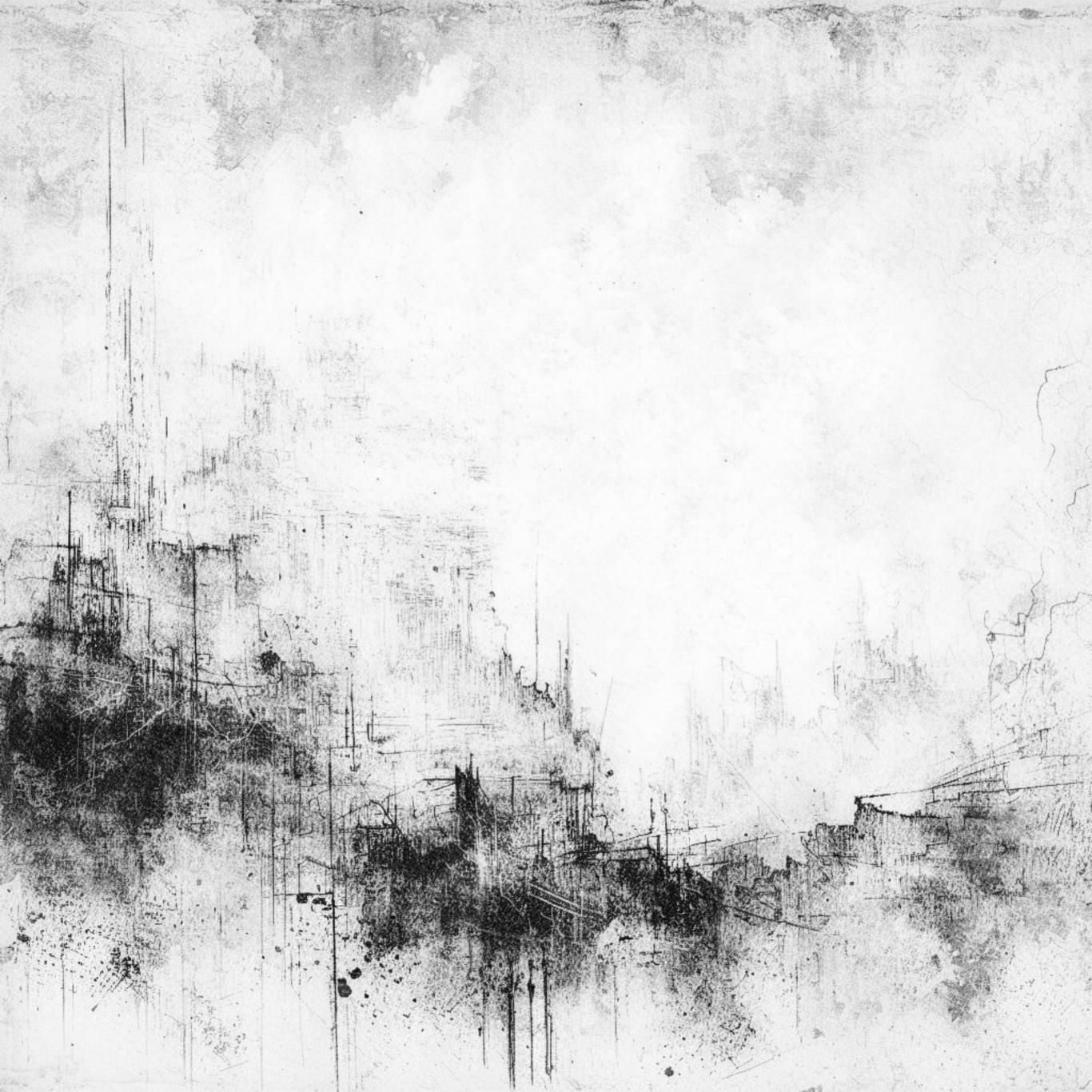




Splats Illustrated ZORBUS SKETCHES & LORE



Foreword

This is a sketch art & lore book for the video game Zorbus. The illustrations are AI generated, so don't be surprised to see missing fingers or other oddities in the images.

Zorbus is a fantasy-themed, tile-based, turn-based, traditional roguelike game. Your goal is to delve deep into a dungeon, find a portal to a mythical place called the Zorbus, where a mere mortal can ascend to demigodhood.

Thematically Zorbus draws influence from the late 70s and early 80s tabletop D&D campaigns, adventures and lore.

The game can be bought from Steam.

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Credits

Art created with Microsoft Bing Image Creator (powered by DALL-E 3).

Against the Giants, Blood War, Journal of an Astraloth Pathfinder, Manual of the Planes, and Saga of Svartr Aska by Helical Nightmares.

Rest of the text, visual layout, image editing, tool programming, and book construction by joonas@zorbus.net.

PDF created from images with ImageMagick.

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Spoilers ahead!





The Zorbus

The Zorbus is a mythical meeting place of the current pantheon of gods. A place where matters of cosmic proportions will be discussed. A place where divine justice will be served. A place that is ruled by a being stronger than the gods.

Once every century comes a time which even the gods fear. A time when the gods must gather at the Zorbus, and stay there for one year in their weakened avatar form. During this time a mortal can enter the Zorbus, and challenge an avatar to battle. If victorious, the mortal will then rise to godhood, and take the slain god's position.

Reaching the Zorbus is not an easy task. A mortal must prove himself or herself worthy by finding and entering a hidden gate that leads to the Zorbus. The gates to Zorbus are located in hard-to-reach areas and guarded by powerful creatures. It is said that just reaching the Zorbus may grant the mortal an option to ascend to demigodhood.

If an ascended god or a demigod reincarnates to a new body, and that creature enters the Zorbus, then that god or demigod must help the creature if it challenges any of the gods.

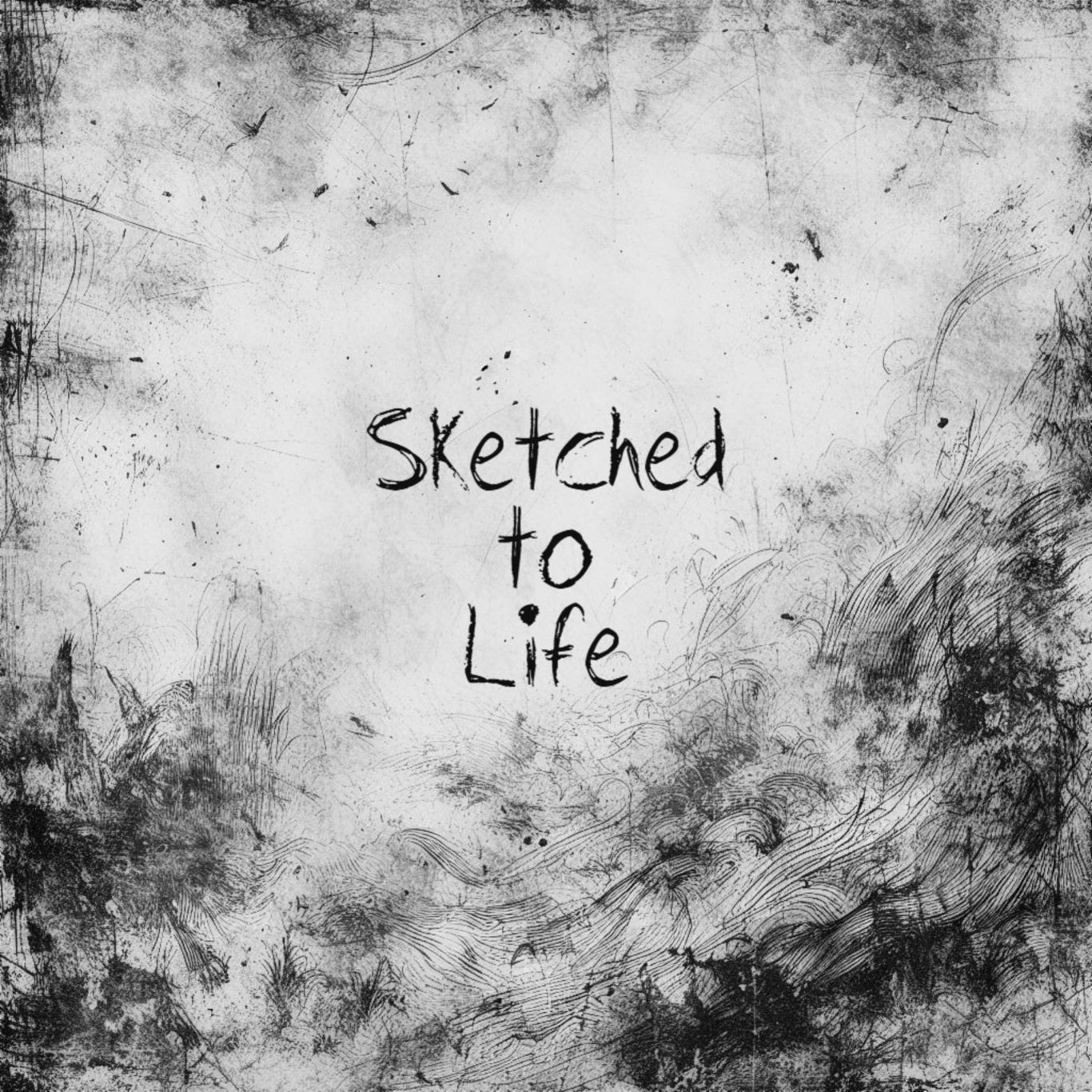
All living companions of an ascended god or a demigod will ascend to demigodhood.

It is rumored that when the gods gather at the Zorbus, they are in their weakest avatar form. Truly must the gods fear this moment!

There is one cosmic force that acts as a judge at the meeting. Who or what is this being? What would happen if this being would perish during the gathering?









