors, while behind walls adorned with ornately carved reliefs of tortured souls in silver and obsidian, scholars delve into the mysteries of the Dark Tapestry and the deepest reaches of the Shadow Plane. The Cathedral of Exquisite Agony (see pages 4–13 of *Pathfinder Campaign Setting: Inner Sea Temples*)—the greatest temple to Zon-Kuthon on Golarion—stands at the city's heart.

In elegant cafes surrounded by fragrant moonflowers and the silvery, mournful melodies of Kuthite bladed harps, vampires and caligni converse alongside agents of the Umbral Court and a select handful of foreign dignitaries—for in the shade city, day and night are so indistinct as to be meaningless.

PANGOLAIS

LE large city

Corruption +3; **Crime** +1; **Economy** +2; **Law** +6;

Lore +3; **Society** +4

Qualities academic, city of darkness, insular, religiously intolerant (Zon-Kuthon), unholy site (Zon-Kuthon)

Danger +30

DEMOGRAPHICS

Population 18,900 (11,000 humans, 3,500 caligni^{B5}, 2,400 fetchlings^{B2}, 2,000 other)

Government autocracy

NOTABLE NPCs

Astarathian (LG male great wyrm gold dragon)

Captain Irciel of Ridwan (LN female caligni^{B5} monk 8)

Hierarch Chartaigne of the Cathedral (LE male vampire cleric of Zon-Kuthon 13)

High Mistress Feylanthe of the Shadowmoor

(LE female half-elf cleric of Zon-Kuthon 5/wizard 5/mystic theurge 3)

Theanor of Nisroch (NG male human illusionist 4)

MARKETPLACE

Base Value 8,000 gp; **Purchase Limit** 50,000 gp;

Spellcasting 9th

Minor Items 4d4; **Medium Items** 3d4; **Major Items** 2d4

SPECIAL QUALITIES

City of Darkness Pangolais is the center of the cruel faith of Zon-Kuthon and is populated largely by deeply evil people who use the nation and religion's laws to perpetuate truly vile practices and behavior. Zon-Kuthon's influence permeates the city and natural bright sunlight never shines here. (*Law* +2, *Society* –2, *Danger* +20)

Religiously Intolerant The people of Pangolais expect everyone in their city, even visitors, to pay obeisance to Zon-Kuthon. Those who openly disparage the religion run a high risk of imprisonment, torture, or worse. (*Members of non-Kuthite faiths must pay 150% of the normal price for goods and services and may face insult, mockery, or even violence.*)

Unholy Site Pangolais is the seat of the worship of Zon-Kuthon in the Inner Sea region. Many high-level priests of Zon-Kuthon live here, making it difficult for adherents of other religions to go about their lives undisturbed. (*Corruption* +2, *increase spellcasting by 2 levels*)

Life in Pangolais, for the wealthy and well connected, is gracious and smooth. The city offers exquisite dining, jewelry and glasswork of extraordinary craftsmanship, and spectacles including Kuthite chain-dancers who whirl spiked chains like ribbons and spin, suspended,

from hooks embedded in their pallid skin. To its favored citizens, Pangolais is a place of beauty and sophistication, albeit a curiously hushed and monochrome strain of beauty, and a particularly jaded sophistication.

For the poor and unlucky it is otherwise. For them, Pangolais is a city of predators, and there is no refuge from the sadists. An affront as small as speaking out of turn may lead to a servant losing his tongue, or even to being impaled on one of the gleaming silver sculptures that holds the silenced, agonized bodies of the tortured as artworks on display above the market squares. It is for his master to decide, and all masters in Pangolais are cruel.

The Black Triune is the unquestioned ruler of Nidal, and they are said to dwell in Pangolais. Few ever see them outside major religious ceremonies, however, and day-to-day administration falls to High Mistress Feylanthe of the Shadowmoor, an influential figure in the Umbral Court and the effective governor of Pangolais. Feylanthe is a lovely, severe woman with black-streaked ivory hair and a fondness for flowing gray gowns with capelets of iridescent black feathers. She is a capable and dispassionate administrator, although considerably less disciplined in her personal life, where she is given to such excesses that few of her lovers survive for a second assignation. This habit has won Feylanthe more than a few enemies, but as yet none of her victims' bereaved relatives has had the opportunity to strike back at the powerful governor.

The following locations marked on the map of Pangolais on page 27 are described below.

1. *Atelier Kiritane*: Kytons' continual quest to reinvent themselves by grafting means that they are not only grafting portions of living victims' bodies onto theirs, but also removing their own skin, flesh, and bone as they carve themselves into ever-evolving forms.

Much of that material finds its way to Atelier Kiritane, a popular and costly center of Pangolais couture, where the fetchling designer **Limris Kiritane** (LN female fetchling^{B2} expert 3) converts kyton skin and bone into stylish accessories for an avid clientele of pious Kuthites and well-heeled fashionistas. Kiritane's pieces are meticulously crafted and luxurious enough to impress the most jaded Chelaxian, but they are also generally designed to be worn by hooking them into one's flesh with pierced rings, appealing to devotees of Zon-Kuthon. Occasionally, a noble demands a piece of couture infused with magic, and in these cases the fetchling works with a number of ally spellcaster-merchants she has cultivated throughout the city.

While many of Atelier Kiritane's less dedicated clients content themselves with piercing the rings harmlessly into other layers of clothing, her more fanatical aficionados would never dream of wearing them that way. Indeed, they view it as a minor blasphemy

against the gifts entrusted to them by their dark god's favored servants. To these fanatical clients, it is virtually a sacrament to reciprocate the kytons' honor of immortalizing their victims by, in turn, binding the kytons' flesh to their own. They see anything less as a dishonor to the kytons, and perhaps even to the Midnight Lord. That this line of reasoning also provides a convenient justification for these envious customers to "liberate" pieces from wealthier and less reverent owners—pieces that, in many cases, the fanatics could not otherwise afford—is quietly overlooked.

2. *Bezin Hall*: This three-story building once served as an orphanage and religious school for the children of Pangolais. It fell into disrepair when the headmaster, Satriel Bezin, was exposed as an apostate and broken in the public square. Long abandoned, Bezin Hall has been an outwardly grand but derelict wreck for years. It stands in an unfashionable and out-of-the-way neighborhood where many fetchlings seeking to keep low profiles have chosen to live.

In recent weeks, neighbors have seen lights floating in the upper windows and heard chains groaning in its dusty halls. Beggars and orphans have been vanishing from the streets at night, and weak cries sometimes drift from Bezin Hall's broken windows.

The new resident of Bezin Hall is a lampadarius kyton (*Pathfinder Campaign Setting: Inner Sea Gods* 315) who, having forgotten his own name, took one of his victims' and now calls himself Mordain. Several months ago, Mordain grafted a qliploth-blighted appendage onto himself, failing to recognize the danger it presented. The blight's sin consumption has been destroying his mind and body, but because of the lampadarius's half-corporeal, shadowy nature, this destruction is not visually obvious. Mordain is dimly aware that his intelligence and sanity are eroding along with his flesh, but he does not recognize that the qliploth blight is the cause; he understands only that he must graft more flesh onto his body at a desperate pace to outrun the dissolution of his self.

Mordain's depredations on the community have become more desperate as the blight consumes him. As he begins preying on upstanding citizens, community leaders may seek help from the Umbral Court, despite their preference for avoiding Nidal's theocratic enforcers. Whether the court will act against a kyton—even a diseased and corrupted one—for the sake of subjects they deem unimportant is far from certain.

3. *Cathedral of Embodied Wisdom*: One of the kytons' earliest gifts to Nidalese civilization were *memory chains*, powerful artifacts enchanted to capture victims' experiences of torment so that they could be shared and relived again and again. To honor their inhuman benefactors' holy gift, the Kuthites gathered these memories into the Cathedral of Embodied Wisdom,

PANGOLAIS



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a sharp-peaked, ombré structure that gradates from obsidian-black at its base to palest ivory at the tips of its bell towers.

Many assume at first glance that the cathedral's lower levels are built of basalt, but in fact the entire structure is formed from bones lashed together with spiked steel chain. The oldest bones—some nearly 10,000 years old—have merely become so worn and stained with time that they appear as dark and indistinct lumps of stone.

The cathedral's inner walls are lined with shelves made of human skulls linked by spiked chains through their eye sockets. The effect is less horrific than fascinating, for the motif of clean bone and steel has a sterile look, and the geometric regularity of the arrangement gives it an eerie beauty that subsumes the individual shock of each skull. In this way, the cathedral's physical appearance echoes its purpose and central observation: that each individual experience of pain is embraced in the whole history and society of Nidal.

Upon these skull shelves rests an assemblage of torture devices unrivaled in Golarion. For millennia, the sadists of Nidal have sought to outdo one another and invent some new torment worthy of inclusion in the cathedral's collection. Each experience caught in its *memory chains* must be unique, and after all these centuries, earning that accolade is extremely difficult. It is considered the culmination of a life's work to earn a place on those shelves now.

Yet there is more than pain caught in the cathedral's chains. In addition to the memory of torment itself, the chains catch and extract pieces of the subjects' personal histories and knowledge. Fragments of long-lost information are hidden among the cathedral's memories of misery, and even those who have no interest in the kytons' sadomasochistic games are drawn to the cathedral in pursuit of esoteric lore.

Among the secrets known to be held in the Cathedral of Embodied Wisdom are the location of an original copy of *Secrets of the Dreaming Dark* (*Pathfinder Campaign Setting: Occult Mysteries* 62); long-forgotten rites of the Runelords; and the passphrase to enter the warded tomb of Uhorik the Witch-Painted, a long-dead warlord of Sarkoris. It is also widely known that much of the lore of ancient Thassilon and Azlant—and perhaps even that of the aboleths who preceded them—may be found in the cathedral's vaults.

So powerful is the lure of this knowledge that many Kuthites believe the kytons seeded those secrets among their memories of pain deliberately, the better to draw otherwise resistant souls into their grasp. No one is permitted to experience the cathedral's collection without first adding a new and unique torment to its shelves—a requirement that has, over the centuries, led to thousands of contributions from good-hearted but desperate seekers.

4. *Cathedral of Exquisite Agony*: The main temple in Pangolais and a major center for Kuthite worship across the Inner Sea region is the Cathedral of Exquisite Agony, built of charcoal-gray marble and polished steel in the form of a monster with a spiked carapace from a fever dream. For details on the cathedral, see pages 5–13 of *Pathfinder Campaign Setting: Inner Sea Temples*.

5. *The Chainhouse*: The Chainguard, Pangolais's city guard, is based out of the Chainhouse, a fortified three-story building located near the Cathedral of Exquisite Agony. Captain Irciele of Ridwan is the commander of the Chainguard and oversees its daily operations. Captain Irciele is not a Kuthite ideologue, but a pragmatist with no use for extremism or pretension. "Captain" isn't even her real title, but she finds it preferable to "Commander of Chains, Guardian of Shade, and Exalted Keeper of the Midnight Lord's Silenced Agonies," her official title, which Irciele deems an embarrassing absurdity and a distraction from a job she takes very seriously.

The Chainhouse has its own dungeon, located beneath the main building, which is mainly used for holding uncooperative witnesses and people in protective custody rather than offenders of Kuthite law. Criminals are not kept at the Chainhouse for long, since they are usually sent to the Cathedral of Exquisite Agony for questioning or to the public squares for torture. Nevertheless, when Captain Irciele has doubts about whether the Kuthites will examine a case properly, she has been known to keep criminals in her own custody until the investigation is complete. Nidalese law is cruel and deeply skewed against the powerless, but Irciele considers it her duty to see that it is enforced as fairly and dispassionately as possible.

6. *Dusk Hall*: Darkly beautiful, this soaring building of smoky glass is a gothic marvel of pointed arches and long, narrow windows tinted in myriad shades of gray. It is one of the storied magical schools of Pangolais, tasked with teaching Nidalese children to master the arcane arts and the mysteries of Zon-Kuthon so that they can go forth and serve the Midnight Lord across the world. (See *Pathfinder Tales: Nightglass* for more information about the Dusk Hall.)

7. *Frostfell Manor*: This fairy-tale mansion of pale stone and sharp-cut crystal is surrounded by a perpetual wreath of twinkling frost in the air. Frostfell Manor is reserved for visiting dignitaries from Irrisen, where Zon-Kuthon's worship finds some favor among the vicious winter witches and the jaded, dissolute aristocracy who rule that ever-frozen land. Irrisen's hereditary nobility, called the Jadwiga, are accustomed to greater luxury than Nidalese austerity typically affords, so Frostfell Manor was built to accommodate their tastes.

It also serves to isolate the Jadwiga, whom most Nidalese find distastefully greedy and undisciplined, and

makes them easier to spy upon. Irrisen, after all, is not an allied power, and while individual Irriseni may be fellow Kuthites, the Nidalese have little regard for their nation.

8. *Gold Manticore Fount*: One of the best-kept secrets among the poor and disenfranchised of Pangolais is Gold Manticore Fount, so named because one of the 17 sculpted beasts supporting the fountain's great obsidian basin is a manticore carved from obsidian with three golden tufts hidden among the steel spikes of its ruff. This is the subtle sign by which the fountain can be distinguished from all the others in Pangolais's poorer neighborhoods.

For centuries, a handful of downtrodden citizens have shared the secret that a wish whispered into the manticore's ear on the first night of the new moon each month might come true, if the wisher is of good heart and the wish is a genuine need. Worried parents who prayed for sick children have woken to find them well; starving paupers who wished for food have found mysterious accounts funded for them at a local greengrocer. On rare but legendary occasion, people who asked for seemingly impossible things have found foreign strangers on their doorsteps, ready to champion their causes.

The true secret of the fountain is that, on the appointed nights, the gold dragon (*Pathfinder Campaign Setting: Dragons Revisited* 38–39) Astarathian—who lives in Pangolais under a false human identity (and maintains the greengrocer's shop with the mysteriously generous accounts)—watches over it. If Astarathian believes that the wish is worthy, he will assist however he can without compromising his identity—whether that involves using his own considerable power or, under a different guise, hiring outsiders to do so.

9. *Hall of the Chronicles*: In the immediate wake of Earthfall, writing materials were hard to come by outside Nidal as survivors fled for their lives with few possessions. Few thought to salvage parchment during this chaotic time. Accordingly, as outsiders poured into Nidal, they brought with them records of the devastation that they had etched with crude chisels fashioned from stones and other materials they found around them.

These grisly records became the *Chronicles in Tooth and Bone*, a collection of vivid firsthand recounting of the ruin that Earthfall's survivors experienced across the Inner Sea region. In addition to being invaluable historical documents, the chronicles preserve numerous long-lost dialects, physical artifacts, and religious customs—particularly, for grim and obvious reasons, funerary rites.

Nidalese archivists continually translate these ancient languages into modern forms, working from the original texts as well as from centuries of intermediate translations that provide additional context and understanding unavailable anywhere else in the world. Because the Nidalese can draw upon this rich tapestry of

unbroken understanding, the archivists trained in the *Chronicles of Tooth and Bone* are widely accounted to have the best modern understanding of these rare and long-dead cultures.

10. *Moth and Flame*: A popular tavern in Pangolais, the Moth and Flame is known for its elaborate, illusion-augmented floor shows, the most popular of which depicts a Desnan “moth” being drawn to a disguised kyton’s “flame” and ends with the moth dancer’s chained torment and apparent immolation in front of the crowd. The dancers are graceful and talented, and their illusory ordeals are extremely convincing, so the shows draw an appreciative crowd.

The shows also provide a convenient cover for the tavern’s Desnan paraphernalia, much of which is actually real. The proprietor, Theanor of Nisroch, and the lead dancer, **Lephalia Silvermoth** (CG female human bard 3), are both followers of the Starsong, and the Moth and Flame operates as the secret gathering point for Desnans in Pangolais. They never meet at the tavern—that would be far too dangerous—but Theanor and Lephalia relay messages, arrange supply drops, and sometimes smuggle fellow worshipers into or out of the city using a variety of disguises.

11. *New Calignos*: This section of Pangolais is heavily populated by caligni, who have dubbed it “New Calignos” and have gone to great pains to recreate what they imagine their ancestors’ original settlement in the Azlanti Empire must have been like.

Architectural flourishes such as swooping rooflines and ornately tiled walkways give New Calignos a look and feel that is distinct from the rest of Pangolais. Purple-hearted white flowers called “stars of Azlant”—a species preserved in the Garden of the Ancients, and a rare flash of color in monochrome Pangolais—fill the window boxes of private residences and tumble from plinths mounted at street crossings, perfuming the neighborhood with a subtle fragrance that hooks deep into caligni memories. Every bakery sells little leaf-shaped cakes filled with torani nut paste, and every grandmother has a unique family recipe for the savory steamed dumplings called *duvai* that are served at children’s namedays, one for each year.

Whether these traditions are actually authentic to Azlanti culture is dubious at best. Caligni scholars spend lifetimes poring over ancient records to mine fragments of information about their heritage, but Azlant was a wide and far-flung empire, and New Calignos is built on many different threads pulled from disparate corners of Azlant. What the caligni have cobbled together is a piecemeal imagining of an imperfectly remembered world, not an authentic recreation of its reality.

After so many generations, however, it hardly matters. Whether or not the traditions of New Calignos were

RIDWAN

LE large city

Corruption +3; **Crime** +1; **Economy** +0; **Law** +6; **Lore** +3; **Society** -2

Qualities academic, city of darkness, fortress, insular, religiously intolerant (Zon-Kuthon)

Danger +30

DEMOGRAPHICS

Population 11,400 (9,700 humans, 1,300 caligni, 200 fetchlings^{B2}, 200 other)

Government autocracy

NOTABLE NPCs

Commandant-General Maidelle of Ridwan

(LE female human fighter 9)

Commandant-General Xherian of the Dusk Hall

(LE male human conjurer 12)

Hierarch Itherine of the Shadowflame (LE female

venerable human cleric of Zon-Kuthon 14)

Midnight General Kyvicir of Ridwan (LE male

caligni^{B5} inquisitor^{APG} of Zon-Kuthon 11)

Nightspeaker Virique of the Uskwood (LE female

human investigator^{ACG} 8)

MARKETPLACE

Base Value 6,400 gp; **Purchase Limit** 40,000 gp;

Spellcasting 9th

Minor Items 4d4; **Medium Items** 3d4; **Major**

Items 2d4

SPECIAL QUALITIES

City of Darkness Ridwan is a major city of the cruel faith of Zon-Kuthon and is populated largely by deeply evil people who use the nation and religion's laws to perpetuate truly vile practices and behavior. Zon-Kuthon's influence permeates the city and natural bright sunlight never shines here. (*Law* +2, *Society* -2, *Danger* +20)

Fortress Ridwan is foremost a military settlement, and its amenities and economy are geared toward martial concerns. (*Economy* -2, *Society* -2)

Religiously Intolerant The people of Ridwan expect everyone in their city, even visitors, to pay obeisance to Zon-Kuthon. Those who openly disparage the religion run a high risk of imprisonment, torture, or worse. (*Members of non-Kuthite faiths must pay 150% of the normal price for goods and services and may face mockery, insult, or even violence.*)

is simultaneously deeply rooted and fragile, for it depends on continual renewal by adoption to survive.