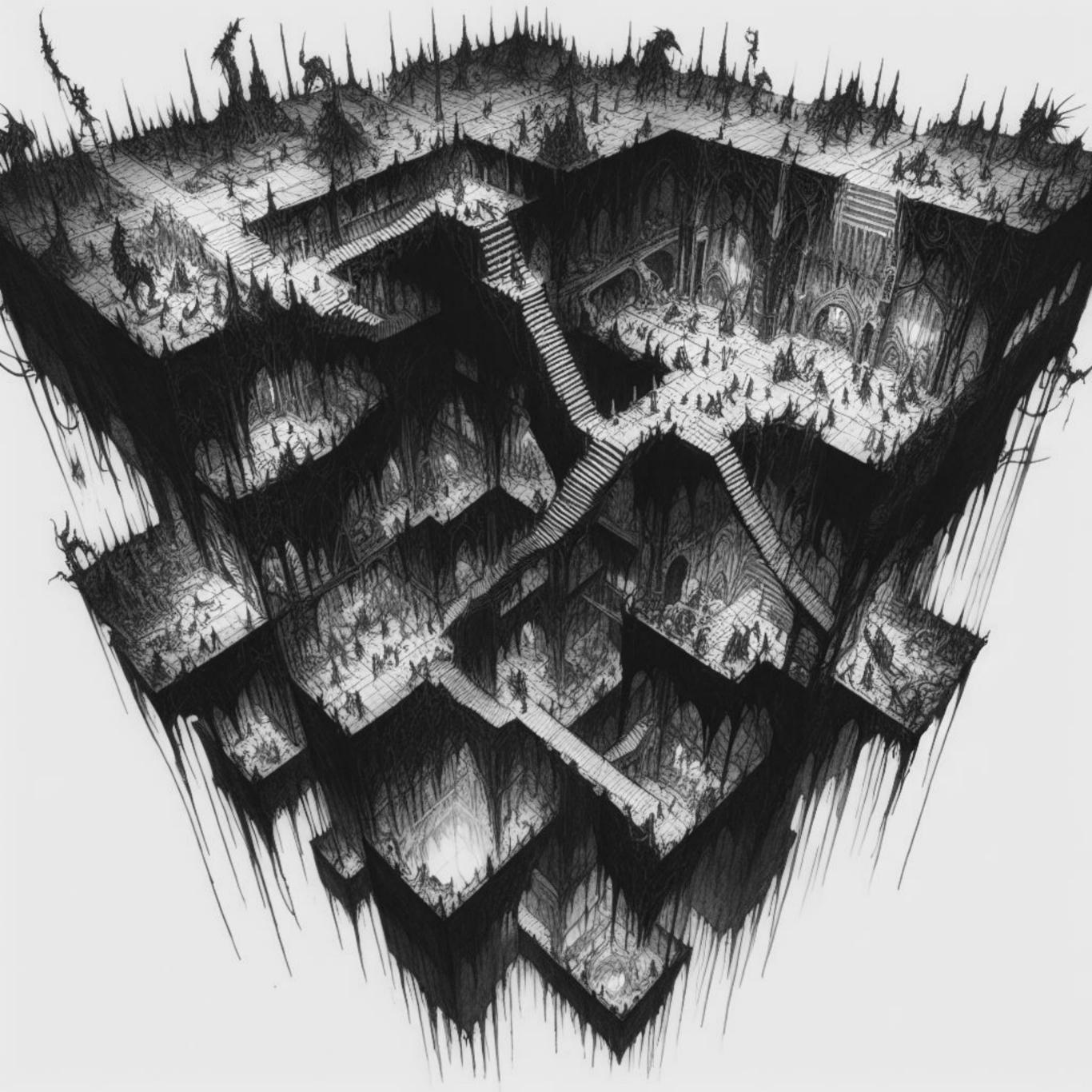


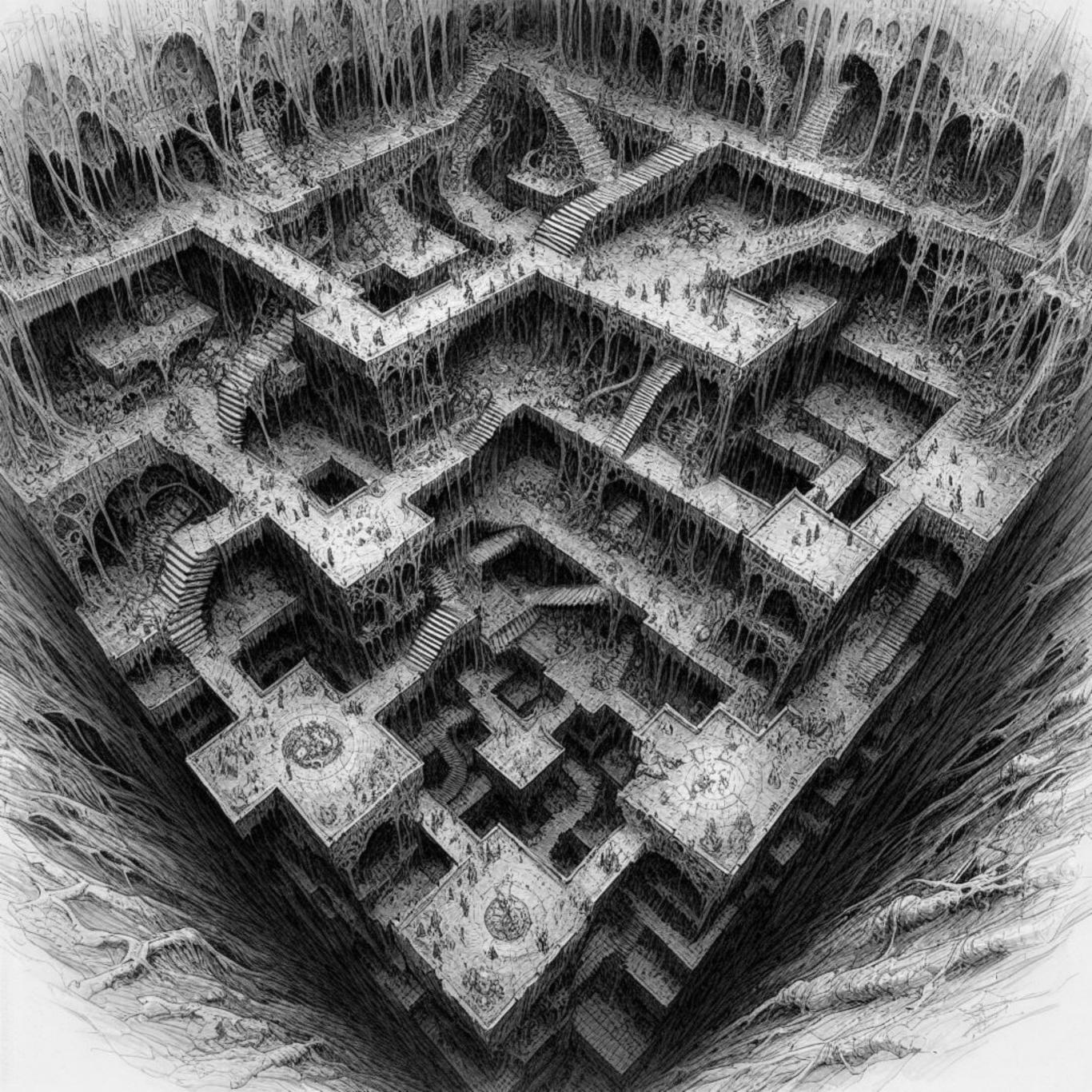


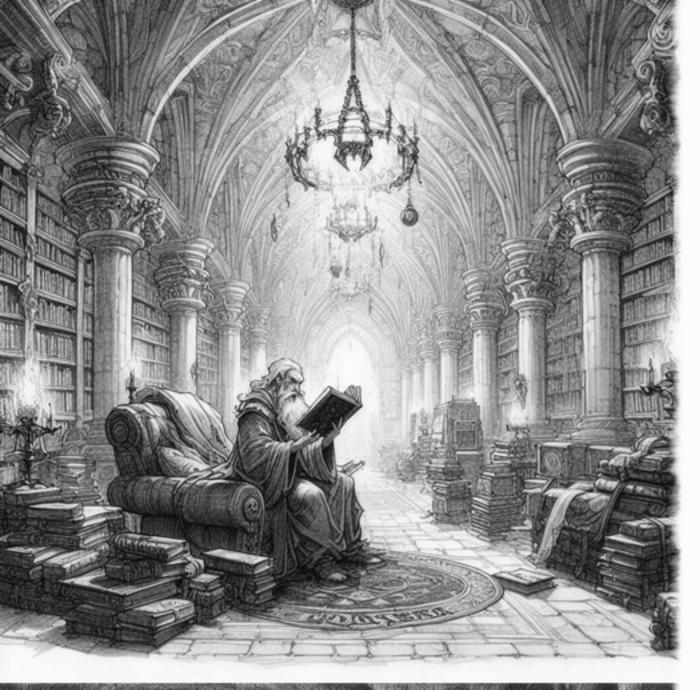


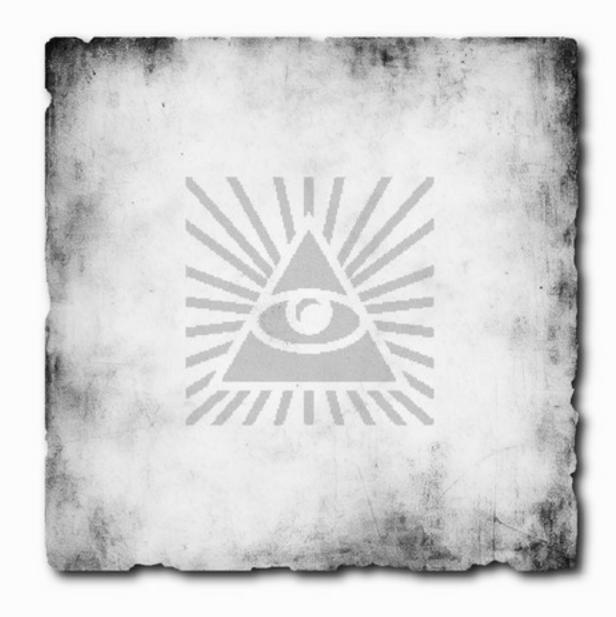


HISTORY 20RBUS











The Loremasters

The Loremasters were a guild focusing on uncovering lost knowledge and gathering huge amounts of eclectic information. Their once great libraries now lay in shambles, conquered by dungeon denizens, haunted by ghosts, the precious tomes seized or destroyed.













The Paragon Knights

The knights of this order were champions of good and justice, striving for the order to become the living embodiment of these ideals. In reality, these noble aims were often diluted by the hierarchical power plays happening behind the scenes. It is said that the archdevil Asmodeus himself had something to do with the eventual collapse of the order.



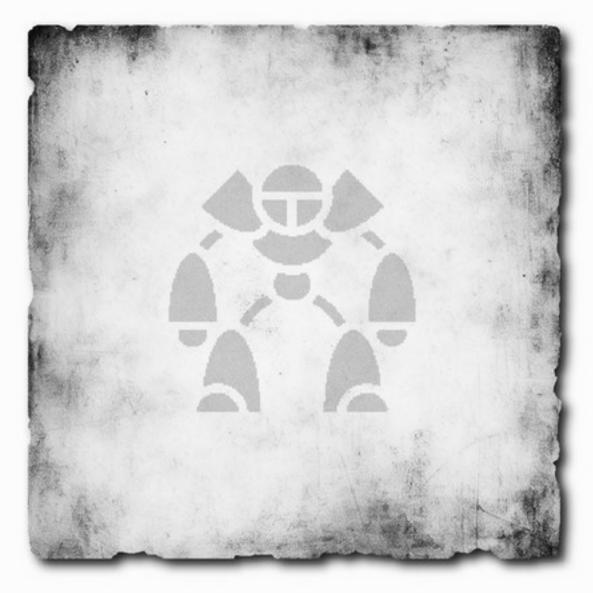










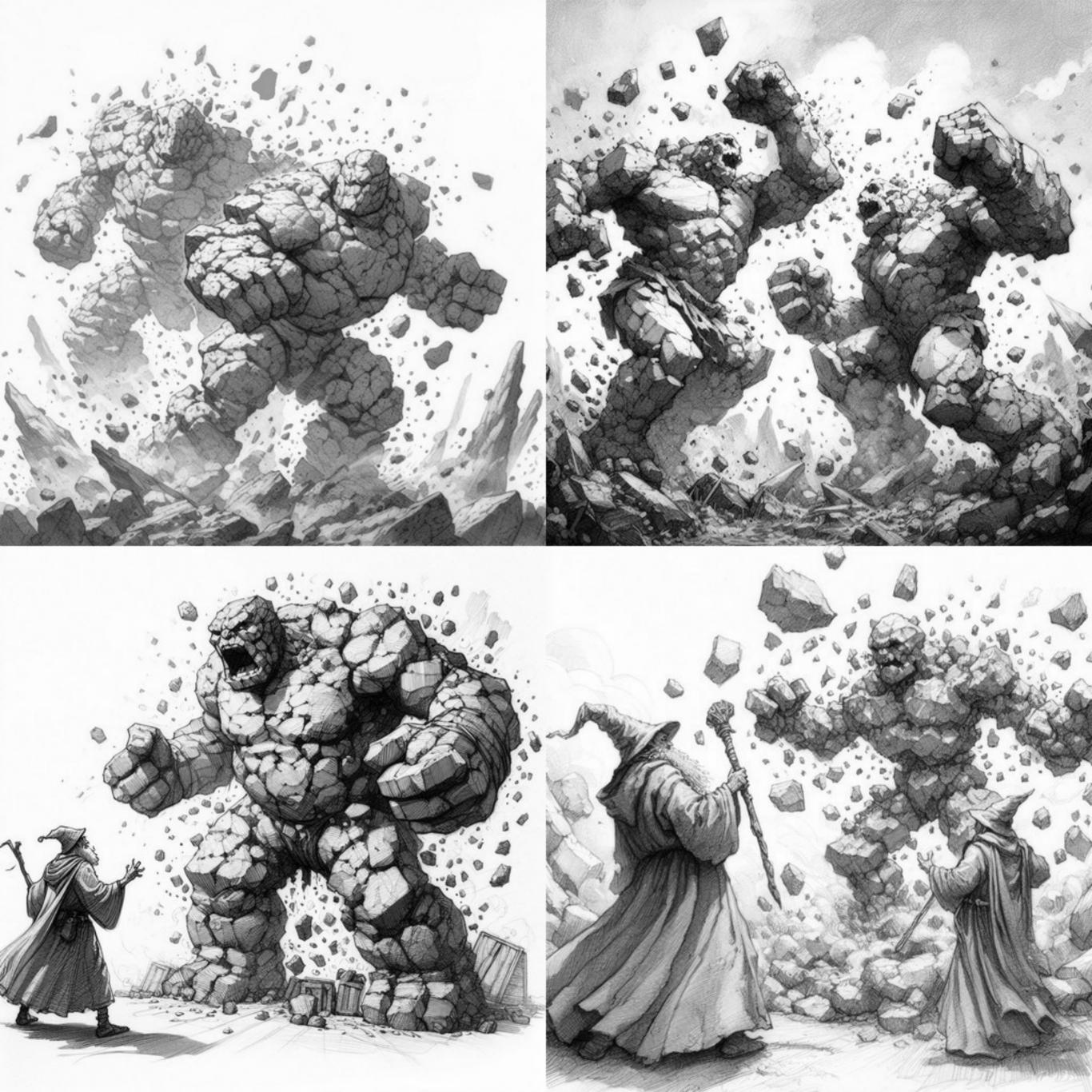


The Golem Guild

A guild of expert golemancers, wizards who specialized in designing and building golems. The golemancers were known to measure their skills of the trade by having their creations fight in duels. This is what eventually led to the guild's downfall, as a group of golems achieved consciousness, and rebelled against their masters.

















The Beauty

Goddess of Beauty, Love, Passion, and Obsession

The Dark Knight

God of War and Combat

The Faceless Lord

God of Oozes and Shapeless Things

The Prince of Undeath

God of Demons and Undeath





The Queen of Spiders

Goddess of the Drow and Spiders

The Titan

God of Giantkind

The Undying King

God of Evil Secrets, Hidden Knowledge, and Intrigue

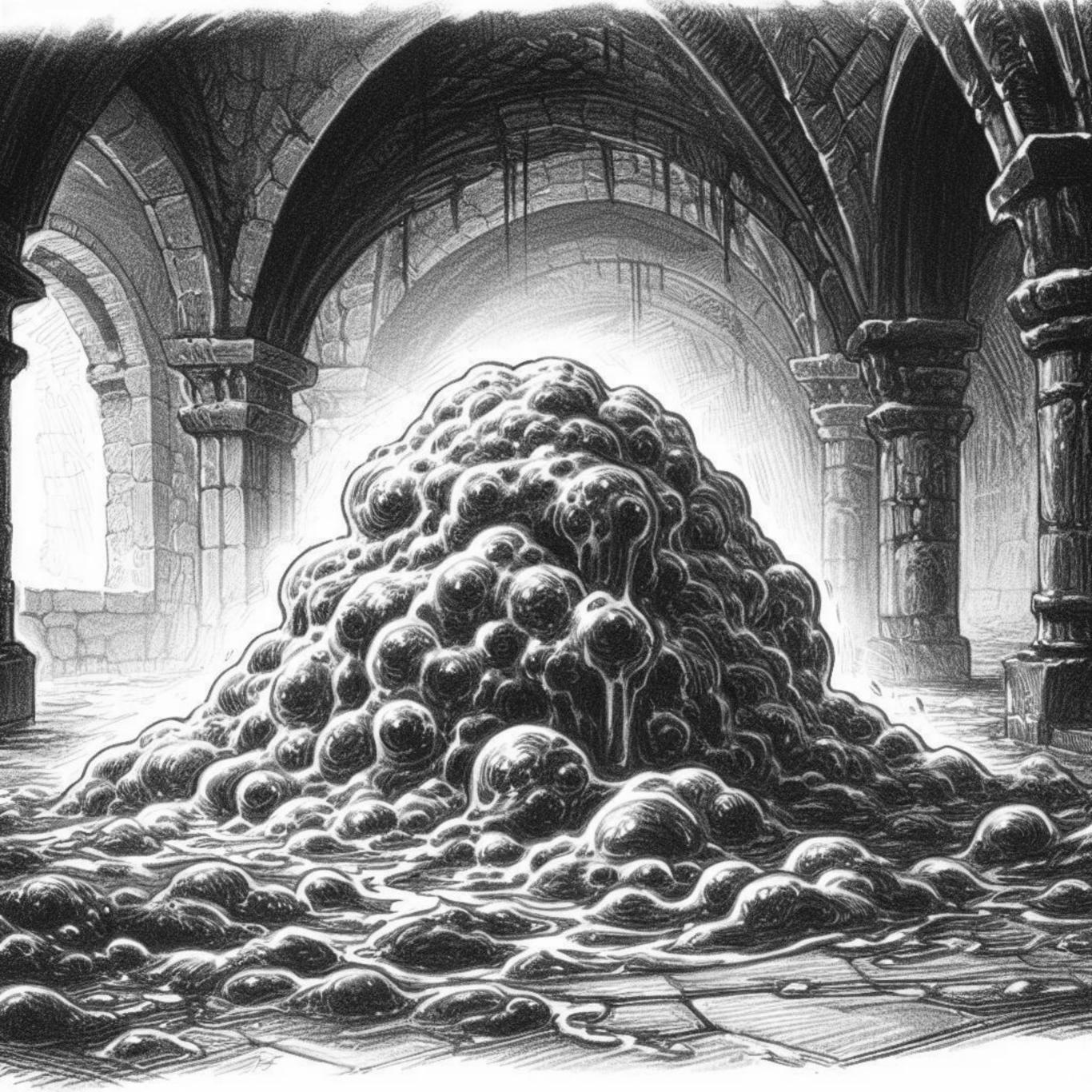
The Wizard

God of Magic and Spells

























The Archer

"Here I go again!"

"Kill for gain, or shoot to maim, we don't need a reason!"

"Too easy!"

"Guess what? Yes, I killed again!"

"Okay, monsters... get in line and wait for your turn...
I'll promise that eventually you all will be shot!"

"Not bad at all. You've learnt from the best!"

"Do you really need all those potions? Hey, I'm discreetly trying to wink my eye at you!"

"You only live once, or so it seems. One life for yourself, or one for your dreams."