12. *Orochel House*: This elegant manor of dark stone and gray-tinted glass located near the Chelish embassy is where most foreigners stay when visiting Pangolais. The Umbral Court prefers to keep outsiders under subtle but constant surveillance in Nidal, and so other innkeepers either refuse to accept foreigners altogether or try to dissuade them by overcharging, requiring gory displays of devotion to Zon-Kuthon, or simply directing them to Orochel House.

Although Orochel House is expensively, if sparsely, appointed, its prices are surprisingly moderate. The food is good, the rooms clean, and the servants efficient and polite. The only drawback is that the entire building is under surveillance by the Umbral Court. Scrysspheres and other spying devices are scattered throughout the premises, and every servant in the building reports to the court.

13. *Shadeglass Foundry*: Near the riverside in Pangolais stands the Shadeglass Foundry, where a unique type of Nidalese glass is produced using the ashes of the Uskwood's black-leaved trees, which lend a supernatural gray tint to the glass. The finished product—called shadowglass—splits light into a multiplicity of shadows, casting them in varied patterns that are dense and complex no matter how much or how little light strikes the glass. Only in absolute darkness does shadowglass fail to create its profusion of shadows.

Shadowglass windows and artworks are rare outside Nidal and are worth 50 to 500 gp to collectors, with larger and more complex pieces commanding even higher sums. The glass is also valuable in crafting shadow- and illusion-related magical items.

14. *Shrine of Convocations*: Twice a year, in spring and autumn, the Umbral Court convenes at the Shrine of Convocations to issue proclamations to the people of Nidal, settle troublesome disputes between their members, and vote on the elevation of any new members whose names have been submitted for inclusion in the court. The Umbral Court also hears reports from prominent members and agents involved in foreign policy, domestic affairs, and theological and arcane studies, and determines the direction that these affairs should take in the next half year.

On matters of grave importance, the Black Triune may issue direct instructions, which may not be disobeyed. In most other cases, the Umbral Court reaches an agreement among its own members after thorough discussion. Despite the divisions that run deep among certain members of the court, it is exceedingly uncommon for these discussions to end without clear resolution, since all members are under a divine mandate to put their own interests aside and seek the best outcome for Nidal. They are permitted to plot

authentic to Azlant, they have become deeply so to the caligni who grew up eating their grandmothers' dumplings and celebrating feast days with nut-paste cakes decorated with purple-centered flowers. In this way, a society of orphans has painstakingly built a culture that

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against one another privately, but not to undermine the nation's interests in setting policy.

Absent explicit dispensation, attendance at the convocation is mandatory for all Umbral Court members on pain of death. This is, accordingly, one of the primary means by which members plot to dispose of one another, since preventing a rival from attending a convocation can often be arranged without showing one's hand and, if successful, results in that rival's death by order of the Black Triune.

Plains of Night: One of the few holdings in the Atteran Ranches not exclusively claimed by descendants of the horselords, this ranch is viewed with some suspicion for the comparatively large number of foreigners it employs. It is a sufficiently modest operation that doesn't compete with the great Atteran clans, and its proprietor Etrixia has won the locals' respect by repeatedly demonstrating the quality of her breeding program, but this has mostly won Etrixia the privilege of being ignored, not embraced. For more information about the Plains of Night, see page 49.

Ravenscry: This ancient basalt sculpture, depicting an enormous, spread-winged raven perched over a sacrificial altar, is a legacy from a splinter tribe in the Atteran Ranches that broke away from Zon-Kuthon and was extinguished centuries ago. Nothing remains of the tribe—not even their name—save this altar, and the altar stands only because the Kuthites who crushed the tribespeople thought it amusing to sacrifice them, one by one, to the spirits they had venerated over Zon-Kuthon. Desecrated and robbed of its worshipers, the altar became powerless, and the Kuthites left it to stand as a tombstone over the bones of its people.

For hundreds of years the statue has stood neglected, its feet whipped by windblown gray grass. Recently, however, **Adannos Blackraven** (LN male human fighter 5), patriarch of the Blackraven tribe, has found himself drawn to the altar. Adannos is worried about his son, Odarac, whom he correctly suspects of being drawn to Desnan heresies and therefore risks great danger.

To clear his head, Adannos goes on long solitary rides across the Atteran grasslands. On one such ride he encountered an oversized raven perched atop the altar who spoke to him, promising to help Adannos protect his son and, beyond that, lead his tribe to surpassing glory. Although Adannos was initially suspicious of the raven, its initial advice proved sound, and over the past few months he has been impressed with its wisdom and magical boons. He now visits the altar regularly to seek out the raven's counsel. He suspects that the raven will eventually ask him to revive the heresies that the altar's original creators followed and is steeling himself to make that decision soon.

In truth, however, the raven is no divine emissary. It is a vilderavn (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 5 268), a malevolent

fey spirit that intends to tempt Adannos not only into apostasy, but into open warfare with Zon-Kuthon's faithful—a war that the Blackraven tribe cannot hope to win, and which will surely end in their torture and destruction, just as became of the last tribe the vilderavn tempted into ruin with the very same altar.

Ridwan: The fortress city of Ridwan stands under a blackened sky. Sulfurous clouds of smoke and dust belched from the fissure-riddled Weeping Fields (see page 40) cast the city into an eternal gloom as dense and unchanging as that of Pangolais, though far less serene. Fire tints the clouds' bellies an eerie violet, for in the heart of Ridwan's fortress is an immense rift, edged in black flame, that opens to the Deeping Darkness, a lightless chasm in the depths of the Shadow Plane. This is where Zon-Kuthon is said to have first emerged after Earthfall from his Shadow Plane prison, and where he shortly thereafter coaxed three horselord leaders into founding his unholy nation. (See page 5 for more about these events.)

Ridwan began as an unholy shrine built around the Shadowflame Rift, as the gate to the Shadow Plane at its center is called. Over centuries, it expanded into a fortified tower, then to its current state as a stern fortress built of rough, crystal-flecked black stone that reflects the rifts' flame in innumerable tiny mirrors. Today, the Shadowflame Cathedral is a major holy site in the Kuthite faith. Together with the Midnight Citadel, it anchors a city whose sole purpose is to train and harden fanatic souls into warriors capable of crushing the Midnight Lord's enemies in this world and beyond.

There is little other than the military fortress in Ridwan. The blasted expanses of cracked rock, hissing vapor, and prowling horrors that constitute the Weeping Fields are inhospitable to human settlement, and no farming is possible nearby. Ridwan's food is either imported or conjured by the clerics who inhabit its halls, with occasional supplements of empty-eyed, ink-fleshed fish and fowl brought through the rifts from the Shadow Plane.

The following locations marked on the map of Ridwan on page 31 are described below.

1. **Crucible Hall:** Orphans and foundlings sent to Ridwan for training are housed in Crucible Hall, a charmless, spartan dormitory where children spend nearly every waking hour honing their bodies for combat and their minds for the cruel mysteries of Zon-Kuthon's faith. Most trainees spend over a decade in Crucible Hall, purposefully isolated from anything that might cause them to question their faith, and by the time they leave to attempt the Weeper's Ordeal in the nearby Weeping Fields, they have been forged into utter fanatics.

2. **Midnight Citadel:** The walled city of Ridwan is dominated by two structures: the Shadowflame Cathedral,

its unholy center, and the Midnight Citadel, a forbidding edifice of rough black-and-gray stone crowned with immense curved spikes of steel, where Zon-Kuthon's armies are forged in pain.

The Midnight Lord's soldiers do not train against mortal armies, for Nidal has never held any interest in expanding beyond its divinely set borders and considers defense largely unnecessary while Zon-Kuthon shields their land. Instead, the Adamant Guard trains for three purposes: to crush any hint of heresy among the faithful, to neutralize escaped thralls or other wandering monsters that might threaten the populace, and to face the immortal foes that are the only true adversaries of concern to Zon-Kuthon. Thus, while Ridwan's Midnight Citadel produces many fighters, it also trains a large number of inquisitors, magi, rangers, and warpriests. All Nidalese soldiers train in the Midnight Citadel for at least a few months, but only the most dedicated attempt the Weeper's Ordeal that would elevate them to the ranks of the elite Adamant Guard.

Midnight General Kyvicir of Ridwan is the member of the Umbral Court responsible for overseeing the fortress. Under him, duties are divided into three branches: martial training and supervising the Adamant Guard, under the charge of Commandant-General Maidelle of Ridwan; the magical auxiliaries and the binding of nightmare beasts called from the rifts, under the command of Commandant-General Xherian of the Dusk Hall; and updating the histories and holy texts with the continual revelations of the Weeping Fields, maintained by Nightspeaker Virique of the Uskwood. Three apostle kytons also serve in the fortress, rewarding faithful Kuthites with their agonizing prayers and binding wayward souls with seductive orations.

3. *Redbottle Foundry*: Established in Ridwan just a few years ago, Redbottle Foundry positions itself as a competitor to the storied Shadeglass Foundry of Pangolais (see page 30). Using finely powdered rocks from the hissing rifts of the Weeping Fields, Redbottle Foundry produces a deep black glass with an iridescent red overlay that sees little demand in Nidal but has become extremely popular in diabolist-ruled Cheliah.

But glass is not its only export. The elderly founder of Redbottle Foundry, **Lemias of Ridwan** (NE male human wizard 11), is a master glassworker and a necromancer with a deep grudge against Cheliah, where, decades ago, rebels murdered his daughter while she was serving in Westcrown's Midnight Guard. Lemias blames Cheliah's government for failing to adequately protect his daughter and its rebellious people for killing her, and he loathes them all. But Lemias has figured out how to avenge his daughter's murder: Nidalese law rarely prescribes execution as a punishment. Torture and mutilation are preferred for nearly all offenders, no matter how

egregious their crimes. Yet it is not uncommon for the torments to be so severe that the subjects die, especially when the condemned are already weakened by poor treatment in the dungeons.

Recognizing this fact, Lemias has been bribing two of Ridwan's torturers to "accidentally" kill the murderers in their care, then binding the murderers' spirits into his bottles as polongs (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 5 196) and sending them out in ordinary shipments to Cheliah. Lemias is careful to keep his activities discreet, and he sometimes teleports to other Nidalese settlements to find his victims, but he ensures that one or two bottles in every shipment of 500 contains a polong to be delivered to some unknowing buyer.

Perversely, as rumors of Redbottle Foundry's secret gifts become known in Cheliah, demand for the bottles has only increased. While some of the polongs end up in the hands of hapless "masters" whom they quickly kill, others have found their buyers perfectly delighted to be given undead assassins. The Chelish brokers who have begun to suspect Redbottle Foundry's secret are, for the most part, inclined to keep it and profit from it.

4. *Shadowflame Cathedral*: Built around the Shadowflame Rift where Zon-Kuthon made Kuthite Nidal's formative pact with the Black Triune, the Shadowflame Cathedral is one of the evil faith's holiest sites. It is a tower of rough black stone, its base built with a bulky crudeness that reflects the limited architectural sophistication of the ancient Nidalese. The upper levels incorporate Azlanti and Thassilonian influences, blending them with an inventiveness that exists nowhere else in the modern world, but rendered in the same basalt that was the only building material available at the time. The result is an architectural marvel that impels scholars to visit Ridwan merely to study the cathedral, notwithstanding the journey's difficulty.

The interior of the Shadowflame Cathedral is filled with darkly dazzling arrays of beaten silver mirrors, smoky quartz and shadowglass prisms, and polished steel chains that gleam about the other ornaments. All these adornments reflect the fissures of tainted fire that erupt throughout the cathedral, culminating in the Shadowflame Rift. Zon-Kuthon's presence hangs heavy throughout the cathedral, overawing even the most jaded souls with the undeniable aura of the unholy divine.

Adding to this ambiance is the cathedral's overseer and high mistress, Hierarch Itherine of the Shadowflame, who has spent considerable decades building the cathedral's notorious reputation within and beyond Nidal. Itherine claims to have been born of shadow within the very walls of the cathedral, on its highest unholy altar—thus her self-styled surname—though some clerics of the evil deity whisper that she in fact originated as a foundling on the church's doorstep.

Each year on the winter solstice, the most devout Kuthites gather in the Shadowflame Cathedral for the Baptism in Midnight, a religious ceremony that culminates with the most devoted of Zon-Kuthon's followers plunging themselves into the Shadowflame Rift in order to submit themselves to their god's personal judgment. Some of them disappear into the rift and never return, but others emerge transformed, mutilated, or blessed with some token of the Midnight Lord's awful favor.

All who survive the experience speak of it with inarticulate wonder and terrible yearning, but it is well known that no one may attempt the baptism twice—vying for his attention twice in this manner is an act of hubris that Zon-Kuthon does not tolerate—and, curiously, no member of the Umbral Court ever seems to undergo the Baptism in Midnight.

One wing of the Shadowflame Cathedral is devoted to row upon row of obsidian spheres, each the size of an apple and polished to a glossy black. Although the spheres are kept in a darkened wing, curious silvery sparks and pale rainbows dance across their surfaces, as if they were reflecting lights from some other world.

This may well be the truth. Known as the *Voyages into the Void*, the spheres hold the collected memories of planar travelers who have ventured into the dark spaces between the stars and returned, not always as they were when they left. Because words are inadequate to describe such travels, the Kuthites extract the memories directly, then enshrine them in the cathedral so that those who wish to retrace their god's footsteps can attempt to grasp some shard of what Zon-Kuthon might have seen.

Not all the memories in the collection are voluntarily given. Kytons, master shadowcallers, and other planar travelers sometimes find lost or ruined explorers in their journeys and may extract the memory of their

experiences in exchange for shepherding those explorers to the relative safety of Nidal.

Access to the *Voyages into the Void* is carefully controlled, not only because of the value of the information, but because the direct nature of the experience may allow creeping influences from the Dark Tapestry to touch susceptible minds. Because individuals who are deeply interested in the Dark Tapestry tend to risk madness from multiple sources over the course of their studies, and because the malevolence of that world can be extremely subtle, it is impossible to prove conclusively that anyone has been driven insane by vicariously reliving another's journey using the *Voyages into the Void*, but many scholars believe the possibility is very real.

Devout Kuthites may petition the Umbral Court to study the collection, while outsiders must make a generous tithe to the cathedral to be considered. In both cases, the visitors are subject to magical interrogation before and after visiting the collection. Those who are deemed unworthy—including those who would use the knowledge to foment chaos, such as cultists of the Great Old Ones—do not return from the Shadowflame Cathedral, except perhaps as skeletons that are sent to mine the Godsblood Crevasse (see page 20).

5. *Spikeforge*: In the shadow of the Midnight Citadel, silent servitors of Zon-Kuthon gather the chains and spikes that kytons discard when they cast aside chunks of their unwanted flesh. These pieces are taken to the Spikeforge and subjected to its cleansing flames, which burn away the

kytons' flesh and melt their chains into liquid metal that can be reformed into vicious weapons for Ridwan's army.

The Spikeforge's arcane smiths produce weapons using Ridwan's steel mixed with the metal recovered from the kytons' molten chains. Such weapons are prized not only for their terrible efficacy in battle, but also because



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they represent a significant blessing from Zon-Kuthon. Each of these weapons is named before it is bestowed, supposedly by the kytons whose chains it carries.

6. *The Soulbooks*: Beneath the Midnight Citadel, secured by triple walls and a labyrinth filled with guardians both living and not, Zon-Kuthon's faithful keep the *Soulbooks*: the annals of all births and deaths in Nidal, updated every year after the Feast of the Survivors. By order of the Black Triune, each village and town is responsible for submitting its own records, which are meticulously maintained lest some error draw the Umbral Court's wrath. This is one of the oldest laws in Nidal, having been issued in the immediate aftermath of Earthfall, and it has never been altered.

Why these seemingly mundane records should be of such importance to the Black Triune is unclear. Unlike the Umbral Court, which is riven by semisecret dissensions and petty politics, the Triune acts only in accordance with Zon-Kuthon's expressed will.

Peasant superstition holds that the *Soulbooks* hold the souls of all Nidalese in bondage and are the means by which their dread god claims their spirits after death. Religious and planar scholars who have studied the matter suggest that there might be some truth to this hypothesis. Kytons are known to wrench souls away from Pharasma's judgment by mysterious means, and it is possible that the *Soulbooks* may be involved in whatever rituals they use.

Rivercroft: The small fishing town of Rivercroft, with a population of about 300, makes its living by netting fish at the juncture of the Usk and Gjurn rivers, while also maintaining two toll bridges over the shallows of each waterway. Although the lion's share of the tolls goes to Pangolais, the village takes enough of a cut to make it one of the wealthier towns in provincial Nidal and a relatively attractive posting for ambitious Kuthites hoping to advance their careers.

The current holder of that post is the Umbral agent **Beldiore Chaintongue** (NE male caligni^{B5} magus^{UM} 7/ Umbral Court agent 1; *Pathfinder Campaign Setting: Paths of Prestige* 58), who sees an opportunity for advancement in a recent prize carried to Rivercroft by a trader who had just finished an expedition into the Umbral Basin. This trader had discovered a polished oblong of shadowglass—a special material created using the ashes of Uskwood trees—measuring nearly 20 feet long and 5 wide, within which lays the withered but well-preserved corpse of a shadow giant (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 6 135) in full ceremonial regalia of a style that vanished at least 300 years ago.

In his arms, the dead shadow giant clasps a locked casket of rune-inscribed obsidian, easily large enough to serve as a human coffin. The shadow giant's arms are wrapped tightly in spiked chains, and the spill of long-dried blood on his wrists suggests that he deliberately cut

them open on two curved blades attached to those chains, soaking the stone coffin in his life's blood. The runes are largely obscured via the giant's arms and a thick layer of dried blood, but Beldiore suspects that they are ancient, perhaps as old as the first *Voyages into the Void* in Ridwan (see page 34), where he believes that he once saw such runes before.

Although Beldiore has no idea what might be in the casket, why the dead shadow giant clutches it so desperately, or how the entire artifact came to be encased in shadowglass and deposited in the Umbral Basin after a reality-warping shadowstorm, he is convinced that solving the coffin's mystery—and, if need be, opening it to confirm what lies inside—will surely vault him upward in the Umbral Court's esteem and possibly even provide his long-sought chance to join the court himself. Quietly, Beldiore has been seeking adventurers and scholars from neighboring Nirmathas to help him solve this mystery.