"Nobody does it better. Makes me feel sad for the rest. Nobody does it half as good as me. Oh, I truly am the best!"

"I need a hero. I'm holding out for a hero 'til the end of the night. He's gotta be strong, and he's gotta be fast, and he's gotta be fresh from the fight."

"There are so many evil symbols and so much blood all over this dungeon... it almost seems like someone decorated it just to look as evil as possible."

"Hmmm... what is this Chained God that these lunatics keep babbling about?"

The Celestial

"I won't rest until this dungeon is cleansed from evil!"

"I've heard that you have to go through the 666 layers of the Abyss and the Nine Hells to reach the Zorbus. I can't wait! We're going to kill Orcus, Demogorgon, Asmodeus, and all the others!"

"Hmm... all these symbols painted on the floors... do they actually have a deeper meaning or are they just decorations?"

"Funny thing, but I can't remember the last time I was hungry. Must be before I came into this dungeon? I'm actually glad, cooking and eating is just a chore. And what would we even eat here? Corpses and slime mold?"

"Chained God? Bunch of evil deities have imprisoned a good deity? Maybe we could free the god?"





The Drow

"A dualwielding rogue drow carrying a panther figurine... yeah, I know, I always get mistaken for that other guy. I'm sure becoming a demigod will fix this tiny identity problem of mine?"

"If we ever get to the Zorbus, I want us to kill that spider bitch goddess! Promise me!"

"I won't mention his name, but that other dualwielding drow with a pet panther... he's just so damn famous! I heard that they even write books about him! No, I'm not jealous! Just venting out my thoughts."

"Okay, I'll admit it... that other drow guy has had some impact on my choices of weaponry and pets."

"Wait a minute! Remind me again exactly why are we drawing maps of these dungeon levels if we have no plans ever to revisit them? Really? Bah. You know nothing."

"Don't tell this to anyone, but while tavern hopping in Waterdeep, I might have impersonated that other drow guy a couple of times, which resulted in lots of free drinks and horrible hangovers."

"So... is becoming a demigod enough for you, or do you aim higher? To be a real god? An overgod, even? Food for thought."

"The Chained God... what's that all about? How can a god be chained? By other gods? But why?"

The Grognard

"Polearms... I just love polearms. Adventurers should use more polearms."

"This greybeard still knows a trick or two!"

"Oh, look at that. My rather excellent polearm really did its job on that poor creature."

"Bardiche, fauchard, glaive, guisarme, halberd, spetum... all sweet, sweet polearms, and I have used them all!"

"This is my polearm, there are many others like it, but this one is mine."

"The only thing I love more than polearms is killing with polearms!"

"I wonder if there's an evil mastermind Dungeon Master somewhere at the bottom of this dungeon? Dungeon Masters... they tend to be the lowest scum of all."

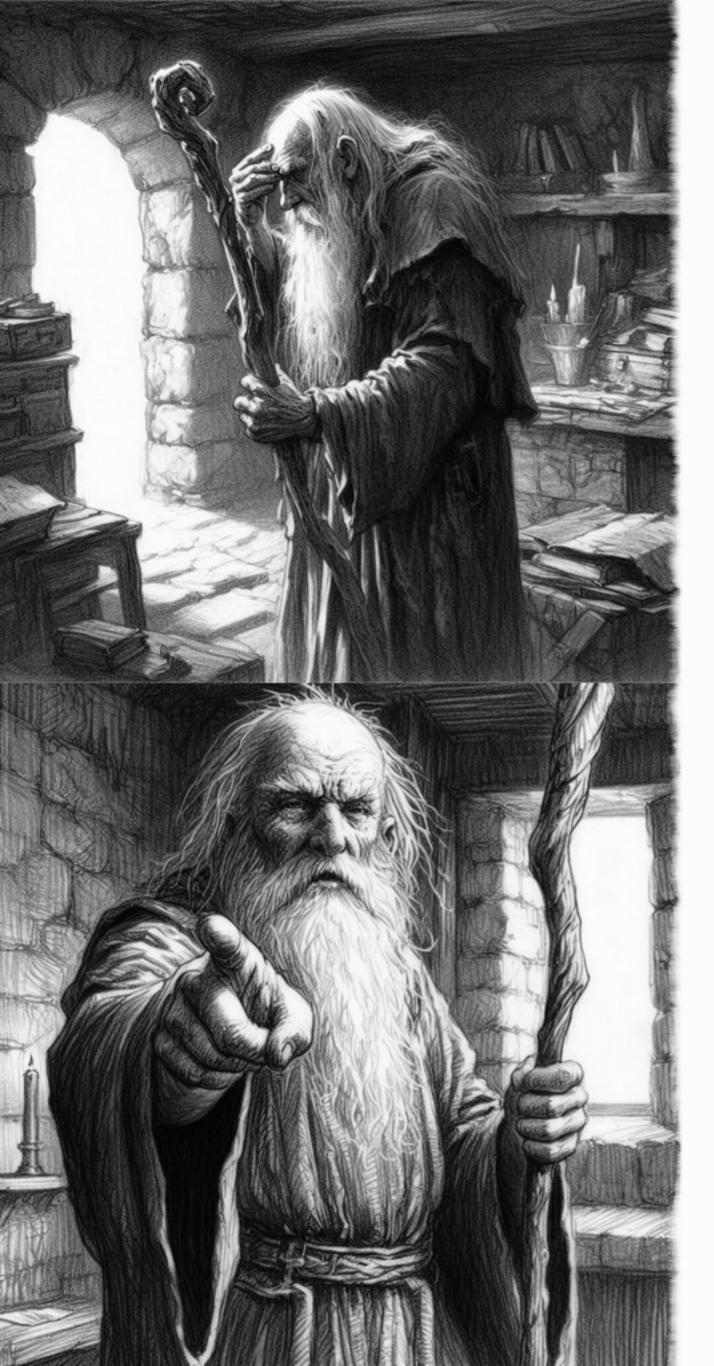
"Have you ever seen a dragon? I haven't. There must be one somewhere in the depths of this dungeon. They kind of go hand in hand. Dungeons and dragons."

"Random chance plays a huge part in everybody's life."

"Old grognards never die. They just become demigods."

"People always say that I remind them of someone. Someone famous? Also liked polearms? Dabbled with games and dice? Who? Gary? What kind of name is that? Never heard of him. I am Zagyg, the one and only, end of story."





The Hermit

"The road to Zorbus is paved with skulls of dead adventurers."

"Now this is odd... I'm killing things by the hundreds, doing all sorts of other questionable deeds, and still there's a compulsive grin forming on my lips."

"Are you sure you're doing this out of necessity and not for the fun of it? Not for the splatter, not for the smashing noises, not for the trail of bodies we leave behind?"

"I've seen dragons. I've seen liches. I've seen unbelievable things through my adventures... but I've never seen a team leader who would split found loot equally with team members. Truly they must be creatures of myth and legend."

"We have to go through the 666 layers of Abyss and the Nine Hells to reach the Zorbus. So many balors and pit fiends to kill. They will be but insects under our foot on our road to godhood."

"Nowadays adventurers have it so easy. Maps that draw themselves, automated exploring, talking monsters... it's sacrilege!"

"Have you ever heard of Blackmoor? No? What a wonderful place."

"Mortals kill gods, mortals become gods..."

"Mortals... demigods... gods. Is there a greater power in the cosmos than a god? An overgod?"

"Chained God... a forgotten, imprisoned god?"

The Mercenary

"Did you see that! Damn I'm good!"

"Not bad, kid, but keep your head calm. Like I always say... don't get cocky!"

"Abso-zorbing-lutely!"

"Warrior needs beer, badly!"

"What is it with these dungeons and giant rats? Back in the tavern all they talked about was dungeons and dragons."

"I can't help myself, but I just really want to smash all the slimy fungi in these caves. You know? To bump, smash, bump, to see all that green goo that comes out from them, and to hear that sweet, sweet smashing sound."

"A wise man once said that 'when everything in your life goes to shit, pop some mushrooms, and you're guaranteed to feel better'. Hey! That is ancient history, not my own statement!"

"You know what is odd? There are all these kitchens and banquet halls in this dungeon, but I rarely feel hunger anymore. I'm actually relieved that we can adventure at our own pace without our stomachs ticking like hunger clockworks all the time."

"I'd like to become the demigod of beer and bar wenches! Do you think that vacancy is still open? You do? Great! Looking forward to it!"

"Chained God... that doesn't sound good. If a god needs to be chained, there must be some reason for it. And who could even imprison a god? Other gods? This is getting way too heavy for my warrior brains. Let's just kill things, ok?"





The Warrior

"Perrrkele!"

"You can't spell slaughter without laughter! Yes! Ha ha!"

"I just might be the greatest of all time. The goat of goats! Yeah!"

"Oh, come on! Now you are just showing off."

"Everything is nothing to me, I couldn't care less. A stern cold dwarf is what I am, hard, relentless."

"Chained God? Bah! Sounds overly dramatic to me."

"The axe, the bottle, and the rope. The feeling there really is no more hope."

"I'm feeling so content with this adventuring life that I don't even get hungry anymore."

"For my name is sorrow and I'm a friend of misery. I deprived myself of love for eternal agony. I don't even dare to try. I know I can only lose. Between this life I live and nothing I have to choose."

"Oops, I forgot my whetstone to the previous dungeon level! What? Why not? It's my favourite whetstone! It's the only whetstone I have ever had! What do mean it's impossible to go back? Why... why, why, why? It doesn't make any sense! Oh, my whetstone..."

"No dwarf would ever build a dungeon where it's impossible to visit previous dungeon levels. It's blasphemy, really."

The Witch

"Always remember... witches before bitches."

"Don't you find it odd that when we take the stairs down to the next dungeon level, we can no longer go back up to the previous one?"

"She's in love with herself, she likes the dark. On her milk-white neck, the devil's mark. Well, when I called her evil, she just laughed. Well, cast that spell on me, boo, bitchcraft."

"I'm somewhat of an expert of symbols and sigils, and I can pretty confidently say that many of these floor symbols are just fluff! They mean absolutely nothing!"

"Haha! Now that's what I call ancient bitchcraft!"