Shadow Caverns: A curiously deep cave above an icy spring is the only surface sign of the Shadow Caverns, the deceptively simple-looking point of connection between the Uskwood and the Darklands. Those who wade through the chill water into the cave's depths find a horrific slave market hidden from the surface world's view. Visceroth, an umbral dragon (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 2 102) and devotee of Zon-Kuthon, maintains the outpost's peace as bidden by the Midnight Lord. There, Nidalese traders sell shackled unfortunates from across Golarion to the dark folk of Nar-Voth, who drag their newly purchased slaves into an alien and perilous realm from which few ever return.

The Shadow Caverns are also where the most wicked caligni of Nidal go to purchase infants. The dark stalker Bozel-Oth is an infamous trafficker, although in truth Bozel-Oth acts entirely on instructions from the shadowy owbs, who keep to the background and do not reveal their role in this trade.

The caligni who are evil enough to trade in this market usually purchase infants for money, but occasionally Bozel-Oth demands something more sensitive: purloined letters, a secret ferreted from a friend or patron, or a service that might range from petty theft to murder. Bozel-Oth never explains how these demands serve his interests (or, more accurately, his owb masters'), and these prices are never negotiable.

For more information about the Shadow Caverns, see page 50.

Shadowreach: Though seemingly a rustic idyll, the locals have been avoiding this ivy-clad hunting lodge in the Uskwood for decades. It is well known that numerous deadly shadow creatures hunt around its grounds, and rumors persist of deadlier threats hidden among the surrounding trees. For more information about Shadowreach, see page 51.

Snowford: On the slopes of the Mindspin Mountains near the border with Molthune stands the village of Snowford, noted for its sweet white goat cheeses and Snowserpent's Kiss—a bracing, minty liqueur infused with mountain herbs and wildflowers. Just under 200 residents live in this sluggish, mountainside abode.

Snowford is also known for the curious local phenomenon of the Glassmoon Witch. About 5 miles outside Snowford is a glade with a ring of obsidian foundation stones half-buried in snow. At midnight on the night of the winter solstice, a ghostly shrine of archaic design materializes over the stones. Between its black pillars stands a single plinth, upon which a lantern shines with a soft gray light that casts no shadows.

Local lore holds that one who makes a monthly obeisance and gift of flowers to the Glassmoon Witch's shrine for a full year may petition the spirit for a blessing on the night of the winter solstice. The blessing must be beneficial or curative, and it cannot be bestowed upon the one who has performed the rituals—the Glassmoon Witch grants boons only to altruists. The stories and the very real effects of the glade are as old as the Black Triune's bargain with Zon-Kuthon, and some whisper that the power of Shelyn

herself works through the glade to soothe her wayward brother's victims.

Whatever its power source, the shrine is credited with curing lycanthropy, healing sick children, and restoring the sanity of those who looked too long upon unthinkable horrors. Despite these miracles, the exact location of the Glassmoon Witch's glade is a close-kept secret in Snowford, and the villagers disclaim all knowledge of the shrine to strangers. The village's crafty mayor, **Wistea Glasswing** (N female half-elf bard 3), is well versed in the art of both downplaying her family's elven heritage with the Umbral Court and deflecting out-of-towners away from the glade. What might be a source of pride in another nation is a dangerous heresy in Nidal, and so the people of Snowford keep silent about their mysterious benefactor.

Soth-Silir: This basalt monolith, located near the northern edge of the Ombrefell Forest, is the center of worship for the Xoskerik, a small clan of shadow giants (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 6 135) summoned by the Umbral Court. It stands nearly 30 feet in height on the bank of a creek, its skewed geometric design casting dramatic shadows along the water at sunset. The giants make their homes in the surrounding woods, shaping large dens out of the brush that grows beneath the Ombrefell's tall hemlocks and tulip trees.

Led by their priest **Salifeth** (LE male shadow giant^{B6} witch^{APG} 7), the Xoskerik giants patrol the Atteran Ranches by night, serving as bogeymen both for the children of northern Nidal and for Desnan agitators across the Varisian border. In the ordinary course of their duties, they prefer to travel alone, passing undetected over the wooded hills and moonlit plains, but when called upon, they are capable of terrifying shows of force.

In exchange for their service, the Umbral Court provides the Xoskerik giants two principal forms of payment: the protective sap of the oleth tree, purchased from the reclusive d'ziriaks (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 2 113) of the Shadow Plane and brought through the portal beneath the Cathedral of Exquisite Agony in Pangolais; and heretics (and the orphans thereof) for use as sacrifices in their religious ceremonies. The preparation of the sacrifices is quite involved and includes a sciomantic rite to determine whether each offering will be accepted. Those who fail the rite are typically eaten. A rare few, however, for reasons known only to Salifeth, are set aside, then carried north through the Uthori Pass to Varisia. Where possible, Umbral agents keep a close eye



on these freed sacrifices—partly to discern more about the shadow giants’ mysterious religion, and partly to help the administrators in Pangolais determine which of their offerings are likely to be wasted. So far, their findings remain inconclusive.

Stormhollow: The nightmare village of Stormhollow is all that remains of an outlaw settlement that was caught in one of the Umbral Basin’s reality-warping shadowstorms and scoured by a raiding party of kytons during that storm.

Refugees and apostates once huddled in the makeshift town of Lorra’s Hollow, named for the escaped halfling slave who supposedly founded the settlement. Others fleeing the hardships of life in Chelias and Nidal came to join her, and over time the place took on a determinedly cheerful air, despite its inhabitants’ hand-to-mouth existence and the perpetual danger of their surroundings.

All that ended when a shadowstorm engulfed Lorra’s Hollow. Kytons came with the black blizzard, stepping through the rift it tore in reality, and they made cruel sport of the townspeople they found. The storm’s magical instability, coupled with the kytons’ own vicious gifts, enabled them to work awful transformations on the innocents they caught. When the storm ended, the kytons left, but their handiwork remained behind.

Today, only husks of skin filled with gasping shadow walk the streets of Stormhollow. Little more than gruesomely dressed greater shadows (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 245), these shambling wrecks nevertheless whisper with echoes of their old voices, repeating fragmentary snatches of old regrets. Some are pinned up in their former homes, affixed to the walls by their robes of skin with rough iron spikes hammered through their wrists and eye sockets, and these seem to be somehow more alive and cognizant of their plight.

The buildings in Stormhollow are skewed and disjointed, their nails driven backwards so the points jut outward like kytons’ spikes. Inside the homes, all the children’s toys weep incessant tears of liquid shadow. Outside, the fields are filled with dead brown plants hunched and curled up in their rows, and bald gray chickens with broken necks and bleeding feet peck at the stones for nonexistent food.

Summer Grove: Not everything in the Uskwood (see page 38) is malign. The Summer Grove is one such place, accessible only in the midsummer months and strangely absent from the woods during the rest of the year. It is a place of beauty and serenity, bright with wildflowers and lush grasses beneath fragrant linden and sweet cherry trees. The albino druids of the Uskwood and their monstrous spiders seem blind to the place, for they have never disturbed it.

Those who sleep in the Summer Grove dream of pleasant futures that often come true, and children

conceived in its glades are born with kind hearts and gentle natures—not always a blessing in Nidal, but such children are also favored with good fortune, such that many of them find a way out of their benighted homeland or, at least, are able to lead quiet and peaceful lives within it.

No one knows what creature or power protects the Summer Grove, or even where it is. Evil beings seem unable to find it at all, but those of goodly heart also find it elusive even while it is accessible in the summer. Its location seems to shift within the Uskwood, and those who have stumbled across it once can never retrace their steps to it again.

Sunless Pond: In the years after Earthfall, the Nidalese had to grow crops in a sunless world. To address this need, Zon-Kuthon gave them the Sunless Pond in the Uskwood: a pool of ink-dark water that bubbles up from an unearthly spring in the depths of the Uskwood. The pond’s water conveys the enrichment effect of *plant growth* and enables plants to grow for a full year with limited or no sunlight.

Today, the Uskwood druids continue to distribute jars of the precious water to the peasants under their rule. Each year, they hand out carefully counted jars as they collect taxes for the Umbral Court and test the local children for arcane potential. Even with the weak sun returned to much of Nidal, farmers rely upon the waters of the Sunless Pond to strengthen their crops enough for survival, and so few of them dare to miss these annual gatherings, despite the unpleasantness they entail.

Throne’s Chance: Most Nidalese accept their lot with fatalism or fear, while some actively glory in the twisted rule of Zon-Kuthon. For a few, however, dreams of liberty die hard. It is for them that the Chelish embassy in Pangolais, with the Umbral Court’s blessing, administers Throne’s Chance, a hamlet of about 50 Chelish diplomats and agents of the infernal crown along the shoreline between the two nations.

Each year, the Chelish embassy in Pangolais selects five Nidalese citizens who are permitted to move to Throne’s Chance for a year and work on assignments of joint import to Nidal and Chelias. While in Throne’s Chance, they are at the mercy of an all-Chelish contingent, led by Admiral **Ferixia Rone** (LE female human swashbuckler^{ACG} 4), formerly of the Chelish Navy.

Upon their service’s completion—provided they’ve made no enemies during their tenure—the Nidalese are given 50 gp, formally sworn in as citizens of Chelias, and set free in the empire to pursue whatever lives they wish. In theory, the selection is random; any Nidalese citizen who petitions for consideration may be chosen from the annual list of names. In practice, most if not all of the candidates are arranged in advance based on bribes and other favors, and little is left to chance.

The Umbral Court permits Thrune's Chance to continue to operate in part because it diverts the energies of those who might otherwise turn to illegal escapes or even rebellion. Entire families throw their efforts behind a single child's chances, and they succeed just often enough to encourage others to invest all their hopes and fortunes in similar attempts. Their interest identifies them as discontented, of course, which is also useful to the Umbral Court.

But the hope is real, and many of those who obtain their freedom in this way go on to become valuable citizens of Cheliah. Once they've become Chelish citizens, however, they are not permitted to return to Nidal.

Tower of Slant Shadows: This jagged iron tower rises diagonally from the gray grasslands of the North Plains, leaning over the land like a sundial's gnomon. Unknown to most, it is one of the Star Towers, gigantic spikes forged by Zon-Kuthon and driven into the earth to imprison the monstrous god Rovagug. For more information about the Tower of Slant Shadows, see page 52.

Umbral Basin: On the border between Molthune and Nidal is the Umbral Basin, a narrow mountain pass shrouded in perpetual gloom. Sunlight seems to glance away from the rocky walls on either side, a phenomenon explained not by their steepness but by the fact that a perpetual shadowstorm roils in the pass, an unstable and constantly mobile portal to the Shadow Plane at its heart. This storm, which unpredictably seizes creatures and objects from this world and exchanges them with those from the Shadow Plane, is a major menace in the Umbral Basin and the source of local legends telling of reality-ripping black storms.

In addition to the menacing shadowstorm, the Umbral Basin is home to numerous murky monsters, including an incredibly powerful shadow giant (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 6 135) named **Kiashach** (LE male shadow giant^{B6} brawler^{ACG} 4). Of late, frenzied fetchling and human cultists have taken to worshipping Kiashach as a god, and the shadow giant has begun putting plans into motion to dominate the entire basin. For more about Kiashach and the Umbral Basin, see page 44 of *Pathfinder Campaign Setting: Lands of Conflict*.

Undervale: A little-known way station in the Umbral Basin, Undervale is the subject of fevered rumor and whispered hope among the enslaved halflings of Cheliah and Nidal. If the tales can be believed, there is a secret safe house hidden among the shadowy perils of that pass, and through it, brave and lucky halflings might escape to Molthune and beyond to safety. Few can say for certain whether the stories are true, however, and the dangers involved would give the hardest hero pause. That a household servant in a wealthy Chelish mansion would even consider trying to find Undervale is, perhaps, the most damning indictment possible of their position. For more information on Undervale, see page 53.

Usk Lake: Still and subtly luminous, the twisted diamond of Usk Lake is often likened to a sea of starlight. This is not merely poetic license; the lake does emanate a gentle radiance that gleams in Nidal's continual darkness, casting shadows up from the water instead of down across its face. Some nights, the water glitters with reflected stars that are nowhere to be seen in the sky, while on other nights, it fails to reflect the handful of stars that break through Nidal's supernaturally dense clouds. It never shows any glimmer of the sun.

Many believe that the surface of Usk Lake does not reflect the terrestrial sky, but rather shows glimpses of the distorted space between stars and behind reality where Zon-Kuthon shed his former self and became the Prince of Pain. There may be some truth to this belief, for certainly the lake harbors an unusually high number of shadow-touched fey and aquatic monsters of extraordinary age and cruelty, including kelpies (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 2 172) and rusalkas (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 3 232). According to local legend, something in the water also transforms its inhabitants over the course of long exposure. The truth of this tale is evidenced in its fish, which have become spiky, white-scaled things with blank, black eyes and obsidian teeth. Longer-lived creatures are said to change in more profound ways.

The Uskheart: The deepest redoubt in the Uskwood is the Uskheart, the age-old stronghold of the Shades of the Uskwood. The Shades have recently uncovered a singularly vile and frightening form of life—a race of strange creatures that live to consume or transform everything they find. Known in certain texts as the hive, these aliens (who refer to themselves using an Aklo word that human voices cannot speak) represent a wholly inimical form of life unlike anything in the natural order on Golarion, yet they are not extraplanar or supernatural entities.

In the hive, the Shades of the Uskwood have found an intriguing example of nature run amok in a way that echoes Zon-Kuthon's ancient transformation and confirms their beliefs. (See *Pathfinder RPG Horror Adventures* for more information about the hive.) More specifically, Elolander of Ridwan helped to engineer the capture of a hive queen (*Horror Adventures* 236) and brought her to the Uskheart. The Shades seek to explore the mechanisms of the hive and, they hope, devise a method of controlling the corruptions it spreads. This dangerous project is but one of many the Shades pursue, and explorers who enter the Uskheart will discover no shortage of ways to lose their bodies, minds, or souls.

For more on the Uskheart, including a map of the area within the Uskwood, see pages 42–45 of *Pathfinder Campaign Setting: Horror Realms*.

Uskwood: An immense forest cloaks the heartland of Nidal, blotting out the sun beneath its unnaturally dense

leaves. This is the Uskwood, home to the albino druids known as Shades of the Uskwood and the Uskheart (see page 38), their fiercely guarded and deeply secret center of power. Elolander of Ridwan (see page 7), a prominent member of the Umbral Court, leads to the Shades of the Uskwood, though other powerful leaders tread here under the mighty Kuthite. They include **Peloise White-Eyes** (LE female human oracle^{APG} [dual-cursed oracle^{APG}] 9) and Speaker **Tralayhi** (NE female fetchling^{ARG} summoner^{APG} [shadow caller^{ARG}] 8), who act as Elolander's lieutenants in the Uskwood. It's said that nothing happens in this dark wood without one or both of these Kuthites knowing and, in turn, without Elolander himself finding out. The fact that the location of the *Harp of Night's Hope*, a Desnan artifact that a murdered agent of the Starsong hid in the forest, continues to elude these powerful Kuthites is a source of endless frustration to them. (See page 6 and the sidebar on this page for more information about the artifact called the *Harp of Night's Hope*.)

The outer reaches of the Uskwood, however, are not obviously threatening. Beech, elm, maple, and oak form the majority of its outer growth. Travelers may notice nothing other than a curious quiet to the wood, a wan quality to the sun, and the odd movement of shadows that do not seem beholden to any light. Small villages of superstitious farmers and foragers live cautiously at the Uskwood's eaves, hanging hair-and-cornhusk effigies and wicker talismans in their cottages, and also as ostensibly Kuthite ornamentations to ward off the druids' displeasure.

Deeper in, however, the forest changes. Strange and ancient trees, black-leaved and silvery-trunked, crowd out any trace of sun or moon. A glassy stillness holds the air. Pale altars of antler and bone stand in lonely clearings, and ghostly cobwebs billow among the upper branches. The Bonebaskets—grisly hanging gardens in which trespassers are flensed and used to grow food for the faithful—are but one of the many monstrosities hidden beneath the Uskwood's leaves. Here, the pale druids of the Uskwood rule unchallenged, and none can pass through Zon-Kuthon's garden of nightmares except by their leave.

Pocketed throughout the forest are isolated gardens where the druids carefully nurture medicinal herbs and flowers of rare beauty, nut trees and fruiting bushes, richly fragrant blossoms used in perfumes, and roots that produce dyes in colors not seen elsewhere. The druids from ages ago used magic to sustain the plants through an inhospitable world, ensuring that a fraction of the old world survived Golarion's great loss. After millennia under Zon-Kuthon's influence, the original plants have changed as profoundly as their caretakers. The vibrant flowers of Azlant and Thassilon have lost their original colors, changing to ghostly hues of white

HARP OF NIGHT'S HOPE (MINOR ARTIFACT)

SLOT none	CL 20th	WEIGHT 75 lbs.
Aura strong abjuration		

This beautifully made concert harp features intarsia butterflies on its walnut frame and column, golden pedals, and silver strings. It produces a warm, mellow tone.

If played for a full hour during a starry night, the *Harp of Night's Hope* grants restful sleep and heartening, reassuring dreams to all good-aligned creatures within 1,200 feet, granting those creatures a +1 morale bonus on all saving throws and skill checks for the next 24 hours. This morale bonus does not stack with itself. Additionally, when the harp grants its morale bonus, each creature of any alignment within range that is subject to an ongoing negative effect (such as possession, a spell of the compulsion subschool, or a similar effect) can immediately attempt a new saving throw with a +1 bonus to break free of the effect. If the effect does not ordinarily allow a saving throw to resist it, the harp does not grant one.

If the harp is played for an hour in the same place on a second consecutive night (24 hours later), in addition to extending the duration of the morale bonus provided to good-aligned creatures, the harp grants a new saving throw to creatures under ongoing negative effects as described above, this time with a +3 bonus. If the harp is played for an hour in the same place on a third consecutive night, the morale bonus is again extended, and creatures suffering from ongoing negative effects receive a new saving throw to break free, this time with a +5 bonus.

After being played for 3 consecutive nights, the harp cannot be used again to grant morale bonuses or new saving throws for a month.

DESTRUCTION

The *Harp of Night's Hope* crumbles into ash if a kyton takes it to Zon-Kuthon's stronghold of Xovaikain on the Shadow Plane and there severs each of its strings with a blade made from the sharpened finger bones of a Desnan who committed a heresy and did not atone before death.

and bluish silver instead. Plants that once required hours of intense sunlight now can survive only when nurtured in deep shade.

They are not what they once were, but the plants in these gardens remain the closest living comparisons to the legendary plants of those long-dead empires. Today, wealthy people across the world try to impress their guests with fruits and nuts once tasted by the runelords and their subjects, and pride themselves to think that they wear fragrances distilled from the same luxurious

jasmines and night-blooming tuberose. Botanists and herbalists sometimes even dare to visit Nidal to study these extraordinary specimens. If they can manage the trip, master poisoners can find much of interest in the gardens, as well.

Besides its great dangers and its great dark beauties, there is much of interest in the Uskwood, including the Summer Grove (see page 37), the Sunless Pond (see page 37), and the Uskheart (see page 38).

Uthori Steppes: In the northwestern reaches of the Atteran ranchers' domain, at the foot of the Mindspin Mountains, is a sea of gray-green grass where both the dark nidarmars of the Atteran Ranches and the untamed, foam-pale chiardmars graze. These are the Uthori

Steppes, a wild land that is not quite wild, having been home to the horselords and their descendants since time out of memory. Spotted gray cats prowl through the grass, hawks wheel overhead, and the ranchers watch vigilantly for poachers and thieves.

They are not always above poaching or thievery themselves, however. **Ephoren Uthori** (NE male human expert 4), patriarch of the Uthori clan and a bitterly envious rival of Vaide Atteran, has long lusted after the genie-touched horses of the Al-Zabriti tribes in Qadira. Ephoren believes that an Al-Zabriti breeding stallion would lift his clan's fortunes above the Atterans'. He is prepared to pay nearly any price to get one—or even to sponsor some horse-thieving foreigners' expedition into Qadira—but such animals are almost impossible to obtain in Nidal, and thus far no convincing thieves have presented themselves. Only would-be fraudsters have come forward, to Ephoren's annoyance and his clan executioners' mirth.

Viridian Forge: On the fringes of the Ombrefell is an immense smithy built of rough, enormous basalt chunks. Its forge glows with the lightless flame of the Shadow Plane, and eldritch runes echo the glow of those flames on the smith's two massive anvils and around the equally enormous quenching barrels.

Here, in the Viridian Forge, the shadow giant (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 6 135) Ukorviak crafts extraordinary weapons of green-hued living steel (*Pathfinder RPG Ultimate Equipment* 51). The trees of the Ombrefell include a grove that produces the extraordinary material, which carries a distinctive viridian sheen and regrows to repair itself when damaged.

Ukorviak alone among the Xoskerik tribe commands the secrets of harvesting and working living steel. He guards those secrets jealously, for trade in living steel weapons is a source of considerable wealth for the Xoskerik giants, and is therefore key to Ukorviak's high status among them. However, Ukorviak is less rabidly possessive about the weapons themselves. He reserves most of his limited production for the Umbral Court, but he is not averse to selling the occasional blade to Chelish merchants or other foreigners, provided they can afford the shadow giant's high prices and often unreasonable whims.

Weeping Fields: Carrying a name that dates to the time of the horselords, the Weeping Fields were once a barren stretch of land where few of the tribes dared to roam. Before, this was merely a matter of practicality based on the fields' treacherous geographic location as well as its disagreeable and infertile soil. However, when Earthfall ended civilization and Zon-Kuthon emerged from his Shadow Plane prison onto the Material Plane, the Weeping Fields began to transform into something far more sinister. Dark clouds perpetually loomed



AURILOACH OF WINTER GARDEN

overhead, and the shadows themselves seemed to reach out menacingly at any who traveled through. Then the leaders who became the Black Triune made their fateful bargain with the Midnight Lord here, and the Weeping Fields' fate was set. Now, these barren fields mark the sinister entrance to the Umbral Basin, where all manner of horrors await. A few hardy human and fetchling cultists and hermits live here, as do shadow ferns (see page 62) and herds of shadow animals (see page 60) that viciously hunt trespassers in dark parody of their natural predatory behavior. For more information about the Weeping Fields and the unholy bargain the Nidalese struck here, see page 5.

For millennia since the Black Triune struck that fateful deal, the Weeping Fields have also been the proving grounds for Zon-Kuthon's military. Soldiers conduct their physical training and combat exercises across the viciously unforgiving rocks and treacherous rifts, braving poisonous smoke and lacerating obsidian. Their training culminates in the Weeper's Ordeal, wherein a trainee is brought to a desolate reach of the Weeping Fields and abandoned with nothing but three pieces of equipment selected by the trainee. The trainee must make her way through the Weeping Fields and all their hazards until she reaches the Chasm of Fears, a smoke-filled shadowflame rift. There she prostrates herself in prayer to the Midnight Lord, breathes deeply of the poisoned smoke, and is gifted a vision of whatever terrors and pains cut most deeply into her soul.

Many fail on the field or are broken by their visions. Those who survive are sworn into the Adamant Guard, and though they are little known in the outside world—since, unlike the Midnight Guard, they seldom venture abroad unless assigned to the Adamant Company—they are respected and greatly feared within Nidal.

Whitemound: Located at the foot of the Mindspin Mountains, where the Atteran Ranches give way to the Uthori Steppes, the quiet little town of Whitemound is the social and economic heart of Nidal's northern plains. It is here where the ranchers often come to trade and hold marriage ceremonies, every summer greatly expanding the town's typical population of about 250 with their braid-decked tents. Weddings, like everything in Nidal, are far more muted and infused with fear than any such celebrations would be elsewhere, but these events are among the closest anything ever gets to raucous in oppressed Nidal.

A sacred place in the days before Earthfall, Whitemound was eventually established as an ideal site for a communal granary to insure against the Usk's periodic flooding. Once just a hamlet, the town grew up slowly around this granary. Whitemound's livestock market is now a key part of Nidal's food supply, and its master tanners are kept busy by the Kuthites' demand for leather.

Like most of Nidal's smaller settlements, Whitemound is essentially self-governing. However, since it lies near a trailhead leading to the Uthori Pass—a passage through the Mindspin Mountains to Korvosa—the Umbral Court keeps a close eye on the town. That duty, widely considered the worst posting that any agent of the court might receive, currently falls to **Insevier of Nisroch** (LE male human investigator^{ACG} 3), who is in disgrace after successively failing several assignments. Shunned by the people of Whitemound, he keeps his watch from the town's unholy cathedral, which sees little other use except for high holidays and when Umbral agents skulk into town to ensure the villagers' loyalty.

While it was once necessary to monitor the pass, Insevier's efforts are currently wasted. For years now, a leucrotta (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 2 178) has stalked the mountains near Whitemound, luring a number of aspiring escapees—and a handful of curious children—to their doom. The townspeople call this leucrotta “the Ascian,” for it is said that he casts no shadow, as a show of defiance to the Midnight Lord. It is said, too, that the Ascian walks the town in the skin of his most recent victim in order to better study his prey. Whatever the truth, only the Xoskerik shadow giants now brave the Uthori Pass, and the villagers are convinced that the leucrotta poses more of a direct threat to their existence than the Midnight Lord's devotees do.

Winter Garden: This secluded cottage once served as the country retreat of **Auriloch** (LE male shadow lord^{B4} wizard 11), a necromancer of the Umbral Court. Having an unusual degree of sensitivity for one of his position, he came here to relieve his troubled mind, cataloging his collection of rare books and planting an elaborate garden of boxwood, cypress, and quince. Now it is his prison.

One fateful night, when his suffering became too much to bear, Auriloch summoned Lethidim, a mnemor devil (*Pathfinder Campaign Setting: Occult Bestiary* 21) to alter his most painful memories. As punishment for this heresy—among the most egregious for worshipers of Zon-Kuthon—a dense fog settled around his land, and he remains trapped there to this day.

Auriloch is now a cursed lord (*Pathfinder RPG Horror Adventures* 235), his domain encompassing the cottage, its sprawling garden, and several surrounding farms. Within the disorienting mists that surround these lands, the subjects of Auriloch's experiments wander as ghosts beneath an unending snowfall, reenacting the horrors they suffered and in some cases inflicting them on unfortunate passersby. Lethidim wanders freely throughout the territory as well, preying on the memories of the trapped farmers, their families, and the travelers they shelter—for the mists readily admit anyone whose faith Zon-Kuthon doubts.



THREATS IN THE GLOOM

I KNEW THINGS WERE LOOKING SOUTH WHEN SHE SMILED WITH A MOUTH FULL OF NEEDLES AND GESTURED US INSIDE THE TOWER.

“AT FIRST WE THOUGHT SHE WAS TESTING US WITH A SIMPLE CLIMB UP A KNOTTED ROPE NET TOWARD OUR PRIZE: A DOZEN GLITTERING MAGIC BAUBLES. EASY ENOUGH. BUT WHEN WE STARTED TO CLIMB TOWARD THE SHINIES, WE KNEW THIS WEREN’T NO ROPE. IT WAS FLESH. LIKE THE RIGGING OF A GREAT TALDAN WARSHIP, ‘CEPT THESE WERE ARMS AND LEGS AND FACES THAT MOANED AS WE HAULED OURSELVES ALONG.

“WE WERE ABOUT HALFWAY UP WHEN HANDS CAME UP OUT OF THAT TWISTED WEAVE OF SKIN, WITH SHARP, BONY CLAWS. DHARMOS SCREAMED UNTIL THEY TORE HIS THROAT OUT. LIRA TRIED TO SAVE HIM, AND THEY TORE HER UP TOO. I FROZE. LOST MY GRIP AND FELL MORE THAN FIFTY FEET TO THE STONE WALKWAY, AND BROKE A LEG WHEN I LANDED. BUT I WAS THE LUCKY ONE. I GOT OUT.”

—BEYLIN ETTERVATTER, RETIRED ASPIS CONSORTIUM AGENT

Nidal has one the longest histories in the Inner Sea region, and numerous sites across the land have risen as testaments to that long and troubled past. Some have lingered in the gloom for millennia, their tragic or malevolent energies building to horrifying results as they wait for innocents to stumble into their maws. Others are more recently gestated dangers, taking advantage of the cover of Kuthite wickedness to carve out lairs where they reign uncontested. Indeed, there is no shortage of shadowy threats in Nidal that stem from the sadistic evil that prevails in this nation, and there are many more threats lurking in the darkness here than even wily adventurers might imagine. This chapter contains some examples of places where adventurers can find great danger and horrors, as well as incredible rewards.

NIDALESE ADVENTURE SITES

The following Nidalese locations teem with shadowy dangers and rich opportunities for those adventurers who dare brave them.

AEVOLAR'S CROSSING

Drowned Treasures Guarded by an Aquatic Horror

Location Southern Usk River near the Menador Mountains

Master Xhilqua the Unmatched (NE female elder water elemental fighter 4)

Inhabitants draugrs^{B2}, mudlords^{B4}, water elementals of various sizes

Features abandoned treasures, military history, warped elementals and soldiers risen from the dead

As the Mindspin Mountains ease into foothills and then into a broad plain south of the Uskwood, the Southern Usk River likewise broadens and flattens, transforming from a swift-churning torrent to a wide, calm waterway. A road runs alongside the river as it winds along the mouth of the pass through the mountains, but no bridge spans the wide waters here, and anyone looking to cross must ford the currents. At the site called Aevolar's Crossing, an entire army once tried to do exactly that—and failed catastrophically, based on the mass of rusted, decaying equipment strewn along the riverbed and carried downstream: armor, weapons, wagons, crates, barrels, and more besides. A passerby looking closely enough might even see the gilded insignia of the old Chelish empire on a still-gleaming, certainly magical breastplate.

No one crosses the river at Aevolar's Crossing, though the river here is shallow and the current is sluggish. An unnatural chill pervades the silent air, which is bereft of any of the usual sounds of river activity. No insects sing, no birds call, and no fish dare break the still surface. Locals speak of Aevolar's Crossing only in hushed whispers, and they avoid the place like it might an harbor unholy agent of the Midnight Lord himself. They say

the place is haunted, that it is here where Zon-Kuthon enacted his vengeance against those who would dare bring arms to bear against the god's own realm. There may be treasure to be found here, the locals agree, but the cost is the seeker's life—or worse—and so no hordes of local treasure-hunters descend on this hushed locale.

Parts of the tales are true. An entire battalion of the Chelish army was indeed lost here in the early days of the Everwar, when Commander Aevolar led her troops north into Nidal in what was to be the first attack against Chelias's northern neighbor. The entire battalion was lost, leaving no survivors but a wealth of abandoned equipment. Though most of the mundane supplies were lost to the intervening centuries, plenty of gold, jewels, and magical gear survives, some of it tantalizingly visible beneath the shallow currents.

The tales of haunts and troubled undead is partly superstition, though the truth here is far more complex. The leader of the terrors that devastated the commander's troops and all looters since is no servitor of Zon-Kuthon, but a fierce elder water elemental named Xhilqua, who styles herself the Unmatched. Xhilqua has claimed this stretch of the Southern Usk River for millennia, since long before Earthfall, when a portal to the Elemental Plane of Water once existed just upriver. The elementals here are a far cry from the insular, nonaggressive creatures typically found near planar founts or on the Elemental Planes.

For a time, Xhilqua and the lesser elementals and mudlords that followed her lived here peacefully, even after the planar portal closed. However, following Zon-Kuthon's descent into Nidal, the villagers from nearby towns—now long-gone—began practicing fell and torturous rituals to their evil god. Those rituals pulled forth energies that warped the elementals, rendering Xhilqua and her allies bloodthirsty and territorial. At first, they simply visited their wrath on passing locals. Soon, though, the elementals began hunting townspeople who ventured too close to their lair, and the seeds of the legend of this place began.

The elementals happened upon their first chance at widespread destruction when Commander Aevolar led her fateful foray across the river during the Everwar. The elementals descended upon the invading force gleefully, tearing them limb from limb as the soldiers waded through the murderous creatures' watery territory. As the decades have passed, the horrific violence of their deaths and the same rank energies that turned the elementals bloodthirsty has reanimated some of the soldiers as draugrs. Now, any treasure hunters hoping for an easy score must face all of these deadly threats—always to their ultimate doom. Though many have tried to raid Aevolar's Crossing, none have yet escaped with any of its many treasures.



BARROWMOOR

Burial Mounds of Ancient Horselords

Location northern Nidal near the Usk River

Master Dridehn Goish (N male old human medium^{OA} 9)

Inhabitants Atteran spirit talkers and caretakers, incorporeal undead, legendary spirits (*Pathfinder Campaign Setting: Occult Realms* 10–11) tied to the ancient Nidalese horselords, unfettered phantoms^{BS}

Features ancient haunts and traps, loci spirits^{OA}, records of ancient peoples, spiritual connections

Barrowmoor is ultimately a thoroughly descriptive name, applied to this eerie region of enormous burial mounds that date back to the ancient culture of Nidal's horselords. Outsiders traveling the region find themselves lost, looping around the same handful of hillocks over and over again, their compass needles twirling uselessly. The people of the Atteran Ranches, who are the horselords' descendants, speak of the place with quiet reverence, but even they tread here only rarely.

At their core, many of the tales of the Barrowmoor are true: the mounds are burial mounds, where one of the oldest surviving cultures in the Inner Sea region laid their fallen to rest. The smallest of these hills stands at the size of a small cottage, while the largest reach three times that, each enclosed by a cage of burned charcoal logs. Many further bear strange, skeletal towers of blackened wood reaching into the sky above them, and decorations of simple flint and braided horsehair offer a testament to those interred within. Though the uninitiated simply tell of "ghosts," in truth many spirits roam the ancient mounds, both benevolent and malign.

As the burial ground of an ancient culture, Barrowmoor holds much of interest to scholars of history. Here lie archaeological records of one of the only civilizations on Golarion to have survived Earthfall, with some relics reaching as far back as those of ancient Azlant. Within these tombs, detailed tapestries of knotted horsehair track horse-breeding records over the course of centuries. Those studying religion find much to learn from those Kellids who lived in this part of the world before the Age of Darkness and Zon-Kuthon's iron fist descended upon the land. Opportunistic explorers insist that treasures untold must certainly lie here, buried alongside those horselords who bore them in life so long ago. Individuals steeped in eldritch lore seek wisdom from the past or connections to the spirits who still roam the lands they knew in life.

For all the temptations Barrowmoor offers, even a traveler brave enough to face the unnatural chill rising from the ground and the subtle, eerie shifts in the mounds would find these tombs difficult to plunder. The horselords of ancient Nidal foresaw that outsiders might seek to pillage these burial lands, and so they constructed their barrows accordingly. Few of the mounds contain

entrances, and those that do have entryways also bear deadly traps that have survived countless ages. Oddly, newer mounds employ the same protections as the most ancient of them. Chief among these is a technique strangely akin to one found in ancient Osirion, though no scholars have yet found any other links between the two cultures; false doors, prominent and decorated to appear as portals to an inner tomb, serve only to house malevolent spirits bound within, eager to lash out at any who dare trespass upon their demesnes.

Around these intentional protections, a host of other defenses has arisen, from potent haunts to incorporeal undead to the very few living descendants of the horselords who have taken it upon themselves to serve as caretakers of the burial ground and as conduits for its spirits to the living world. Although there is no formal structure or society among this area's mortal wanderers, the barrows' unofficial lead caretaker is an aged man named Dridehn Goish, who has lived here since he was cast out decades ago from his family's nearby farm for his unsettling connections to and comfort with the dead. It's said that Goish knows these tombs' every nook and cranny and can marshal the area's significant undead energies and creatures against intruders. Those who seek information or other riches from this ancient place are wise to seek Goish's counsel, though it's unclear exactly where he lives, and he's said to brook the attentions of only those who show the utmost respect to the Barrowmoor's past.

As unsettling as the moor is, the place is not evil—haunted, yes, and weighted under a tremendous history, but most of those who lie at rest here were not evil in life and have remained uncorrupted by time. Many of the spirits that wander here are not malevolent if treated with appropriate respect, and they simply linger on the Material Plane because of some unfulfilled wanting of the soul or some cosmic confusion that bars them from reaching the Boneyard.

These loci spirits may take form and offer aid to travelers directly in exchange for succor, or they might simply offer support in the form of minor spells and solicitude to beneficiaries who protect their living descendants from the nation's many evils. Other spirits offer great wisdom to those individuals who know how to harness them: many a medium's legendary spirit can be found with roots here, as can an oracle's mystery of bones, various implements wielded by the occultist, or even the ghostly steeds of the fabled cavaliers called ghost riders. These offerings are rare indeed, and those who seek to garner such wisdom had best prepare themselves accordingly; the horse tenders of the Atteran Ranches and their ancestors bear no great respect for Nidal's shadowy masters, but neither do they welcome travelers from beyond their borders.

CASTLE OF THE CAPTIVE SUN

Luxurious Estate of Masochistic Undead

Location northern Uskwood, west of Pangolais

Master Volsazni Dezarr (LE male vampire mesmerist^{OA} 10)

Inhabitants cowed good-aligned individuals (aasimars, celestial bloodline sorcerers, clerics of Iomedae and Sarenrae), dhampirs^{B2}, dire wolves, vampires

Features dark vampiric dinner parties, hoards of magic items and artifacts, vampire spawn

Though Volsazni Dezarr maintains a townhouse in Pangolais—as all members of Nidal's high society do—the Castle of the Captive Sun is his favored abode and the location where he spends the vast majority of his time. From the outside, the estate seems a traditional country manor akin to one that might be found in any civilized nation, given its manicured lawns and pristine architecture. But the perpetual gloom of Nidal's shadows dims the estate into a gray monotone, the first sign that the great house is not what it seems.