"Chained God? Hmmm... why would anyone chain a god? And who has the power to do that?"

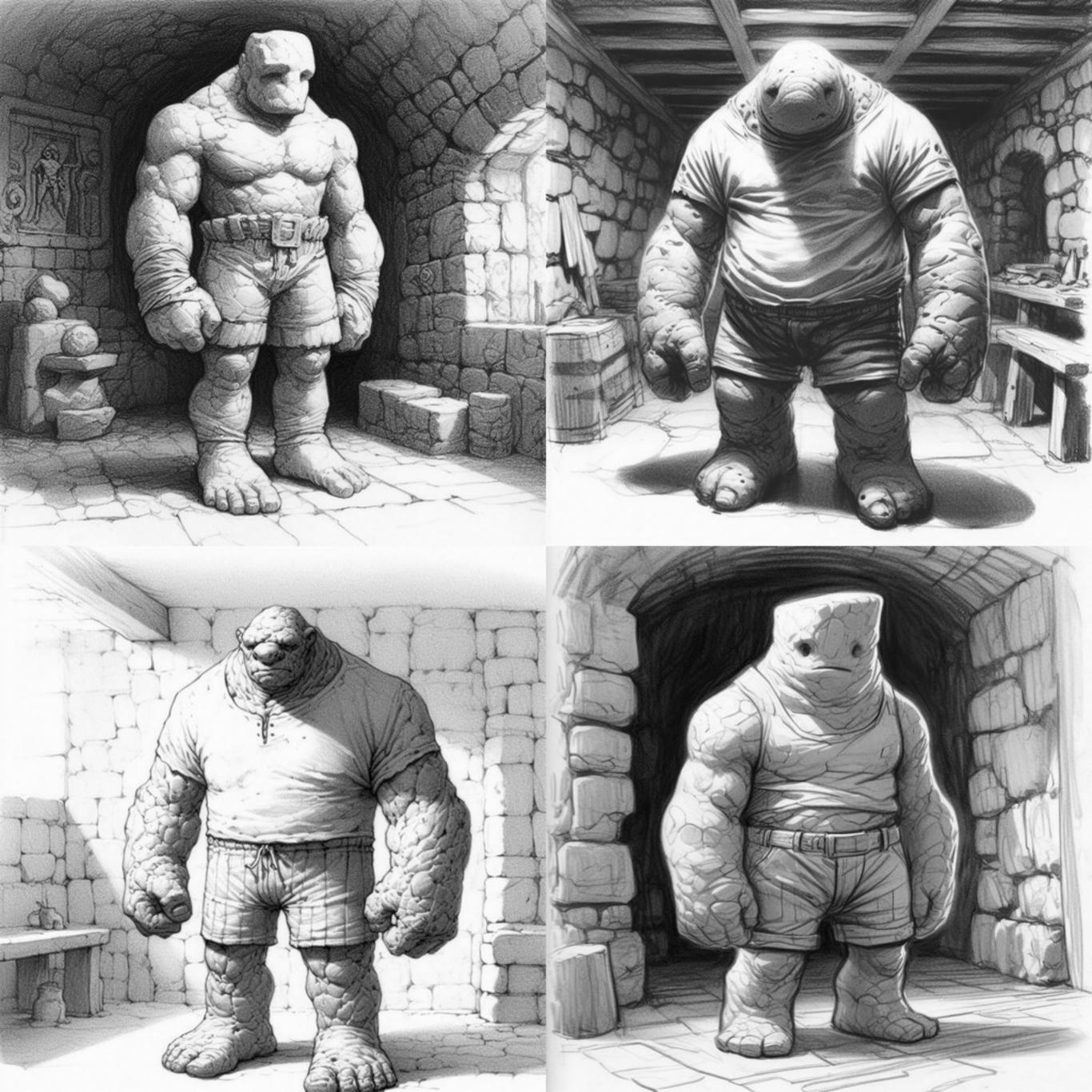
























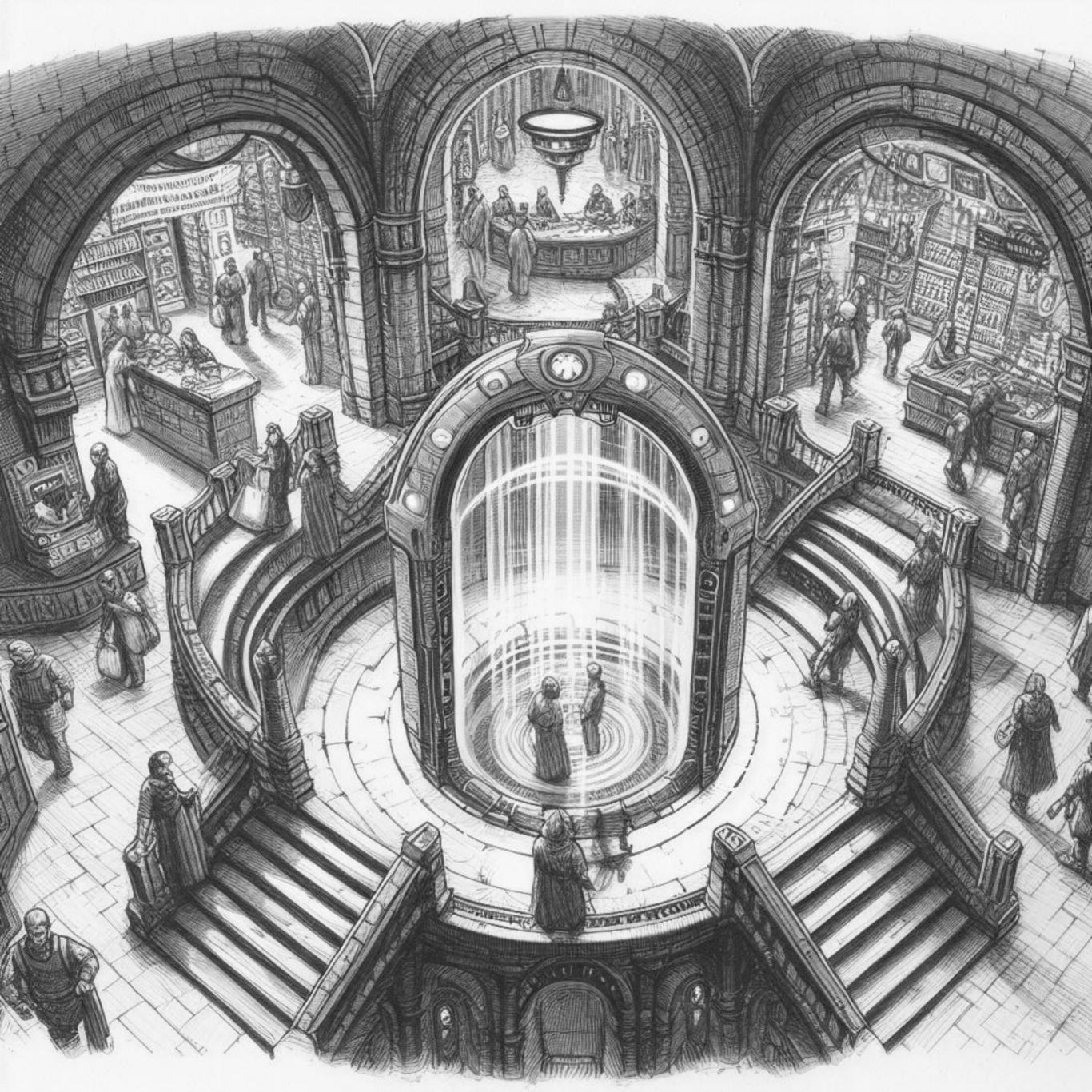
Carillo

Carillo is an entertainment center demiplane with shops and a tavern. It can be accessed through teleporters from Zorbus dungeon levels.

The jovial bouncer welcomes guests with open arms.

Ever vigilant iron golems take care of the security of the place.