First of all, Volsazni Dezarr is a vampire, as well as a devout Kuthite who embraces agony in a way that only a creature truly of the night can.

The Castle of the Captive Sun takes its name from Volsazni's "guests," a collection of celestial-blooded captives kept in utter luxury alongside an astounding treasury of holy and solar-related artifacts gathered over the years. Volsazni keeps aasimars, Sarenites, and other holy creatures as his preferred feeding stock, as their divinely tinged blood offers a delectable, searing pain in addition to sustenance. The artifacts, meanwhile, the vampire uses in profound devotions to his dark god. He wields their light-bringing powers upon his own flesh and that of several dhampir offspring he sired in the years before establishing the Castle of the Captive Sun.

Volsazni keeps his guests in the height of luxury, though they are chained to their gilded chairs at the feast table. Volsazni's guests are hemmed in not only by the vampire and his spawn but also by countless traps, spells, and his dire wolf guardian. From time to time, Volsazni even hosts decadent dinner parties during which other noble vampires stay as honored visitors and escalate the captives' torment to despicable heights over the course of a fortnight.

What keeps the captives in also keeps them safe from outside

predations, and one recent arrival has taken advantage of that protection. **Alastros Niannah** (LG male human bloodrager^{ACG} 5) is on the run from the Silent Enforcers; though the castle's full reputation was no secret, Alastros knew that the celestial blessings in his blood would grant him sanctuary within. Now, the Iomedean bides his time, aghast at true horrors of the castle. Now he seeks a way to escape so that he can rescue his tormented lover in Nisroch.

The collection of artifacts Volsazni keeps has its own reputation among arcane scholars, historians, and treasure seekers. Some items are no more remarkable than a *wand of daylight*, while others are priceless artifacts. Yet the vampire regards few with any particular affection; he is more than willing to part with any if offered a new useful trinket. Those attempting such trades had best be prepared, though, as Volsazni scorns any who think they can treat his collection as a mere shopping arcade, and woe to those who think to outright steal from the ancient lord.



EDAMMERA'S FOLLY

Ancient Laboratory Straddling the Planes

Location western Nidal, northwest of the Usk River's fork

Master Kaidalous (LE agender interlocutor kyton^{B3} investigator^{ACG} [forensic physician] 6; *Pathfinder RPG Ultimate Intrigue* 33)

Inhabitants augur kytons^{B3}, interlocutor kytons^{B3}, shadow lord^{B4} brain oozes^{B3}, various shadows and greater shadows

Features mysteriously mobile portals to the Shadow Plane, roving shadow horrors, surgical laboratory

The mysterious archmage Mesandroth Fiendlorn is well known among Nidalese scholars of the arcane; the ancient wizard's lifelong quest for immortality produced a wealth of knowledge on various outsiders, necromantic arts, abjurations, and more—if not the desired outcome. Like many great minds, Fiendlorn was paranoid and secretive, and he segmented his various areas of research into separate laboratories across the land, each in the care of one of his many apprentices. No one knows how many such lairs exist, as only a few have been discovered and explored, and all proved destroyed from within.

Edammera's Folly is one such location. The titular wizard, an apprentice of Fiendlorn, maintained this pristine research facility—a sterile tower of steel and glass etched with meticulous columns of precise arcane runes. Its protections were near absolute, save that this tower, like all of Fiendlorn's facilities, remained accessible to the archmage. The damage he wrought within its halls during his research is nearly imperceptible from without; most who see flickering shadows crawling along the sides of the tower simply attribute the shifting pattern to the perpetual Nidalese gloom.

If an explorer were to gain access to the facility—no small feat, given the layered arcane protections atop the reinforced steel doors—she would find that the interior likewise shows few signs of its downfall. Permanent *light* spells gently illuminate the halls, while the laboratories and surgical theaters are enchanted such that much brighter lights flare into near daylight when a humanoid creature enters the space.

Of course, this illumination is limited to those spaces that exist on the Material Plane—a fact that becomes clear upon stepping through nearly any doorway in the facility. Here, the treachery Fiendlorn unleashed becomes evident: every interior doorway in the entire facility has been replaced with a portal to a twisted replica of the tower on the Plane of Shadow. These portals are permanent, but they are not fixed. Each connects with a doorway in the counterpart tower at random, and the destination changes from use to use, even between two creatures passing through only moments apart. Savvy explorers might realize they can at least ensure they pass through together by joining hands, although this leaves

them rather disadvantaged against whatever might await them on the other side of the portal.

The Shadow Plane version of Edammera's tower is forged of blackened, rusting iron and blood-spattered obsidian in place of the Material Plane's sterile steel and glass, and the eerie silence is replaced by screams and gasps of torment. A cabal of interlocutor kytons and the augur kytons who act as their sentinels use the laboratories here as an ideal location for them to work their arts upon one another and upon pitiable souls captured from the Shadow Plane or who have crept through the portals. The kytons navigate their portion of the tower courtesy of their innate *plane shift* spell-like ability, though they find the plentiful illumination of Edammera's tower distasteful and typically avoid it. The greatest of these kytons, Kaidalous, is rumored to once have been Edammera herself.

The residents of Edammera's tower on the Material Plane are far more subtle but no less dangerous than their Shadow Plane counterparts. Edammera's research focused on harnessing the innate abilities of oozes to withstand the ravages of time, and while she quickly dismissed the mindless varieties as an unviable option for her efforts, the peculiar and intelligent brain ooze (*Bestiary* 3 43) came to the fore as a candidate for her experiments, its reputation bolstered by the rumors that these creatures themselves were the result of another race's efforts to achieve immortality. Of the dozens of specimens Edammera kept here at the facility's height, only a handful remain, the rest having fallen into Fiendlorn's hands, wasted away in captivity once their handlers had perished, or fallen prey to guests from the Plane of Shadow.

These few remaining brain oozes have been thoroughly infused by the shadow essences seeping through the portals, and now all of them bear the shadow lord template. Since their non-humanoid presence doesn't activate the tower's lights, the creatures can slink along the shadows throughout the facility without passing through the portals. Of course, the tower is also home to shadows and greater shadows, who consistently slide from their home plane to the Material Plane and back, looking for victims along the way.

A few opportunists aware of Edammera's Folly have considered whether the facility's semistable portals to the Plane of Shadow could be used as a means of transit between the two planes. The challenges facing such an endeavor are manifold: not only would a traveler need to avoid or appease the denizens of each planar tower, but she would also need to find some way to stabilize the portals enough to secure a route that lets her exit the Shadow Plane's tower rather than shifting randomly between the two for what could become eternity. Of course, some explorers are willing to risk that fate in the hope of gaining access to the wealth of research material and magical items that are no doubt abandoned within the shady facility.

HALL TO THE BROKEN DREAM

Cult of Rogue Kytons and Fanatics

Location southern Mindspin Mountains, northeast of Citadel Gheisteno

Master Skrialsiken (NE female lampadarius kyton mesmerist^{OA} [umbral mesmerist] 8; *Pathfinder Campaign Setting: Inner Sea Gods* 315, *Pathfinder Campaign Setting: Occult Realms* 16)

Inhabitants hopeful cultists, lampadarius kytons

Features bizarre flesh- and soulwarping experiments, secret cultist recruiters, shrine to a kyton demagogue

Seemingly constructed from pure shadowstuff, the Hall to the Broken Dream in southern Nidal is home to a curious sect of malignant beings whose loyalties and machinations have taken a perhaps unexpected twist. The sect is made up of lampadarius kytons (*Pathfinder Campaign Setting: Inner Sea Gods* 315) and fanatic mortals who revere Vevelor, the kyton demagogue known as the Broken Dream. Their leader, Skrialsiken, claims to be Vevelor's herald on Golarion, though what actions she has planned for her cult of kytons regarding that role are unclear.

Regardless, the Umbral Court is aware of the Hall to the Broken Dream. In fact, every year, a contingent from the hall visits Pangolais to soak in the urban atmosphere, bathe in the latent suffering that looms so large in the city, and quietly explain their particular faith to any who will listen. They openly discuss the Broken Dream's apotheosis to first a kyton and then a demagogue, and they adroitly argue against any possible merits of fatalism or predestination.

Were any other contingent to dare such proselytizing in Nidal, the Umbral Court would visit torturous sufferings on the perpetrators without thought. And indeed, most court members openly dislike the worship of anyone other than Zon-Kuthon in Nidal, even if Vevelor is a powerful, evil deity from the Plane of Shadow. However, the hall's faithful insist that their adherence to Vevelor is simply defiance of the predestination that they believe limits Zon-Kuthon's servants. For their part, the members of the Umbral Court realize that the vast majority of Nidalese citizens can discern little difference between Vevelor and Zon-Kuthon. They wish to avoid the appearance of infighting within the church of the Midnight Lord, and so the hall's contingents continue to travel to Pangolais on their dark missions without reprisal.

During their trips to the Nidalese capital, the cultists also clandestinely look for potential recruits to join their sect. Among rural villages and back urban alleys alike, they seek Kuthites or secret atheists who are discontent with their lot in life, and wish to translate indomitable wills into more power than the state would ever allow.

So far, the sect contains about a dozen non-kyton cultists, all of whom undergo horrific rituals and experimentations at the Hall to the Broken Dream as they try to map Vevelor's journey of the flesh and soul. Most of these cultists hope to transform themselves into kytons, though some seek very different and specific goals, such as becoming another type of evil creature.

The sect has carefully hidden its recruitment and flesh- and soulwarping activities lest it lose its very tentative peace among members of the Umbral Court. Nevertheless, the Umbral Court is wily, and some of its members suspect the truth. Because they have no proof, and because Skrialsiken has a few powerful allies, these Umbral Court agents quietly seek a



SKRIALSIKEN

powerful team of agents who can be sent to eliminate the rogue outpost.

HOUSE OF LIES

Haunted Guild Hall and Repository of Curiosities

Location northwestern corner of the Uskwood

Master Takhina (CN female middle-aged human medium^{OA} [storyteller^{OA}] 9)

Inhabitants Guild of Liars, Umbral Court agents, unquiet guardian spirits

Features arcane and occult treasures, haunts and traps, supernaturally strong security

The Shadowbreak was an anomaly in Nidal's history; it was a 3-century period during which the veil between Nidal and other nations was drawn back, Nidalese citizens gained a glimpse of life in other parts of the world, and adventurous souls were, occasionally, permitted to travel within the shadowy realm. It was during this time, not long after the treaty granting Chelish sovereignty was signed, that Delaeris Iovengio built the House of Lies.

A savvy entrepreneur who saw a particular opportunity in the newly opened Nidalese borders, Delaeris established this estate with the intention of inviting renowned storytellers to Nidal to marvel at the previously inaccessible country. Of course, such guests would pay a fine price to visit this luxurious retreat, and Nidalese guests, curious to hear tales of the outside world, likewise paid well for seats in the theater.

To further drive attendance and interest in his venture, Delaeris began a contest. Every 5 years, the most talented storytellers from across the Inner Sea region were invited to compete for the title of "truth maker." Contestants were, of course, required to lodge at the House of Lies at exorbitant festival rates, but entering the contest merely required the participant to contribute a unique curiosity to the house's collection. Archaeological oddities, eldritch tomes, unique magic items, puzzle boxes, and all manner of strange objects made their way into the collection. Each time, the truth maker's true prize was access to the amassed curiosities garnered from competitors over the years.

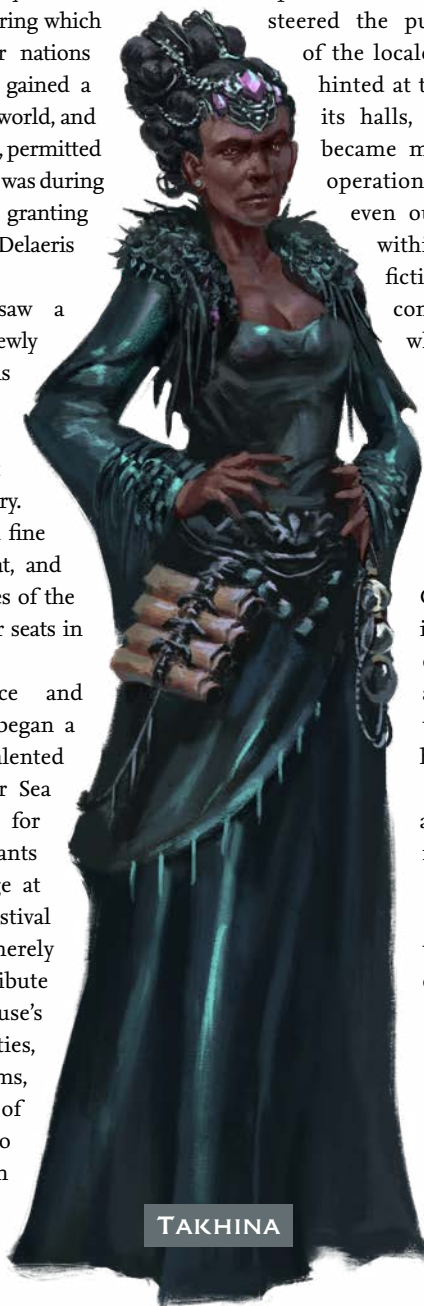
The winners could study the curiosities but were not permitted to take them from the site.

It was a thoroughly successful venture. Word of the House of Lies, the opportunity it provided to experience Nidal firsthand, and the allure of its collection of curios drew visitors year after year. Those who had taken part in the competition, winners or not, began to call themselves the Guild of Liars. Delaeris retired a wealthy man, and the younger generations of his family have kept the institution going to this day.

Not even the Iovengio management realized the subtle influence the Umbral Court has had on their institution. From the first days the House of Lies opened its doors, Nidalese agents have watched and steered the public perceptions and understanding of the locale. While at first only the estate's name hinted at the false nature of the tales told within its halls, as the years passed, such deception became more and more central to the house's operations, until it was explicitly stated and then even outright required that the stories told within its halls be firmly in the realm of fiction. The Guild of Liars was advertised as consisting of individuals with the best lies, who competed in a contest of falsehoods on an epic scale. Thus the only stories from outside of Nidal that citizens heard were lies—further reinforcing the Umbral Court's control over information about the outside world.

The regional fame of the House of Lies came to an abrupt end with the Chelish Civil War, as Nidal again tightened its borders. However, the Guild of Lies continues, meeting every 5 years to declare a new truth maker, who gains access to the invaluable collection of artifacts in the house's collection for the years to come.

The current truth maker is Takhina, a well-traveled Garundi woman with a rocky relationship with the Pathfinder Society, who has lived in the House of Lies since winning the contest. In the years since, she has gradually taken over administration of the manor from the remaining Iovengios and is now its unequivocal mistress. Though she allegedly entered the contest at the Society's request and using Society funds, she has since refused to allow other Pathfinder agents to share in her access to the manor's curio collection. To warn away overeager visitors, Takhina has summoned several spirits to



TAKHINA

linger within the premises, lending some veracity to the Nidalese claims that the site is haunted—and ironically making her one of the first literal truth makers.

PLAINS OF NIGHT

Stronghold of Desnan Occultists

Location Atteran Ranches

Master Etrixia Star-Touched (CG female aasimar cleric of Desna 6/psychic^{OA} 8)

Inhabitants Desnan occultists, Nidalese refugees

Features dream magic, occult rituals, successful ranch obscuring organized resistance

The plains of Nidal are no place for Desnans, and yet for generations Desnans have come here, fighting to defend the night as the realm of their virtuous goddess rather than the domain of Zon-Kuthon. Though various sects have slipped into Nidal's northwestern reaches over the years, those known as the Dreamtenders approach their work with methods and tools far removed from those of most followers of the Whispered Song.

The Dreamtenders harbor no illusions about the effectiveness of an outright rebellion against Nidal's shadowy rulership. Though the Umbral Court and Zon-Kuthon's hand are just as overt as devils' grasp on Cheliax, their grip over the land is perhaps even stronger than their neighbors' contracts with Hell. Armed rebels in Nidal would be utterly crushed by Zon-Kuthon's shadowy servitors—depending on the perceived severity of the insurrection—and though whispers speak of Desnan agents infiltrating the Umbral Court, millennia of history prove that subversive efforts bear little fruit under the sunless sky. Instead, the Dreamtenders focus their efforts on the night and the dreams that fall under the purview of their goddess.

Scholars of the occult and mystical, Dreamtenders welcome Nidalese refugees who seek to escape the land's cruel masters. The Desnans offer these pariahs of the state shelter and safety, and the Dreamtenders are well versed in helping victims of Nidal's torments overcome the trauma of their abuse, whether through counseling, magic, or more esoteric means. These methods consist of rituals that are not only a salve to those Nidal has wounded but also a weapon the Dreamtenders bring to bear against the shadowy realm. Discovered in far corners of the world by traveling Desnan scholars over the ages, the rituals pull the victims' traumatic memories and nightmares out from the psyche to manifest in physical form. Many of these quasi-real dream creatures are unmanageable and must be destroyed, but some of the more pliable specimens become the Dreamtenders' weapons and can be sent to find and assail the root of the afflictions that caused them in the first place. The dream-beasts are difficult to trace; divinations seeking their origin find that such psychic

threads typically lead back to the Nidalese agent who finds himself fighting them off, making them an effectively anonymous weapon.

The Plains of Night, a modest but successful horse ranch some distance from the nearest village, serves as the base of operations for the Dreamtenders' efforts. The distance from civilization allows the Dreamtenders to bring new guests to the ranch without drawing overmuch attention, and the horses raised here help the Desnans claim a legitimate identity in the region and finance some of their more expensive operations. They maintain amenable relations with their rural neighbors but remain careful to keep their rebellious activities under close guard. For all that the Atteran residents have allowed Desnans into their communities in the past, they have been equally willing to purge those same outsiders when challenged by the Nidalese authorities.

Most of the Dreamtenders are mediums, mesmerists, psychics, and spiritualists (see Chapter 1 of *Pathfinder RPG Occult Adventures*). They are led by Etrixia Star-Touched, a Nidalese refugee persecuted since early childhood by agents of the Umbral Court due to her celestial blood. While she has healed her spiritual scars through the practice of healing others, she still bears the physical scars inflicted by the clerics of Zon-Kuthon, who meant to torture her to a slow and agonizing death. She refuses to speak of how she escaped their clutches, but those who hear even this much of the tale realize the dedication it has inspired in her for her work with the Dreamtenders.

The Plains of Night employs staff to handle the ranch's operations. These hostlers are handpicked by Etrixia; a few are those the Dreamtenders have helped who then decided to repay the service, some are non-Desnan refugees who can no longer face life in this evil nation, while others are simply experienced hands who have been found trustworthy. Etrixia loathes turning away any who might need her help, so long as they're not double agents, and the hands' periodic journeys to Orol's Quay to sell the ranch's quality steeds double as cover for the refugees escaping Nidal.

The Dreamtenders have a secondary mission that they keep an even closer secret: since their formation, they have been seeking the *Harp of Night's Hope* (see page 39), a Desnan relic said to have the power to free those who hear its song from the grasp of Zon-Kuthon's shadows. Though the search began when a Dreamtender heard tales of the artifact and suggested it might aid in their work, Etrixia has recently caught wind of a rumor that a member of the Umbral Court has personally undertaken the search for the artifact (this is true; see page 6 for more information about Virihane of Pangolais). The implication that its power is great enough to merit such high-level attention has given their search more urgency, and the Dreamtenders keep a careful watch for

trustworthy agents who can assist in finding the relic. The Desnans' divinations have given them several clues as to the harp's location, but the journey to find and procure the relic is certain to be treacherous indeed.

SHADOW CAVERNS

Slavers' Entrance to the Darklands

Location Uskwood near Pangolais

Master Visceroth (LE old male umbral dragon⁸²)

Inhabitants dark folk, owbs⁸⁴, subterranean monsters, troglodytes

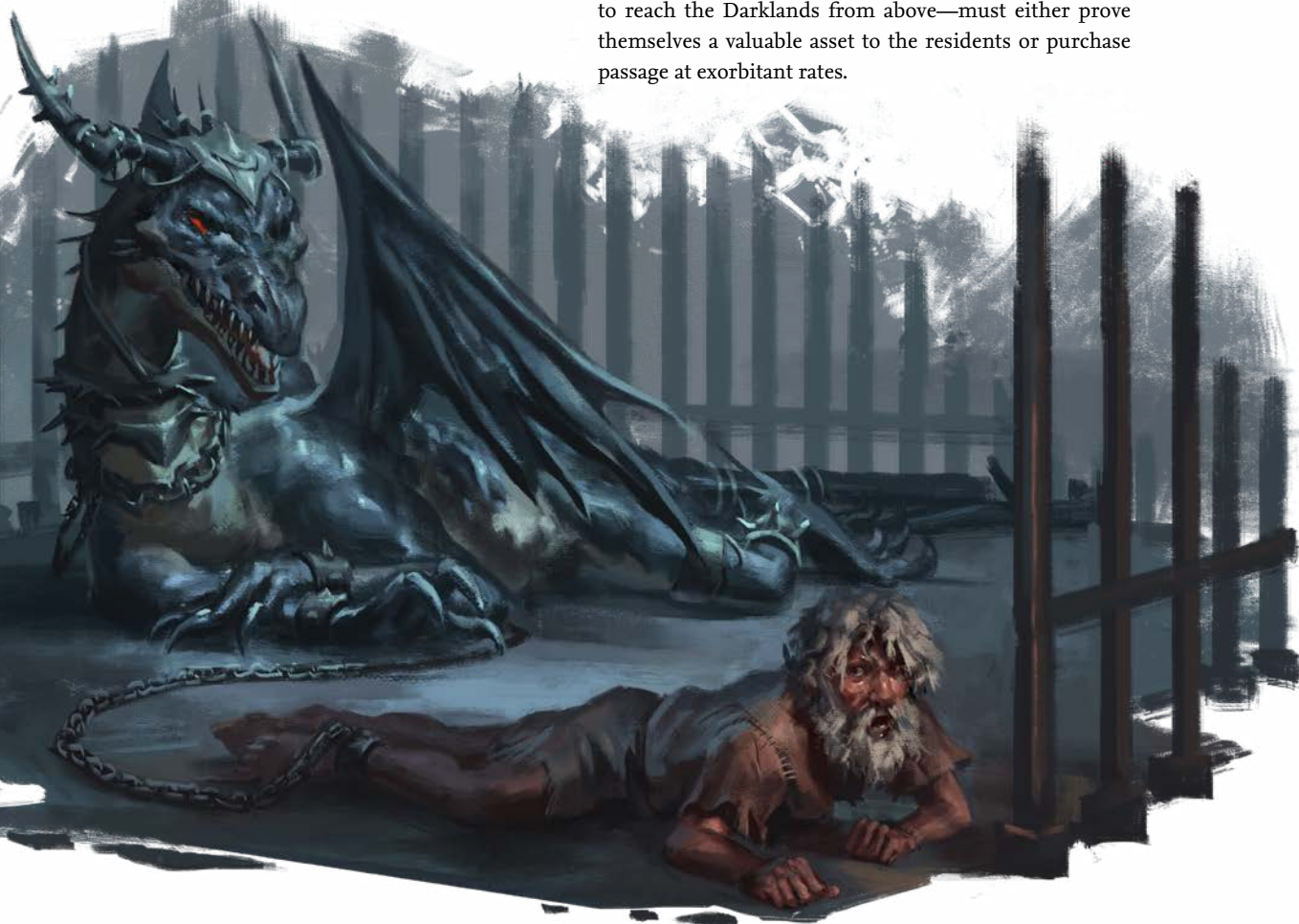
Features Darklands entrance, dragon's hoard, slave trade

First discovered during the Everwar some 4 centuries ago, these caverns in the Uskwood's shadows southwest of Pangolais have become far more than the tomb of the unfortunate Chelish legionnaires who first found their way into the caverns' depths. Explorers during the Shadowbreak (see page 48), intent on learning what had become of the lost troops, found that the previously unexplored caverns delved far deeper into the earth than anyone would have expected, eventually opening into the Darklands layer of Nar-Voth. Once peaceful contact and amicable relations were established with the dark folk of the settlement called Rauhlos, the caverns took on their

present-day role as perhaps the most profitable and active slave-trade route between Nidal and the Darklands.

The caverns' mouth is an unassuming crack in the stone, accessible only by wading through an ice-cold natural spring—an experience that many Nidalese slavers consider a suitable display of devotion to their deity. The first few caves appear ordinary enough, and the roving bands of troglodytes working in service to the caverns' master are sufficient to drive away those who happen here by chance or curiosity. Those permitted access deeper into the caverns find the remnants of that lost legion of Chelish soldiers, alongside rough iron cages holding all manner of captive humanoids brought to Nidal by pirates from the Shackles. These unfortunates are ultimately sold off to the Rauhlosian dark folk in regular exchanges overseen by the umbral dragon Visceroth, a devotee of the Midnight Lord who both guards the caverns and ensures that the slaves are sold at rates that garner sufficient profit for the Nidalese traders.

Rauhlos, though a relatively small village, is tremendously prosperous. As a gateway into Nar-Voth with relatively easy access from the surface of Golarion, it maintains a fierce rivalry in the slave trade with the Sekamina city of Sverspume located beneath it. The insular dark folk inhabitants of Rauhlos are protective of their holdings, and any travelers looking to pass through the settlement—whether to gain access to the surface or to reach the Darklands from above—must either prove themselves a valuable asset to the residents or purchase passage at exorbitant rates.



Rauhlos is frequented by one or more of the mysterious owbs that control the fate of the dark folk—the owbs' lack of distinguishing features and its shrouds of darkness make it nearly impossible to tell whether it is the same benefactor who visits each time or if they are different creatures. Regardless, their visitations grant the settlement yet another unique means of generating income for its denizens. Aboveground, Pangolais holds a sizable population of caligni residents who without hesitation would buy a caligni infant to raise as their own, without regard for whether the infant was freely given or stolen. Nowhere else in Nidal is this exchange carried out with such deliberate frequency as the Shadow Caverns. While such an arrangement would leave most outsiders aghast, it appears to work perfectly well for those directly involved in the exchanges: the caligni gain families, the dark folk avoid any unpleasant confrontations with estranged offspring stirring up trouble in their homeland, and the slave brokers make a tidy profit.

SHADOWREACH

Abandoned and Rediscovered Shadowmaster's Lair

Location southern Uskwood

Master Valnica Sivanshin (NE female dhampir^{B2} sorcerer 4)

Inhabitants carnivorous plants, dhampirs^{B2}, shadow animals and shadow ferns (see pages 60 and 62)

Features archive of a dead demon lord, records of an ancient culture, shadowbinding secrets

Those who travel the Uskwood know to beware sites that appear overly wholesome, as such locales in Nidal are almost always too good to be true. Such is the case with this rustic lodge tucked into a thick stand of ancient red oaks. From the exterior, it resembles an idyllic woodland retreat adorned with a tall stone chimney, stout log walls, and shuttered windows. But no smoke rises from the chimney, and climbing vines cover more of the structure's exterior every year. Further driving locals and wary travelers away are the crawling, miasmatic shadows drifting through the area and the fearsome shadow beast guardians that prowl the dusky undergrowth around the dwelling.

For all that the locals avoid the lodge, claiming it is protected by Zon-Kuthon's servitors, few would guess the site's true nature. Over a century ago, a half-elf Pathfinder Society agent named Ilnarik Sivanshin fled Westcrown carrying an ancient artifact dedicated to Vyriavaxus, demon lord of shadow. Though the icon's demon lord patron was long deceased, its power remained, and it siphoned away the agent's life force. After his death, the half-elf arose as a vampire, seeking the shelter of the Uskwood's gloom and building a haven in which he could study the artifact that had given him such power. Christened Shadowreach, part in bitter mockery of the Pathfinder Society's Absalom stronghold and part

describing Ilnarik's ultimate goals, the lodge grew from a solitary abode to the headquarters for a small but talented mercenary crew of local shadowtouched recruits and Sivanshin's vampiric thralls.

Ilnarik's research into the shadowy powers granted by the artifact that shaped his fate was fruitful, and though Ilnarik and his mercenaries departed half a century ago to return to his home in Westcrown, Shadowreach still holds many of the secrets into which he delved during his years here. One section of the lodge's remarkable library houses expansive lore about the lost Jaytirian culture that forged Ilnarik's shadowy artifact, while another catalogs with startling accuracy a host of profane rituals and boons long thought lost with Vyriavaxus's demise. Most dangerous of all, however, are those secrets and treasures Sivanshin collected to gain control over Nidal's shadowy creations, not least of which are the shadow beasts that famously plagued the streets of Westcrown.

Though Ilnarik left Shadowreach, he did not leave it undefended; his shadow creatures, gloomwings, shadow ferns (see page 62), and far stranger shadow guardians defend the lodge both within and without. While many of these still follow the last commands given them by their absent master, subjects of earlier experiments in shadowbinding are less predictable. Sivanshin considered the occasional loss of one of his mercenaries a fair price for the additional security these creatures provided.

The lodge, though seemingly simple enough from the outside, is a confounding maze within. Ilnarik's illusions lie heavy over every hall and room, from the entryway with an ever-shifting number of exits to unending corridors of shadowstuff that lead victims to wander in infinite loops. Arcane and mechanical traps alike await unwary intruders, all the more deadly in areas cloaked in preternatural darkness, where the most valuable lore lies. Unquestionably larger than the simple cottage containing it, the lodge extends down into an expansive sublevel carved into the earth and stone beneath its foundation; other portions, though, are more akin to extradimensional spaces not unlike those created by a simple *rope trick* spell.

Recently, a new mistress arrived at the house. She is Ilnarik's dhampir daughter, Valnica Sivanshin, who carries her father's legacy in her sorcerer's shadow bloodline. The elegantly cruel dhampir has recently returned from a brief stint with the Midnight Guard and seeks to master the eldritch lore of Shadowreach with the help of some like-minded dhampir friends. So far the disappearances of those travelers and villagers due to Valnica's predations and experimentations have been attributed to the typical dangers of the Uskwood, but there are only so many sources of prey in the sparsely populated region, and word of Valnica's presence here is sure to reach the Umbral Court soon.



TOWER OF SLANT SHADOWS

Iron Tower of Living Flesh Tapestries

Location southwestern plains of Nidal

Master Mother Ravel (LE female human alchemist^{APG} [vivisectionist^{UM}] 14/trickster 7; *Pathfinder RPG Mythic Adventures* 44)

Inhabitants cultists of Rovagug, demodands^{B3}, flesh golems, shredskins^{B4}, skincrawlers^{B6}, skinstitches^{B4}

Features hybridized religions, Star Tower piercing the prison of the Rough Beast, tapestries of living flesh

In the umber grasslands in Nidal's southwestern plains, the rugged Tower of Slant Shadows stands like a massive iron spike cast from the heavens into the ground. Tales about the tower abound, from the simple theories that the structure extends far deeper into the earth than the hundred or so feet it rises into the sky to the assertion that the tower is one of the iron needles that pierces Zon-Kuthon's flesh, manifested in his realm on Golarion. Rare is the scholar who realizes that the Tower of Slant Shadows is one of a series of similar structures found across Golarion, and rarer still is one who knows the origin and true purpose of these Star Towers hewn by Zon-Kuthon's former incarnation Dou-Bral as part of the prison holding the evil god Rovagug captive within the planet.

Tales tell of the torturous deaths that the tower's curate, Mother Ravel, inflicts upon those who dare trespass upon the tower she has guarded since time untold, and most of these tales still fall short of reality. A weaver in flesh, as they call her, Mother Ravel has spent millennia braiding all manner of creatures into vast, living tapestries of semisentient flayed flesh stitched together to span the interior of her tower. Many of these creatures retain no small portion of the memories they knew in life, whether firsthand accounts of historical happenings or arcane lore long lost among the living world. Others retain the treasures they carried or wore when they fell into Mother Ravel's clutches; rings, bracelets, and necklaces are the most common of these trinkets, though some weapons and wondrous items peek out from the weave. What equipment the fleshweaver chooses not to incorporate into her tapestries is simply cast aside, left to molder in a heap at the bottom of the tower's seemingly infinite depths—among which there are certainly no small number of valuable treasures.

Mother Ravel occasionally welcomes visitors who offer her sufficient deference and offerings, typically strange new creatures to incorporate into her weavings, though sometimes she allows guests into her tower for the sheer sport of watching them succumb to the hungry claws of the tapestries. Such guests find themselves clambering along the animate stretches of flesh, beset by animate ribbons of the creatures from which the

weavings were made. A mouth set within a faceless stretch of skin implores outsiders to end its torment in hollow, breathless whispers; fingers pry a climber's hands loose from the web; and limbs scratch and kick at creatures trying to creep along the grotesque tapestry. In the event that Mother Ravel demands the flesh weavings' cooperation, perhaps to identify an incorporated soul that holds some tidbit of information, an eerie congregation of hands rises in the gloom to point the way across hundreds of yards of this lumpy flesh sea. Particularly bold adventurers may seek to rescue a companion or an ally woven into the tapestry but find they must slice their comrade out from the bleeding, screaming tangle of flesh strands (in addition to facing Mother Ravel's wrath).

Cultists of Rovagug have always maintained some level of interest in dismantling the Star Towers, as they ever seek to weaken the bars of the prison around their god. The Tower of Slant Shadows faces fairly regular surveillance and the occasional attack by such cultists, who maintain a small, unruly outpost in an overgrown gulch in the grasslands to the south. These cultists find themselves occasionally fighting off attacks by Desnan fighters seeking to carve out a niche against both Cheliox and Nidal here. Recently, though, both groups have come under attack by a third party: a war party of shaggy and tarry demodands (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 3 69, 71) with its sights set on the tower. These hateful creatures plot at the behest of a thanatotic titan (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 2 267), itself sealed away in a planar prison adjacent to the Abyss. Rather than destroy the tower, these demodands seek to channel its power into their own efforts to bring their titan master to the Material Plane. This plot has enraged the cultists of Rovagug, who see it as tampering with one of the keys to their deity's prison, but it has also galvanized the efforts of the Desnans in the region to prevent the introduction of such a destructive force of evil.

Though normally followers of these two deities would never willingly cooperate, they find themselves strange bedfellows in opposing the demodands, and a few chaotic neutral individuals have formed a bizarre philosophy bridging the two divine portfolios. Not welcome in the camps of either of their patrons, the followers of this strange and hybrid faith have formed their own commune nearly in the tower's strangely angled shadow, serving as the last line of defense against the demodands' attacks—other than the caretaker Mother Ravel herself, of course. The tower's keeper has so far refrained from taking action against any of the various factions struggling over her tower, though whichever group found itself the victor of this conflict would surely face her ire before it could enact its plans upon the tower.

UNDERVALE

Illusion-Cloaked Bellflower Waystation

Location Umbral Basin

Master Landry Tethertine (CG male halfling bard 6)

Inhabitants gnomes, halflings, passing merchants

Features constructs, freedom-fighting plots spanning Avistan, illusions

Few souls travel the Umbral Basin willingly. Even Nidalese locals avoid the place, warned away by the unnatural shadow mists and the many predators hiding and hunting within. The most mundane of the dangers is that of laming a steed on the rocky, uneven surface underfoot, and tales abound of far more sinister forces: the indestructible Splinter Men, leagues of shadow giants, and reality-warping storms of black fog.

But some do brave the terrors of this foreboding locale. The semiregular merchant caravans between Molthune and Ridwan are the best known of these hardy travelers, prompted by economic need and making the journey under the protection of elite mercenary guards. Less well known are the halflings of the Bellflower Network, who take advantage of the mist and the nearby pass through the Menador Mountains to shepherd freed slaves from both Nidal and Cheliox into Molthune and, once there, to freedom in the many welcoming nations of the Inner Sea region and beyond.

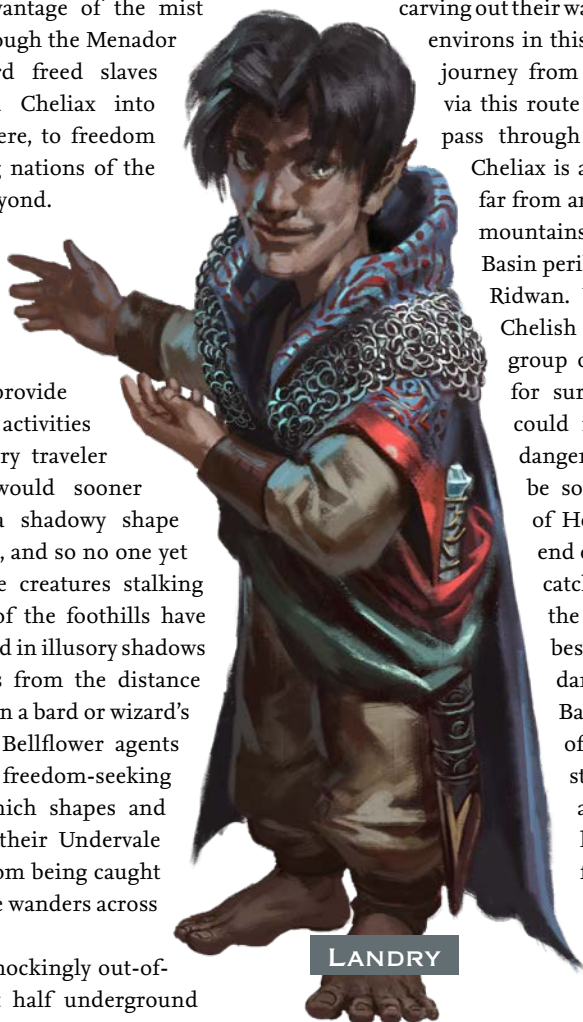
The halflings of the settlement of Undervale are a canny lot, leveraging the widely known perils of the Umbral Basin to provide cover for their own activities in the area. Nearly every traveler through the region would sooner flee than investigate a shadowy shape emerging from the mist, and so no one yet has discovered that the creatures stalking this particular hollow of the foothills have skeletons of brass cloaked in illusory shadows or that the eerie howls from the distance have no source other than a bard or wizard's simplest cantrips. The Bellflower agents leading each group of freedom-seeking former slaves know which shapes and sounds are created by their Undervale kin, preventing them from being caught off guard when a true foe wanders across their path.