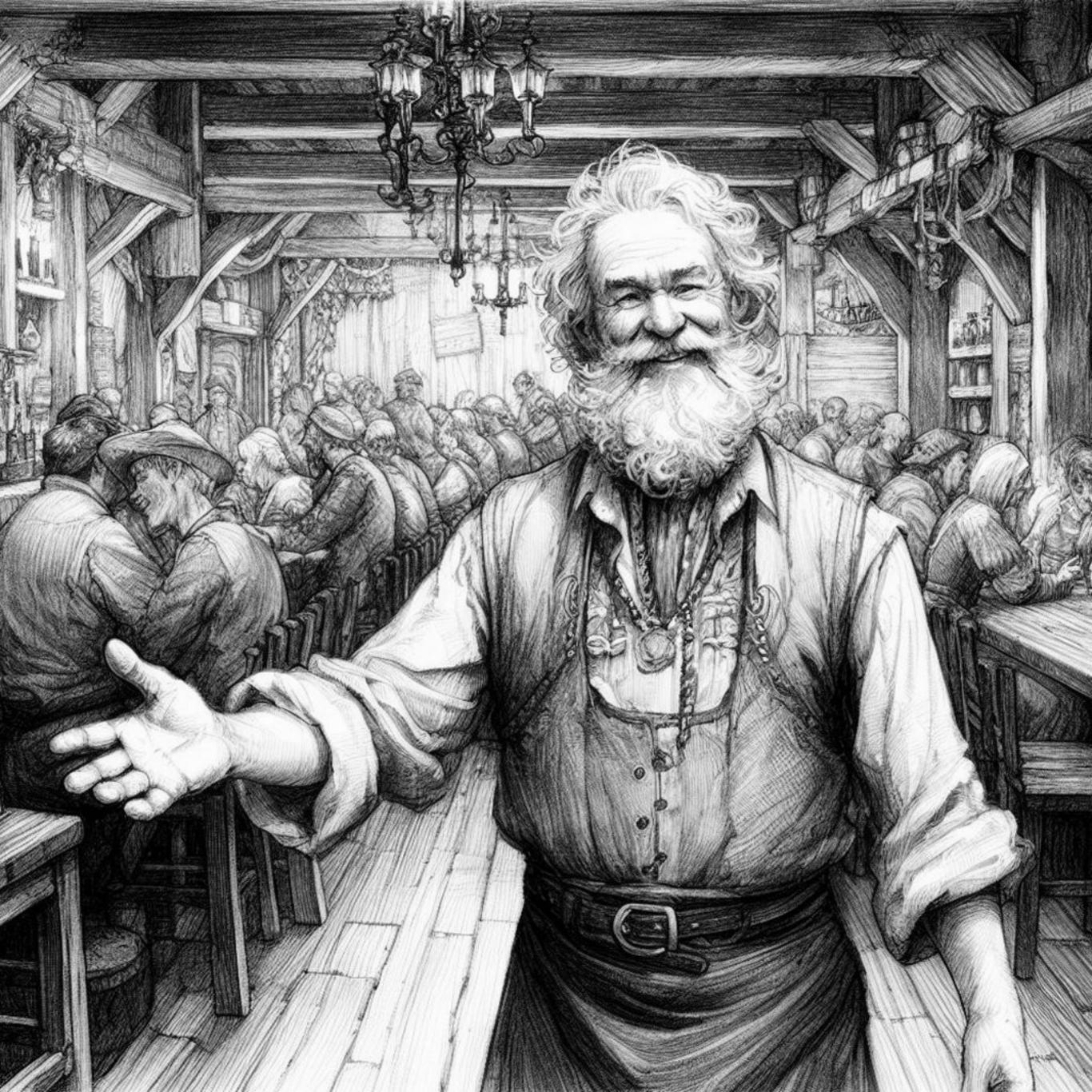
























A DAY IN THE LIFE OF AN ADVENTURER

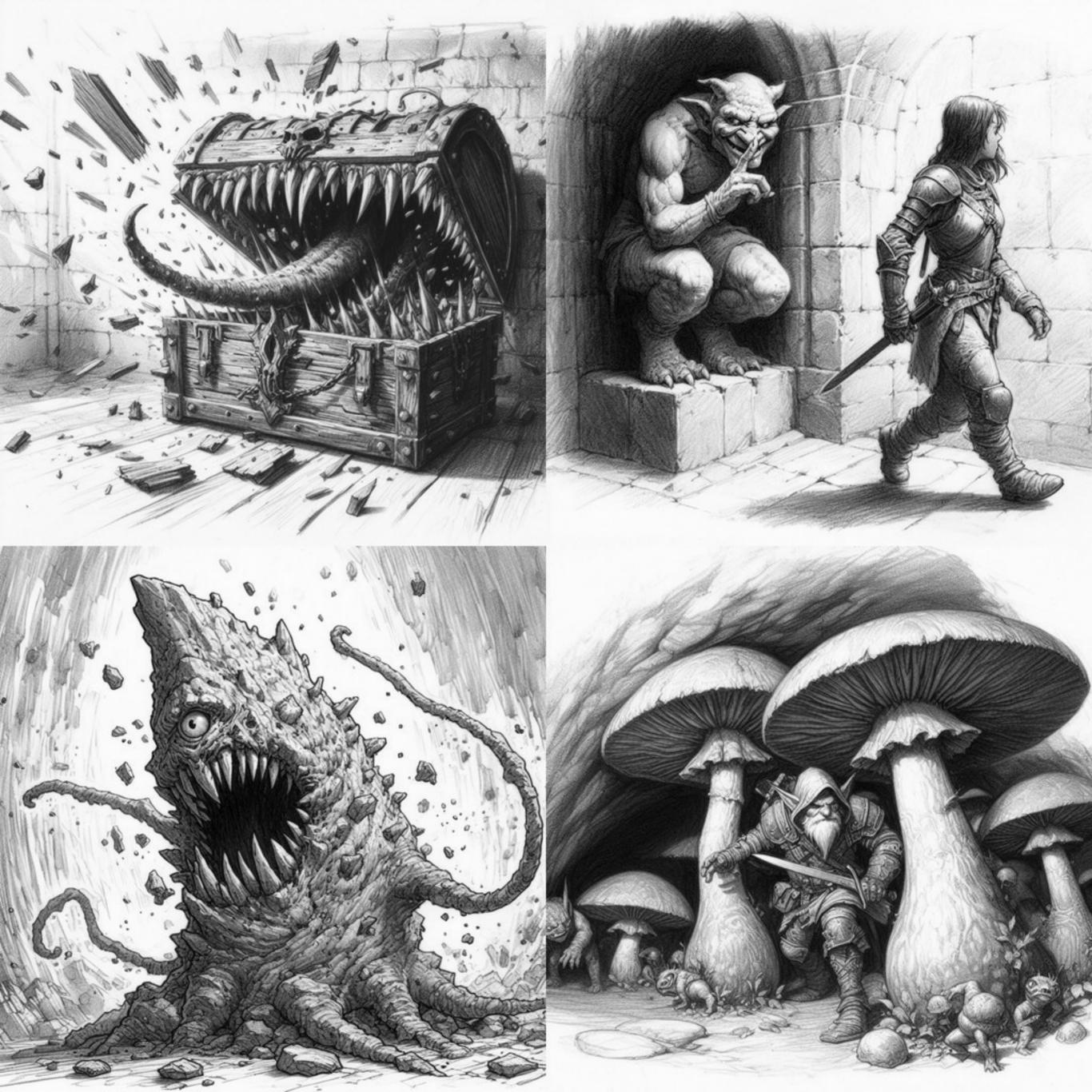










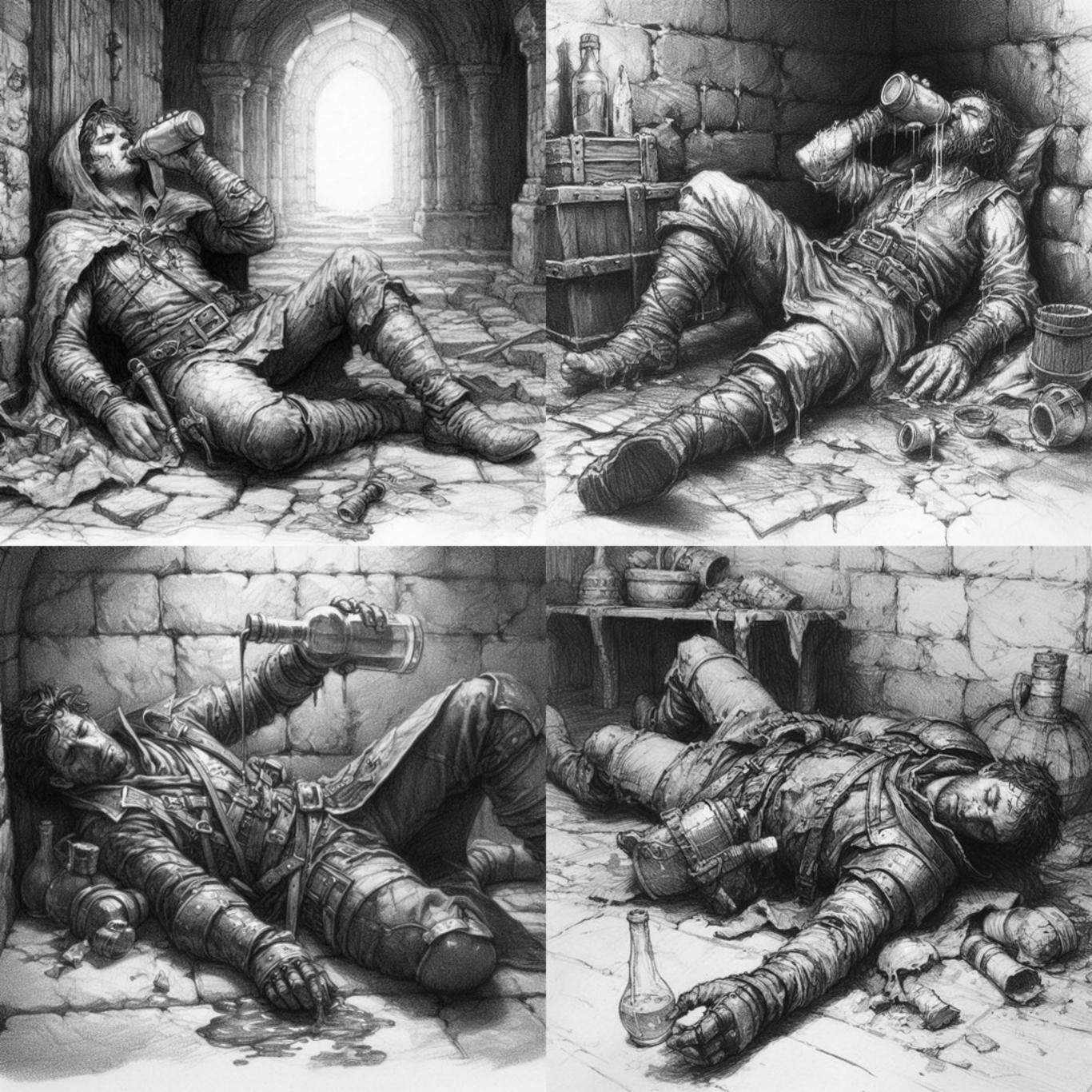
















THRENDER'S JOURNAL





Thrender's Journal

This is the journal of Thrender and our heroic band of adventurers!

JOURNAL ENTRY 1

We barely escaped Phlan alive. The clerk did not mention that there were trolls in the slums district! I heard later that some other adventuring band rescued Phlan from a corrupted silver dragon. Bah! They were just lucky not to come across those trolls.

Here we are in another dungeon. Phineas thinks that there is something at the bottom of this dungeon that will make us demigods... or even gods! Zorbus... what does that even mean? Sounds like that cheap wine the homeless drunkards in Waterdeep drink, or was that called Sorbus?

So far, so good. The first dungeon level is filled with mostly kobolds and goblins.

JOURNAL ENTRY 2

Rhiannon is dead! On the second level a kobold tribe leader attacked us with several sorcerers who kept summoning giant lizards. We were greatly outnumbered, and I saw the tribe leader kill Rhiannon! Since when were kobolds that deadly? The rest of us had to flee to the next level.

JOURNAL ENTRY 3

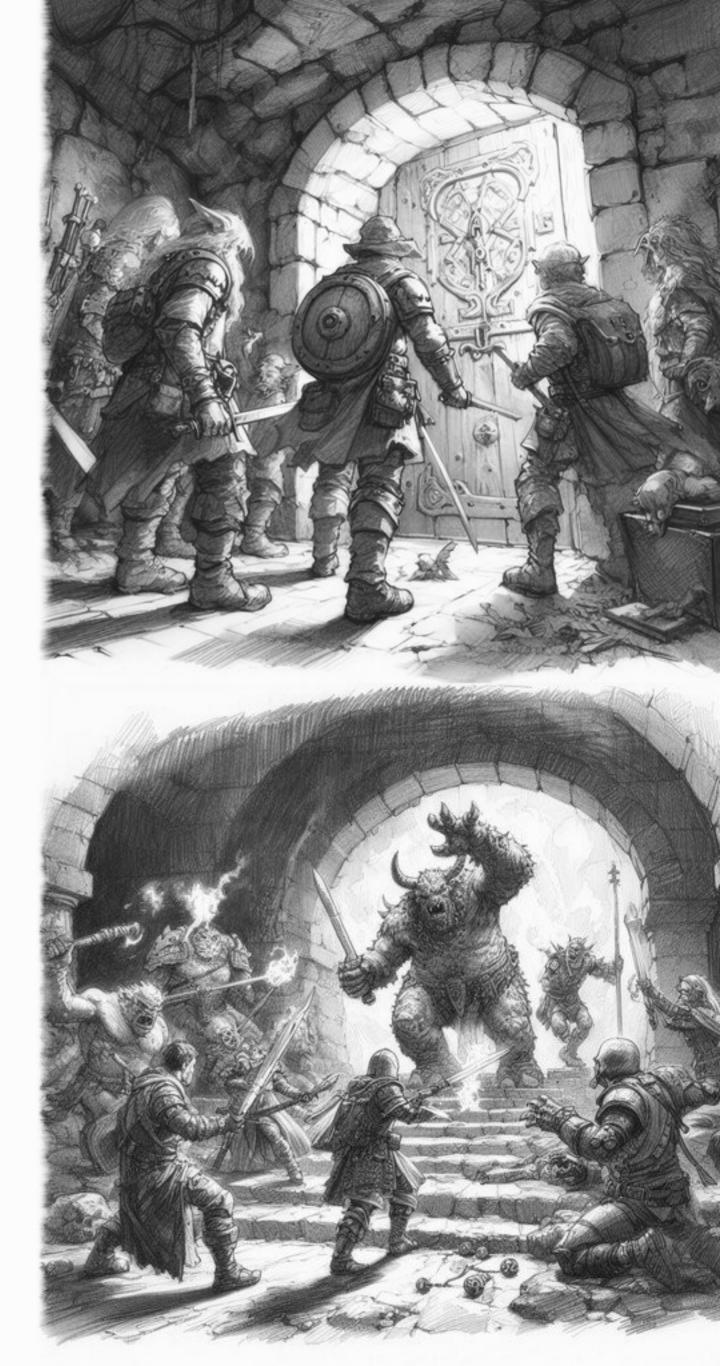
We found a peaceful area to mourn Rhiannon and to lick our wounds. There is something odd in this dungeon. In our previous adventures we always found a way to restore the fallen. In some cases it almost felt that we could magically step back in time after a lost battle, and fight it again and again until we were victorious. Not here. Here death is definitely permanent! We will rest here for a while.

JOURNAL ENTRY 4

Now Darkstar is dead! On the third dungeon level, we came across a room where there was a switch and a skull painted on the floor. The floor was filled with corpses and bones. When Darkstar turned the switch, the corpses and bones on the floor were animated! The undead killed Darkstar before we could do anything! We had to flee, again.

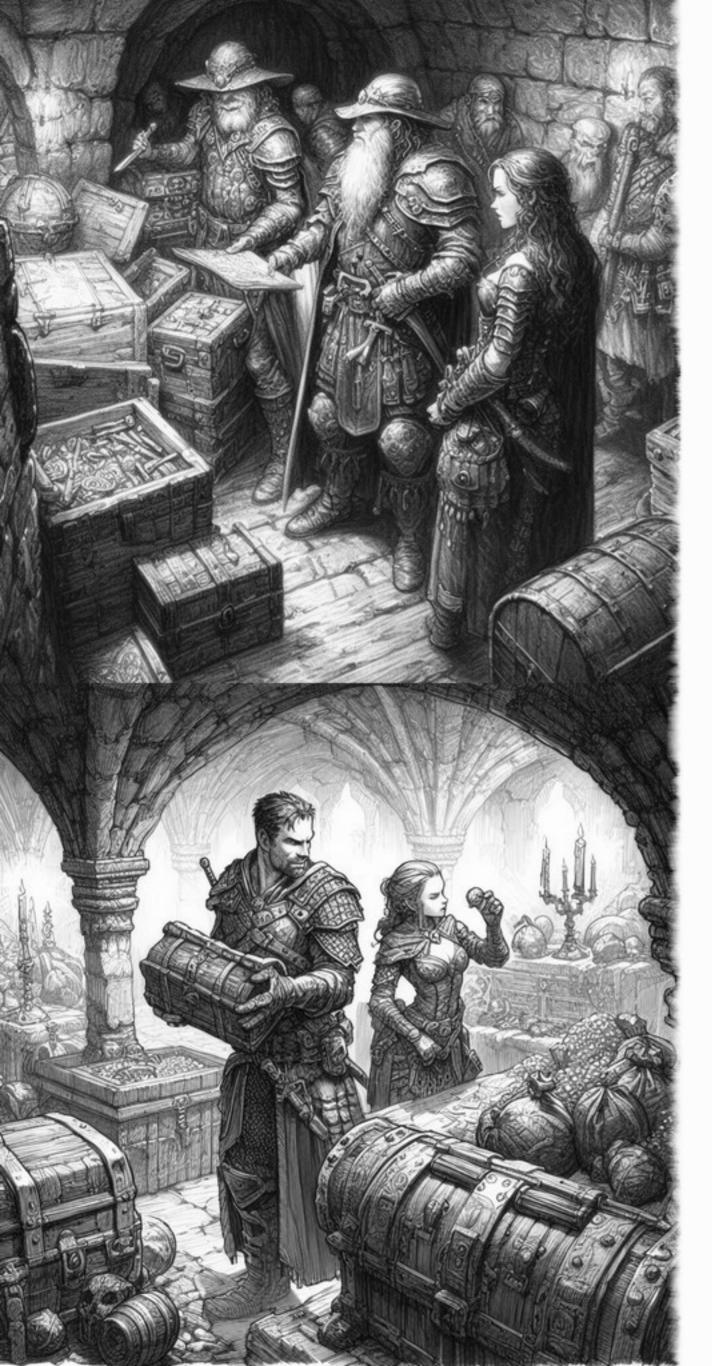
JOURNAL ENTRY 5

I am probably dead if you can read this. The others are probably dead as well. We should have never come here. The goblin king was too much for us. If I could only rest for a while before the monsters find me...





Tomb Raiders Guild



Tomb Raiders Guild

This guild raids tombs and treasure caches in the Zorbus dungeon. They have a Guild Shop in Carillo. They don't seem to have much respect for rogues.

"Bugger off, rogue! Don't you have any fake amulets to find? Leave tomb raiding to professionals."

"Late as usual, rogue! This place has been already declared as ours! Officially, I might add."

"There's no need to draw blood, kid. We found this place first! We are here on official business. Very important. Not something a rogue would understand."

"Want to give it a try, rogue? I see how you're already licking your lips, thinking of all the sweet, sweet loot you would find here. The world is yours. We're but obstacles for you to remove. Your anger is building up. Your heart is beating. You're losing control. You just want to splat, splat, splat. So, what's it going to be? Shall we dance, or will you leave?"

"Sorry, rogue, this place is already ours. Hey, I feel you, I truly do. You rogues are already dying by the thousands while chasing your laughable dreams of ascension, and now they won't even let you rob a freaking tomb when you want to. I don't make the rules, but I do follow them, so you just have to back off!"

"How do you rogues spawn so fast? Nevermind. I'll have an one-time offer for you. You will exit this place, forget it ever existed, and for that you'll get to keep that ugly head on your shoulders. Sound good? You can close the deal by just walking away."

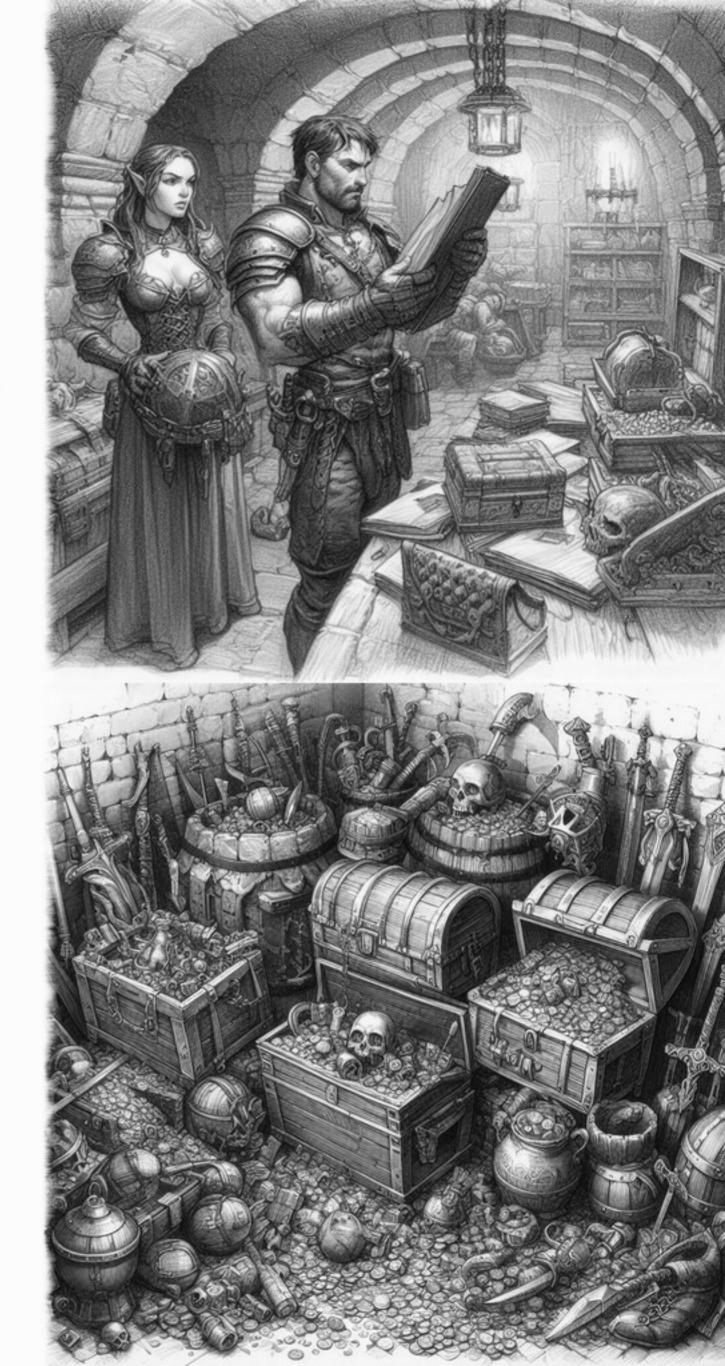
"Bugger off, rogue! This place has been declared by the Tomb Raiders Guild. Official business. We are cataloging all this great loot. Hmm... where were we, ah yes! One pair of Boots of Mobility, in excellent condition. One Elixir of Experience, mint condition. Hey, rogue, why are you still standing there? Why are you licking your lips?"