The settlement is a shockingly out-of-place community, built half underground

among the basin's roiling shadows. Once within its carefully hidden walls, travelers find themselves welcomed into a bright, cheery community where fires burn on every hearth, songs carry from one person to the next, and the cozy scent of a hearty meal pervades the air.

The atmosphere of Undervale is vastly different, more cheerful, and more full of life than any place in Nidal proper. The vast majority of its residents are halflings, though a few gnomes remain in residence for the thrilling experience of living amid such legendary danger, helping to maintain the illusions and golems of all sorts that defend the waystation. Molthuni caravan mercenaries are occasionally "lost" in the mists for a few days while they convey supplies to the Undervale residents, though any taller visitors among them find themselves at a disadvantage in the settlement, forced to crouch and adapt to the half-sized accommodations. The halfling Landry Tethertine manages Undervale, vetting potential residents and overseeing both the Bellflower operations and the construct and illusion defenses.

For all that Undervale's experts have achieved in carving out their way station in one of the most hostile environs in this part of the Inner Sea region, the journey from Cheliox and Nidal to Molthune via this route is not for the faint of heart. The pass through the Menador Mountains from Cheliox is a difficult and dangerous passage, far from any bastions of civilization, and the mountains open into the edge of the Umbral Basin perilously close to Kuthite-dominated Ridwan. While neither the Nidalese nor Chelish authorities are likely to pursue a group of fleeing slaves into the basin—for surely a ragtag band of little folk could never survive the overwhelming dangers to be found there—it would not be so unreasonable for a detachment of Hellknights to patrol the southern end of the Menador pass in an effort to catch fleeing slaves before they reach the pass. Undervale hunters do their best to keep their route clear of more dangerous foes, but the Umbral Basin is a perilous place, and many of its dangers are difficult to truly stave off. These halflings' bravery and tenacity are formidable, however, and the promise of freedom beyond the shadowy mists encourages agents of the Bellflower Network to make regular use of this hidden route to freedom.



LANDRY



BESTIARY

WE KNEW NO ANIMAL WOULD KILL HORSES LIKE THAT—SAVAGING THE CORPSES AND ROLLING AROUND IN THE GUTS LIKE A PIG IN DUNG. I HAD A MIND IT WAS THE WORK OF THOSE PALE, CHAIN-WRAPPED MONSTERS THAT SERVE AS COURTIERS DOWN IN PANGOLAIS. EVERYONE KNOWS THEY LOVE BLOOD AND SUFFERING, BUT NO ONE WITH ANY SENSE TALKS ABOUT THEM OUT LOUD. SO OFF WE WENT ON AN ANIMAL HUNT ANYWAY, ME AND THE BOSS AND NINE OTHERS, KNOWING THAT IT WEREN'T ANY ANIMAL WE WERE TRACKING. TURNED OUT MAYBE WE WERE BOTH RIGHT AND WRONG TOGETHER.

"THE TRAIL LED US NEAR THE BARROWMOOR, WHERE NO ONE SANE PREFERS TO VENTURE, BUT THANKFULLY IT SOON VEERED AWAY INTO A BOX CANYON. THREE LIONS WERE WAITING FOR US, HIDING IN THE SHADOWS OF THE CANYON WALL. BLESS THE BOSS'S SHARP EYES, HE SAW THEM BEFORE THEY SPRANG. THAT'S THE ONLY REASON WHY THREE OF US SURVIVED."

—ROLLO BESPAR, ATTERAN RANCHES HAND

RANDOM ENCOUNTER TABLES

The encounter tables presented on this page are not meant to be exhaustive lists of creatures that dwell within all major regions in Nidal, but they are presented for the GM's convenience when PCs are traveling or adventuring in each of the indicated regions. Some results may be trivial or too difficult for the PCs, or might not fit with a specific location; if so, GMs should feel free to roll again or choose a different encounter.

Desnan Revolutionaries (CR 4): These groups are stirring up sympathies for Desna, the chaotic good goddess of dreams, stars, and travelers. Each group consists of three chaotic good acolytes (*Pathfinder RPG NPC Codex* 244) and a charlatan (*NPC Codex* 145). If the PCs don't appear to be affiliated with the Umbral Court, these groups may attempt to recruit them to defeat evil foes or carry secret messages. The acolytes are genuine worshippers of Desna, but the charlatan is only out to stir up trouble.

Kuthite Inquisitors (CR 7): These groups have been charged with ferreting out disloyalty to the Umbral Court and to the glorious patron of Nidal, the evil god Zon-Kuthon. Each group consists of a vivisectionist cleric (*NPC Codex* 48) in command of two bullying brawlers (*NPC Codex* 96). These groups assume that the PCs are spies or criminals and attempt to capture them alive to torture confessions from them.

Suspicious Travelers (CR 2): These groups haul battered carts with valueless goods to disguise the fact that they are carrying a substantial amount of money. Each group consists of three apprentice jewelers (*NPC Codex* 260) with an old sailor (*NPC Codex* 260) as a bodyguard. These groups attempt to avoid the PCs, as they assume that all the people they meet are brigands in disguise.

ATTERAN RANCHES

d%	Result	Avg. CR	Source
1-21	1 giant raven	1	<i>Bestiary</i> 6 240
22-33	Suspicious travelers	2	See above
34-45	1 shadow	3	<i>Bestiary</i> 245
46-56	Desnan revolutionaries	4	See above
57-66	1d6 shadow animal horses	5	See page 60, <i>Bestiary</i> 177
67-76	1d3 shadow animal lions	6	See page 60
77-86	2 green hags	7	<i>Bestiary</i> 167
87-96	1d3 kytons	8	<i>Bestiary</i> 185
97-100	1 nuckelavee	9	<i>Bestiary</i> 3 203

MINDSPIN MOUNTAINS

d%	Result	Avg. CR	Source
1-26	2d8 orcs	3	<i>Bestiary</i> 222
27-48	1 nightgaunt	4	<i>Bestiary</i> 4 203
49-64	1d4 ogres	5	<i>Bestiary</i> 220

65-79	1 pukwudgie	7	<i>Bestiary</i> 3 223
80-92	1d6 trolls	8	<i>Bestiary</i> 268
93-97	1 fire giant	10	<i>Bestiary</i> 148
98-99	1 jinmenju	11	<i>Bestiary</i> 4 161
100	2d4+1 hill giants	12	<i>Bestiary</i> 150

NORTH PLAINS

d%	Result	Avg. CR	Source
1-22	1d4 fetchling rogues	1	<i>Bestiary</i> 2 123
23-34	Suspicious travelers	2	See above
35-46	1 dark slayer	3	<i>Bestiary</i> 2 75
47-57	Desnan revolutionaries	4	See above
58-67	1 ice mephit and 1 salt mephit	5	<i>Bestiary</i> 202
68-77	1d4 bison	6	<i>Bestiary</i> 174
78-87	2 ostiarius kytons	7	<i>Bestiary</i> 4 176
88-95	1 guecubu	8	<i>Bestiary</i> 3 145
96-100	1 mastodon	9	<i>Bestiary</i> 128

UMBRAL BASIN

d%	Result	Avg. CR	Source
1-22	1 suffragan kyton	5	See page 58
23-37	1d6 shadows	6	<i>Bestiary</i> 245
38-52	Kuthite inquisitors	7	See above
53-64	2 kytons	8	<i>Bestiary</i> 185
65-76	1 caller in darkness	9	<i>Bestiary</i> 5 48
77-87	1d6+1 svartalfars	12	<i>Bestiary</i> 4 256
88-95	1d6 ash giants	14	<i>Bestiary</i> 3 126
96-100	2 shadow giants	15	<i>Bestiary</i> 6 135

USKWOOD

d%	Result	Avg. CR	Source
1-21	1d4 troglodytes	3	<i>Bestiary</i> 267
22-33	1 shadow fern	4	See page 62
34-45	1 ostiarius kyton	5	<i>Bestiary</i> 4 176
46-56	1 owb	6	<i>Bestiary</i> 4 210
57-66	1 hive brute	8	See page 56
67-76	2 deathwebs	8	<i>Bestiary</i> 3 65
77-86	1 vampire sorcerer	9	<i>Bestiary</i> 270
87-96	1d4 fiendish treants	11	<i>Bestiary</i> 294, 266
97-100	1 interlocutor kyton	12	<i>Bestiary</i> 3 174

WESTERN COAST

d%	Result	Avg. CR	Source
1-24	1d4 caligni rogues	1	<i>Bestiary</i> 5 66
25-42	1 smokeshade	2	See page 63
43-57	1d6+2 fetchling rogues	3	<i>Bestiary</i> 2 123
58-69	1 scrag	5	<i>Bestiary</i> 268
70-80	2 dark creepers and 1 dark stalker	6	<i>Bestiary</i> 53, 154
81-90	Kuthite inquisitors	7	See above
91-96	1d4 saltwater merrows	8	<i>Bestiary</i> 2 189
97-100	1 sacristan kyton	10	<i>Bestiary</i> 4 177

HIVE BRUTE

This hulking, four-legged beast has thick, chitinous plates covering its body. Steaming acid drips from its snapping maw.

HIVE BRUTE

CR 8



XP 4,800

NE Large aberration (hive); *Pathfinder RPG Horror Adventures* 233

Init +6; **Senses** blindsense 60 ft., blindsight 10 ft., hive mind; Perception +14

DEFENSE

AC 21, touch 11, flat-footed 19 (+2 Dex, +10 natural, -1 size)

hp 102 (12d8+48)

Fort +7, **Ref** +8, **Will** +11

Defensive Abilities corrosive blood (1d6 acid), heat adaptability; **Immune** acid

OFFENSE

Speed 40 ft., climb 20 ft.

Melee bite +15 (1d8+7), 2 claws +15 (1d6+7/19-20), tail slap +10 (1d8+3)

Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.

Special Attacks acid spray, death throes (12d6, DC 19)

STATISTICS

Str 24, **Dex** 15, **Con** 16, **Int** 6, **Wis** 13, **Cha** 3

Base Atk +9; **CMB** +17; **CMD** 29 (33 vs. trip)

Feats Improved Critical (claw), Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes, Toughness, Vital Strike

Skills Climb +15, Perception +14, Stealth +7, Survival +12

Languages Aklo (can't speak)

SQ blind

ECOLOGY

Environment any

Organization solitary, pair, or hive (1-10 plus 1-50 hive workers and warriors plus 1 queen)

Treasure incidental

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Acid Spray (Ex) A hive brute can spray a fine mist of acid in a 30-foot cone as a standard action once every 1d4 rounds. Creatures in this area take 6d6 points of acid damage. Additionally, creatures damaged by the hive brute's acid spray continue to take 6d6 points of acid damage each round for the next 1d3 rounds. A creature that succeeds at a DC 19 Reflex saving throw halves the initial damage and negates the ongoing damage. The save DC is Constitution-based.

At the center of the Uskwood, the Shades of the Uskwood keep a hive queen imprisoned in a magical cell, yet her influence is not so easily contained. Near the Uskheart, the queen's spawn are very common. Most of these creatures are hive warriors (*Pathfinder RPG Horror Adventures* 237), hive-corrupted humanoids (*Horror Adventures* 24), or animals with the hive creature simple template (*Horror Adventures* 249), but sometimes they are different creatures altogether. Animals or other monstrous beasts that reject their role as incubation vessels for hive larvae sometimes instead become powerful hive creatures in their own right.

Often found wandering the Uskwood alone or in pairs rather than as part of the central hive near Uskheart, hive brutes lack the intelligence and cunning of their kin, but they make up for the deficit with more primal physical abilities. When in a large group of other hive creatures, brutes assist both workers and warriors in their tasks, serving as beasts of burden and war beasts in equal measure.



JOYFUL THING

This sluglike humanoid has neither arms nor legs and is covered in spiked, rusted chains. Its lolling tongue drips with thick saliva.

JOYFUL THING CR 6 
XP 2,400

LE Medium outsider (native)

Init +2; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +11

DEFENSE

AC 19, touch 11, flat-footed 19 (–2 Dex, +8 natural, +3 profane)

hp 68 (8d10+24)

Fort +11, **Ref** +5, **Will** +9

Immune fear, pain effects; **SR** 17

OFFENSE

Speed 10 ft.

Melee spiked chain +11/+6 (2d4+3 plus grab)

Special Attacks taste fear

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 8th; concentration +11)

Constant—*levitate*, *mage hand*

At will—*bane* (DC 14), *cause fear* (DC 14), *command* (DC 14), *darkness*

3/day—*bestow curse* (DC 16), *crushing despair* (DC 17), *hold person* (DC 15), *mirror image*

1/day—*augury*, *summon* (level 3, 1 augur kyton⁸³ 35%)

STATISTICS

Str 10, **Dex** 6, **Con** 15, **Int** 16, **Wis** 11, **Cha** 17

Base Atk +8; **CMB** +8 (+10 grapple); **CMD** 19 (21 vs. grapple, can't be tripped)

Feats Improved Grapple, Improved Initiative, Lightning Reflexes, Toughness

Skills Diplomacy +14, Intimidate +14, Knowledge (local) +11, Knowledge (nobility) +11, Knowledge (planes) +14, Knowledge (religion) +14, Perception +11, Sense Motive +11, Spellcraft +14

Languages Common, Hallit, Shadowtongue

SQ blessing of pain, exploit pain, umbral embrace

ECOLOGY

Environment any

Organization solitary, pair, or coven (3–8)

Treasure standard

SPECIAL ABILITIES

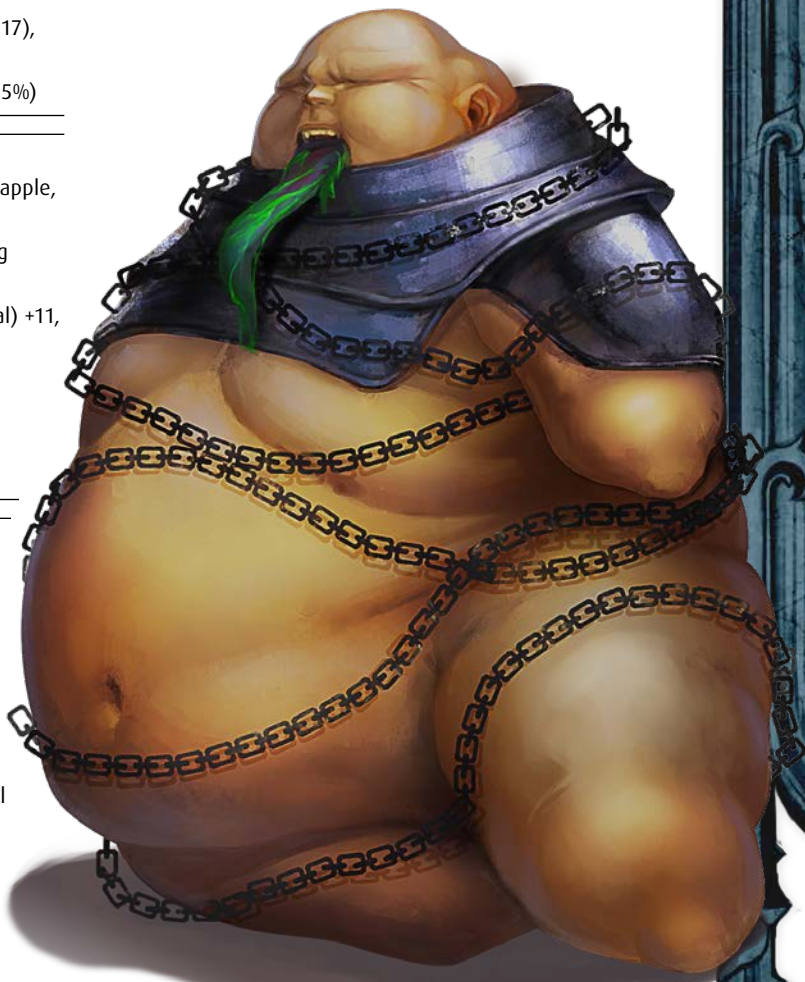
Blessing of Pain (Su) In exchange for its sacrifice to Zon-Kuthon, a Joyful Thing gains a profane bonus equal to its Charisma bonus to AC, on all saving throws, and on attack and damage rolls. A Joyful Thing whose alignment shifts away from lawful evil for any reason loses these bonuses.

Exploit Pain (Su) A Joyful Thing gains a +1 morale bonus on attack and damage rolls against any target under the effects of an emotion, fear, or pain effect.

Taste Fear (Su) As a standard action, a Joyful Thing can attempt to pin a grappled target by wrapping its elongated tongue around the creature's head. While the target is so pinned, the Joyful Thing can read its thoughts as if it were under the effect of *detect thoughts*.

Umbral Embrace (Su) A Joyful Thing is always treated as if it qualified for its Improved Grapple feat, even though most Joyful Things do not have the normal requisite Dexterity score or the Improved Unarmed Strike feat.

The most dedicated of Zon-Kuthon's faithful sometimes undergo a brutal ritual in which their limbs are amputated and their nonvital organs are removed. This imbues the so-called Joyful Things with powers drawn from the Plane of Shadow but also makes them embodiments of pain, sacrifice, and the eternal torment that awaits Kuthites in the afterlife. These exemplars of the Midnight Lord's glorious suffering hold positions of influence among other Kuthites, and any temple that hosts one or more Joyful Things is considered blessed by the god of darkness.



KYTON, SUFFRAGAN

Bladed whips and spiked chains sprout from the stumps of this humanoid torso's amputated limbs. Elongated saw blades loll out of its distended mouth.

SUFFRAGAN

CR 5



XP 1,600

LE Medium outsider (evil, extraplanar, kyton, lawful)

Init +3; Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +12

DEFENSE

AC 18, touch 14, flat-footed 14 (+3 Dex, +1 dodge, +4 natural)

hp 51 (6d10+18); regeneration 2 (good weapons and spells, silver weapons)

Fort +5, Ref +8, Will +8

DR 5/good or silver; Immune cold; SR 16

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

Melee 4 bladed limbs +8 (1d6+1 plus trip)

STATISTICS

Str 13, Dex 16, Con 17, Int 11, Wis 16, Cha 14

Base Atk +6; CMB +7; CMD 21 (25 vs. trip)

Feats Dodge, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (bladed limb)

Skills Acrobatics +12, Climb +9, Heal +12, Intimidate +11, Knowledge (planes) +6, Perception +12, Sense Motive +9, Stealth +12

Languages Common, Infernal

SQ configuration of chains, slow fall

ECOLOGY

Environment any (Plane of Shadow)

Organization solitary, pair, or tangle (3–6)

Treasure standard

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Bladed Limbs (Ex) The chains and bladed whips extruding from a suffragan's stumps can deal piercing or slashing damage, as chosen by the suffragan with each attack.

Configuration of Chains (Ex) As a swift action that does not provoke attacks of opportunity, a suffragan can choose the configuration of the blades and chains sprouting from its amputated limbs. The suffragan's configuration of chains affects its number of attacks, its reach, its base speed, and its climb speed, in addition to affecting other statistics or granting additional abilities, depending on the configuration. The configurations available to the suffragan are described below, and the suffragan retains the selected configuration until it spends a swift action to change it. Most suffragans frequently use the old form configuration, which is reflected in the statistics above.

Midnight's Blessing Configuration: The suffragan rolls onto its back and extends all of its chains and whips to their full lengths. The kyton can make up to eight bladed limb attacks each round and has a reach of 10 feet. Its base speed and climb speed are 5 feet.

Old Form Configuration: The suffragan uses the chains and whips sprouting from the stumps of its amputated legs to walk. The kyton can make up to four bladed limb attacks each round and gains the trip special ability with its bladed limb attacks. Its base speed and climb speed are both 30 feet, and it gains a +4 bonus to its CMD against trip combat maneuvers.

Prowler Configuration: The suffragan uses most of its chains and whips for locomotion while hunched low to the ground like a beetle. The kyton can make up to two bladed limb attacks each round. Its base speed and climb speed are both 50 feet, and it gains the pounce ability as well as a +8 bonus to its CMD against bull rush, reposition, or trip combat maneuvers.

Slow Fall (Ex) A suffragan in any configuration can use its bladed whips and chains to slow its fall. When within reach of a wall, a suffragan can slow its descent and fall any distance without harm.

Born from the twisted souls of the Joyful Things—Zon-Kuthon's most devoted zealots—suffragans appear as humanoid torsos with chains or barbed whips sprouting from the stumps of their amputated arms and legs. Suffragans display an uncanny ability to reconfigure their barbed limbs to suit any task at hand. When desperate or when fighting a cornered foe, most suffragans roll onto their backs to strike with a tempest of chains and whips. Albeit uncommon, other suffragan configurations include wings or fins made of interlocked limbs.

A suffragan's face is as much a horrific fusion of metal and flesh as its body. Barbed blades droop from its mouth, its tongue replaced with jagged metal that undulates eerily.

Like all kytons, suffragans delight in inflicting terror and suffering, particularly upon the pure and weak. They enjoy giving captives small, overlapping, painful lashes with their barbs and blades. Suffragans often refer to their torturous work as blessings they are bestowing on their cruel god's behalf, though their words are garbled around their mouth blades.

A suffragan kyton stands about 5 feet tall and weighs 160 pounds.

ECOLOGY

Suffragan kytons are born from the souls of Joyful Things (see page 57) who were so warped and depraved in their post-ritual transformations that they became true servants of Zon-Kuthon: kytons. Newly created suffragans lack appendages, but they quickly and eagerly embrace the kyton desire to improve their flesh. For suffragans, this means affixing chains and whips to

their stumps. As the creatures had long ago shed their attachment to typical human forms, suffragans learn how to reconfigure their limbs as needed to suit the task at hand.

Suffragans take pride in the bladed metal drooping from their mouths, replacing those components frequently with longer, sharper, or more brightly colored pieces of metal. They understand that their distinctive facial features evoke revulsion or even fascination in others, but they typically misinterpret this attention as adoration rather than horror.

Suffragans serve loyally as functionaries and majordomos to eremites (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 3 172) in the massive sanctuaries to Zon-Kuthon on the Plane of Shadow. The suffragans skitter about these echoing structures, carrying about their various tasks with fervent devotion.

Suffragans have no need to eat or drink, and they are often so long out of the habit—having been fed through feeding tubes or magic while they were mortal—that they seem to have entirely forgotten how to. Suffragans understand that other creatures must eat, and they take delight in preparing what they believe to be elaborate meals for their mortal victims. Unfortunately, a suffragan's ideas of food range from the unusual (such as a bowl of moth wings) to the gruesome (such as lumps of flesh cut from the suffragan's torso).

HABITAT & SOCIETY

Even among the inscrutable kytons, suffragans have a particularly alien mind-set. Suffragans don't feel at all bound by the humanoid shape; they switch between climbing, crawling, and walking without much thought. When suffragans deign to take on humanoid forms, they seem to have forgotten how to move in that form, walking with painfully twisted torsos or in a disturbing crouch. Other kytons often find suffragans' zealous dedication to Zon-Kuthon off-putting and prefer to assign them to minor tasks or other busywork to keep them occupied and out of the way. Suffragans tend to take great pride in these tasks, no matter how menial, believing they are loyally serving more powerful or devout kytons.

Suffragans often serve as torturers or jailors and take a particular, sadistic glee in the pain they inflict upon mortal victims. Generally, kytons utilize torture now as an end to itself, but rather as a gateway to a perverse form of enlightenment or as a debasing method of dominance. Suffragans blur this line, however. They are among the cruelest pain inflictors and the most zealous Kuthite servants among their kind. They believe that their own bodily transformations—as well as the excruciating pain they have endured and continue to suffer—are the purest and most powerful method of worshiping the Midnight Lord. Thus, they seek to perpetuate this evil obeisance through inflicting what

they refer to as the blessings of Zon-Kuthon upon any who fall into their grasp.

As suffragans switch easily and naturally between their configurations, they are often quite comfortable with other creatures that have malleable forms. Suffragans particularly like oozes, keeping them as pampered pets when possible and feeding them cast-off bits of flesh or the remains of their victims. Suffragans find doppelgangers and faceless stalkers (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 2 122) intriguing, and such captives might earn an opportunity to escape by promising an entertaining display of shape-shifting.



SHADOW ANIMAL

This lion has washed-out coloration and a sharp shadow that extends an unnaturally long distance from its claws.

SHADOW ANIMAL LION

CR 4



XP 1,200

N Large outsider (native)

Init +9; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision, scent; Perception +12

DEFENSE

AC 16, touch 14, flat-footed 11 (+5 Dex, +2 natural, -1 size)

hp 32 (5d8+10)

Fort +6, **Ref** +9, **Will** +3

Defensive Abilities shadow blend

OFFENSE

Speed 50 ft.

Melee bite +7 (1d8+5 plus grab), 2 claws +7 (1d4+5)

Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft.

Special Attacks pounce, rake (2 claws +7, 1d4+5 plus blinding savagery)

STATISTICS

Str 21, **Dex** 21, **Con** 15, **Int** 4, **Wis** 14, **Cha** 10

Base Atk +3; **CMB** +9 (+13 grapple); **CMD** 24 (28 vs. trip)

Feats Improved Initiative, Run, Skill Focus (Perception)

Skills Acrobatics +13, Intimidate +12, Perception +12, Stealth +13 (+17 in undergrowth); **Racial Modifiers** +4 Acrobatics, +4 Intimidate, +4 Stealth (+8 in undergrowth)

Languages Common, Infernal (cannot speak)

SQ shadow step (50 ft.)

ECOLOGY

Environment warm plains

Organization solitary, pair, or pride (3-10)

Treasure standard

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Blinding Savagery (Ex) Whenever a shadow animal lion deals damage to a creature with its rake attack, the damaged creature must succeed at a DC 14 Fortitude save or be blinded for 1 round. The save DC is Wisdom-based.

Shadow Blend (Su) In any illumination other than bright light, a shadow animal lion blends into the shadows, giving it concealment (20% miss chance). A shadow animal lion can suspend or resume this ability as a free action.

Shadow Step (Su) A shadow animal lion can teleport up to 10 feet per Hit Die as a move action, so long as the creature starts and ends this travel in dim light or darkness. It can use this ability once every 1d4 rounds.

Dread energies from the Plane of Shadow have leaked into the countryside of Nidal for thousands of years, pooling in shadowed groves and along darkened hillsides. Although normal animals shun these shadow-haunted regions, hunger or adversity sometimes compels a creature to enter

them. Some animals who do so are wholly transformed by these energies, becoming shadow animals.

Shadow animals are more than mere animals, becoming hunters bleached of bright colors and commanding unusual predatory powers. Even herbivores that undergo this transformation become short tempered and dangerous.

Shadow animals have the brute cunning to understand spoken language, but they generally cannot speak.

CREATING A SHADOW ANIMAL

The shadow animal template is inherited or acquired and can be added to any living, corporeal animal (referred to hereafter as the base creature). A shadow animal uses all the base creature's statistics and special abilities except as noted.

CR: If 9 HD or fewer, base creature's CR + 1; if 10 HD or more, base creature's CR + 2.

Type: The creature's type changes to outsider (native). Do not recalculate HD, BAB, or saves.

Alignment: Any (usually nongood).

Armor Class: Reduce the creature's natural armor, if any, by 1 (to a minimum of 0).

Senses: A shadow animal gains darkvision with a range up to 60 feet and low-light vision if it didn't already have it.

Defensive Abilities: A shadow animal gains the following defensive ability.

Shadow Blend (Su): In any illumination other than bright light, a shadow animal blends into the shadows, giving it concealment (20% miss chance). A shadow animal can suspend or resume this ability as a free action.

Speed: All of the shadow animal's movement speeds increase by 10 feet.

Special Abilities: A shadow animal gains one of the following abilities for every 3 HD it has (round up).

Blinding Savagery (Ex): Choose the rake, rend, or trample ability. Whenever the shadow animal creature uses the selected ability to deal damage to a creature, the damaged creature must succeed at a Fortitude saving throw or become blinded for 1 round. The save DC is equal to 10 + half the shadow animal's Hit Dice + the shadow animal's Wisdom modifier. This ability can be selected up to three times, applying it to a different ability each time.

Energy Resistance (Ex): The shadow animal gains cold resistance 10 or increases its existing cold resistance of 10 or greater to immunity to cold. This ability can be selected up to two times.

Evasion (Ex): The shadow animal gains evasion, as per the rogue ability of the same name.

Fear Aura (Su): Any creature within a 60-foot radius of the shadow animal that can see or hear it must succeed at a Will saving throw (DC = 10 + half the shadow animal's HD + the shadow animal's Charisma modifier) or be

shaken for as long as it remains within the aura. Whether or not it succeeds at its save, that creature cannot be affected again by the same shadow animal's fear aura for 24 hours. This is a mind-affecting fear effect.

Frightful Presence (Su): The shadow animal gains the frightful presence universal monster ability, which activates as a free action when the shadow animal charges, attacks during a surprise round, or succeeds at a DC 15 Intimidate check. Its frightful presence has a range of 30 feet and a duration of 5d6 rounds.

Hide in Plain Sight (Su): The shadow animal can use Stealth even while being observed. As long as it is within 10 feet of a shadow other than its own, a shadow animal can attempt to use Stealth to hide itself from view even if it does not have cover or concealment.

See in Darkness (Su): The shadow animal can see perfectly in darkness of any kind, including that created by deeper darkness.

Shadow Bite (Su): The shadow animal can make one of its natural attacks through its shadow. Its reach with the selected natural attack increases by 5 feet, and a creature damaged by this natural attack must succeed at a Fortitude save ($DC = 10 + \text{half the shadow animal's HD} + \text{the shadow animal's Charisma modifier}$) or take 1 point of Strength damage in addition to the normal damage dealt.

Shadow Form (Su): Once per day as a standard action, the shadow animal can turn into an animate pool of darkness for up to 10 minutes. This duration need not be used at all once, but it must be used in 1-minute increments. This ability functions as per *gaseous form*.

Shadow Spirit (Su): The shadow animal gains a +4 racial bonus on saving throws against energy drain and death effects. This ability can be selected up to two times; if this ability is selected a second time, the shadow animal instead gains immunity to energy drain and death effects.

Shadow Step (Su): The shadow animal can teleport up to 10 feet per Hit Die as a move action, so long as the creature starts and ends this travel in dim light or darkness. It can use this ability once every 1d4 rounds.

Spectral Attacks (Su): The shadow animal's natural attacks affect incorporeal creatures as if they had the *ghost touch* weapon special ability.

Spell Resistance (Ex): The shadow animal gains SR equal to 11 + its CR. This does not stack with any SR the base creature has.

Umbral Fast Healing (Ex): The shadow animal gains fast healing 1 when in areas of dim light or darkness. A shadow animal must have at least 10 HD to select this ability.

Vanish (Su): As a swift action, the shadow animal can vanish for 1 round as if affected by *invisibility*. Each day, it can use this ability for 1 round per Hit Die. This ability's duration need not be used all at once, but it must be used in 1-round increments.

Abilities: A shadow animal gains a +4 bonus to Dexterity and Charisma and a +2 bonus to Intelligence and Wisdom.

Skills: A shadow animal gains a +4 racial bonus on Intimidate and Stealth checks, which does not stack with any racial bonuses the base creature has. A shadow animal has a number of skill points per racial Hit Dice equal to 6 + its Intelligence modifier. Its racial class skills are Acrobatics, Climb, Fly, Intimidate, Perception, Stealth, and Swim.

Languages: Shadow animals gain Common and Infernal, but if the base creature is unable to speak, it can only understand these languages.



SHADOW FERN

The thick stalks of this dark-veined, gray plant are covered in a fine black fuzz.

SHADOW FERN

CR 4



XP 1,200

N Medium plant

Init +1; **Senses** low-light vision, see in darkness;
Perception +2

DEFENSE

AC 17, touch 11, flat-footed 16 (+1 Dex, +6 natural)

hp 39 (6d8+12); fast healing 2

Fort +7, **Ref** +3, **Will** +4

Immune cold, plant traits; **Resist** acid 5, electricity 5, fire 5

Weaknesses vulnerable to light

OFFENSE

Speed 10 ft.

Melee 2 slams +8 (1d6+4)

Special Attacks poison, spore cloud

STATISTICS

Str 18, **Dex** 13, **Con** 14, **Int** —, **Wis** 15, **Cha** 2

Base Atk +4; **CMB** +8; **CMD** 19 (can't be tripped)

ECOLOGY

Environment any forests or underground

Organization solitary, pair, or patch (3–12)

Treasure none

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Poison (Ex) Spore cloud—inhaled; *save* Fort DC 15; *frequency* 1/round for 6 rounds; *effect* 1d2 Con damage; *cure* 2 consecutive saves.

Spore Cloud (Ex) Once per day as a standard action, a shadow fern can expel a cloud of poisonous spores in a 10-foot-radius burst that lingers for 1 minute before dispersing. A moderate wind (11+ mph), such as from a *gust of wind* spell, disperses the cloud in 4 rounds. A strong wind (21+ mph) disperses the cloud in 1 round. A new shadow fern grows out of the corpse of any creature that dies as a result of Constitution damage from this poison after 1 week.

Vulnerable to Light (Ex) Shadow ferns use darkness for essential life functions in the same way normal plants use sunlight for photosynthesis. Their fast healing is suppressed in areas of normal light and bright light, and they are staggered in areas of bright light.

The perpetual darkness under the canopy of the Uskwood in Nidal has given rise to new varieties of both flora and fauna unique to the preternaturally shadowy environment. Most prevalent among the plants exhibiting such adaptations are the fecund shadow ferns, which grow in large patches throughout the forest. Darklands-dwelling societies—including caligni, drow, and especially duergar—cultivate the plants underground, since they thrive in the lightless depths. Over the millennia, the plants have even spread into the Plane of Shadow, leading travelers using *shadow walk* to encounter the plants with increasing frequency during their umbral jaunts. Some shadowcasters believe that elder specimens of shadow ferns are capable of existing simultaneously on both the Material and Shadow Planes, and many such casters have a number of potted shadow ferns in their laboratories for further study.

The malevolent druids of the Uskwood have been known to weaponize shadow fern spores, killing their victims and seeding new patches of the invasive plant in their victims' corpses.



SMOKESHADE

This tube of roiling mist writhes through the air. Thin tendrils of dark smoke reach tentatively out from its body as swiftly as they collapse back into its central mass.

SMOKESHADE

CR 2



XP 600

NE Tiny aberration (extraplanar, incorporeal)

Init +6; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +8

DEFENSE

AC 15, touch 15, flat-footed 13 (+1 deflection, +2 Dex, +2 size)

hp 22 (4d8+4)

Fort +2, **Ref** +5, **Will** +5

Defensive Abilities amorphous; **SR** 13

OFFENSE

Speed 10 ft., fly 60 ft. (good)

Melee tendrill +5 (2d6 negative energy plus cloying shade)

Space 2-1/2 ft.; **Reach** 0 ft. (5 ft. with tendrill)

STATISTICS

Str —, **Dex** 15, **Con** 12, **Int** 8, **Wis** 13, **Cha** 11

Base Atk +3; **CMB** +3; **CMD** 13 (can't be tripped)

Feats Improved Initiative, Lightning Reflexes

Skills Acrobatics +9, Fly +15, Perception +8, Stealth +15

Languages Aklo (can't speak); telepathy 60 ft.

SQ hide in plain sight, misty form

ECOLOGY

Environment any (Plane of Shadow)

Organization solitary or pair

Treasure standard

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Cloying Shade (Su) A smokeshade's tendrils deal negative energy damage. A creature that takes damage from a smokeshade's tendrill attack is surrounded by a haze of cloying shadow for 1 round. This cloying shade imposes a –2 penalty on attack rolls and Perception skill checks and grants the target concealment from attacks made by opponents that are not adjacent to it. This ability does not give the target concealment against the smokeshade.

Hide in Plain Sight (Su) A smokeshade can use the Stealth skill even while being observed. As long as it is within 10 feet of an area of dim light, a smokeshade can hide itself from view in the open without anything to actually hide behind. A smokeshade can hide in the shadows of other creatures but not in its own shadow.

Misty Form (Ex) A smokeshade's body is composed of a semisolid black mist similar in consistency to thick foam. In addition to the incorporeal subtype, the smokeshade's misty form grants it the amorphous defensive ability. The creature cannot speak or make other sounds beyond a low rumble. Unlike a normal incorporeal creature, a

smokeshade cannot enter water or other fluids, and it is always treated as a Tiny creature for the purposes of how wind affects it, even if it increases in size.

Capricious natives of the Plane of Shadow, smokeshades are amorphous creatures that are made from semisolid smoke and shadow. Thought naturally wormlike in shape, smokeshades can contort themselves into rings, corkscrews, or even crude effigies with little effort. Regardless of a smokeshade's shape, its composition remains purely a dark, roiling mist. Vain, preening creatures, smokeshades generally avoid combat and prefer to mock others with rude shapes or pantomime.

A spellcaster of at least 7th level with an alignment within one step of neutral evil who has the Improved Familiar feat can select a smokeshade as a familiar.



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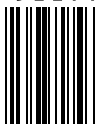
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