"Another scruffy-looking rogue? Okay. Let me educate you with a few facts regarding grave robbing. There are you, rogues, and then there are us, the professionals. And who got into this tomb first? Right. You're not so dumb after all. And that, my little friend, is your cue to leave."

"Good day to you, sir. I can't help but notice that you are one of those rogue-like characters. There is this peculiar scent of insurmountable greed surrounding you. I feel that any advise for you to retreat your steps would be in vain. Since I am somewhat of an expert in cataloging things, I find it rather convenient to ask this beforehand: Do you want your possessions identified?"

"Oh, little rogue, I have to make a confession. I sometimes get these odd impulses of compassion spinning in my head. Like, for once, let a person just walk away, without crushing its skull, without ripping its eyes out, and so on. And you know what, I'm having one of those impulses right now, but I'm not sure how long I can hold this state. I can already feel the real me pushing through. I'm rambling, but you see where I'm getting at?"

"Now why do I have this feeling that a person most unwanted entered our domain, interrupting our precious work. Maybe if we leave it alone, it will show enough comprehension to navigate back to where it came from. After a quick glance at the creature, I wouldn't hold my hopes high, but one should never underestimate even the lowliest of lifeforms."



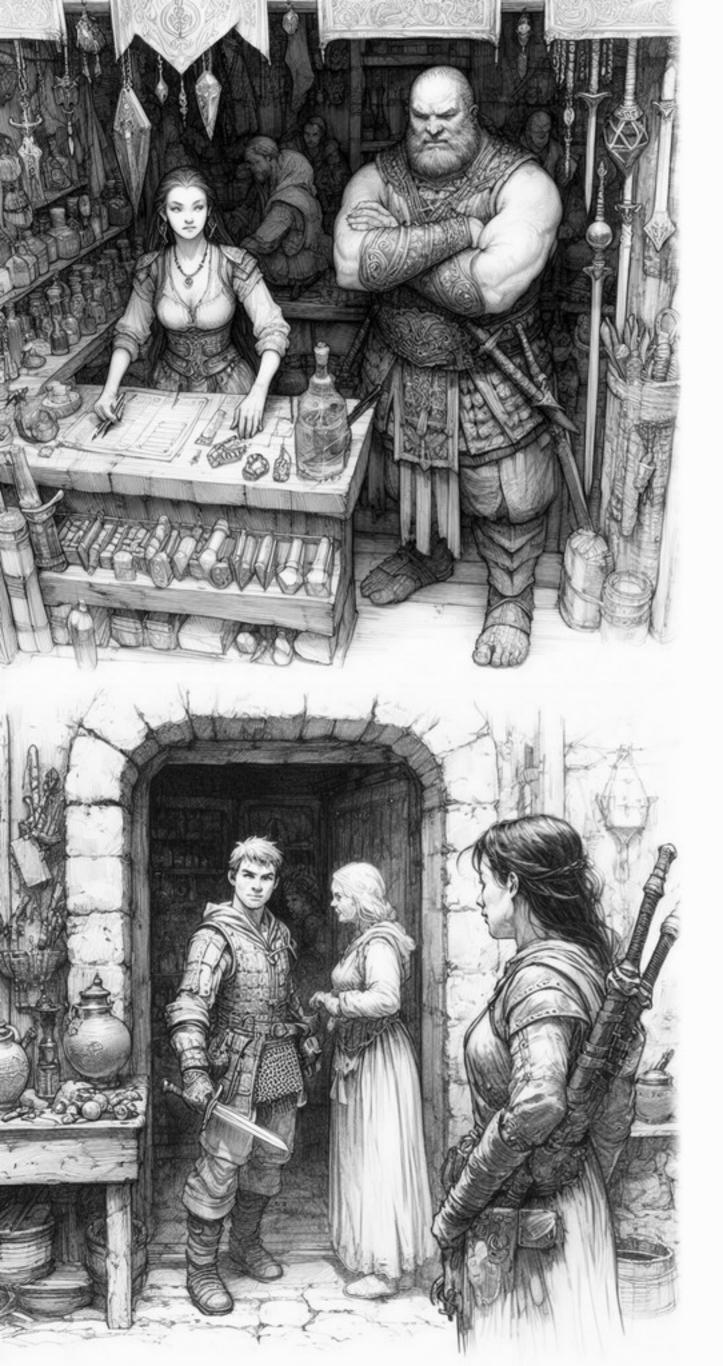




"Who are you? A rogue? Really? You mean the type that dies a thousand deaths while searching for some old trinket in a musty dungeon? Wait, so you're not seaching for an amulet but are trying to ascend to godhood? Ooh, that is just so much better! Just listen to yourself. Ascend? Godhood? Stop dreaming, boy. Get back to reality. Seriously, cut that greasy hair and get a real job. Now get out, I have to finish this."

"Well, I'll be damned, an actual, living rogue! You guys certainly have a reputation. May I ask you what keeps you doing it? Getting hurt over and over again, disappointment, frustration, repetition? Oh, it's the dream of godhood that motivates you. Well, each to their own. Excuse me, but I'll have to return to my ordinary, very mortal, labour. You just go on with your rogue business. No, you can't stroll around. You must leave, or I'm forced to hurt you. Guild policy, you know."





Tomb Raiders Guild Shop

"Do we really allow rogues in our shop, mistress?"

"Now what the hell is that ugly, misshapen creature? A rogue? Looks scrawny. Yes, mistress, I try to behave... but I bet I could one-shot him! No? Not yet? Hmph! I can wait."

"A stinking rogue in our shop! I can get rid of it if you want, mistress. It certainly doesn't look like much. Yes, yes, mistress. I won't dispose the rogue... just yet."

"Lookie, lookie. Sir Splatsalot is back."

"I didn't even have to look. Recognized the rogue just by the smell."

"Does that rogue even know how to eat? Probably doesn't even identify its items. So disgusting!"

"Still struggling to stay alive, rogue? Just say the word, and I'll fix that problem for you."

"Oh, great, the rogue-like character is back. I bet its name is Atsign. They all look just the same."

"Try something, rogue. Make a move. Try to steal something. Slap my mistress's behind. Just anything, really. You can't even imagine how badly I want to fight you."

"Welcome back, Atsign, or whatever it is that you call yourself. I hope you had a horrible day."

"Well, look who's back. Been dying a lot? I imagine black hex magic and mucsevas-rituals are in constant, everyday use? You are just so vile."





TRIBES. CLANS







The Dauntless Dragon

This is a kobold tribe whose main camp is on the second dungeon level.

Kobolds are short, reptilian humanoids with a dark rusty brown scaly skin and glowing red eyes. It is said that kobolds are of draconic heritage.







The Crimson Claw

This goblin tribe has set up their camp on the third dungeon level, and is led by the brutish Goblin King.

Goblins are small, green skinned, dull-eyed evil humanoids usually dressed in leather and rags, living in caves and dungeons. Goblins have an affinity with rats and wolves, raising them to serve as companions and mounts.



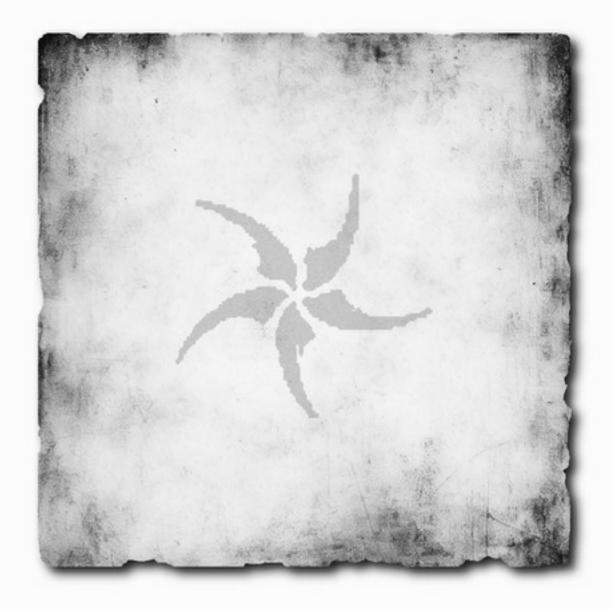












The Five Fangs

The orcs of the Five Fangs tribe have not yet set up a main camp, but are known to occasionally dwell in barracks on dungeon levels 4 to 6.

Orcs are grey-green skinned, pig-snouted, almost human-sized, robust humanoids.







The Scalding Skull

The respectable warlord leads this feisty clan of hobgoblins. They have set up a camp on dungeon level 4.

Hobgoblins are medium sized, dark orange skinned, bigger and smarter cousins of goblins. Hobgoblins live for war, and believe strongly in strength and martial prowess.







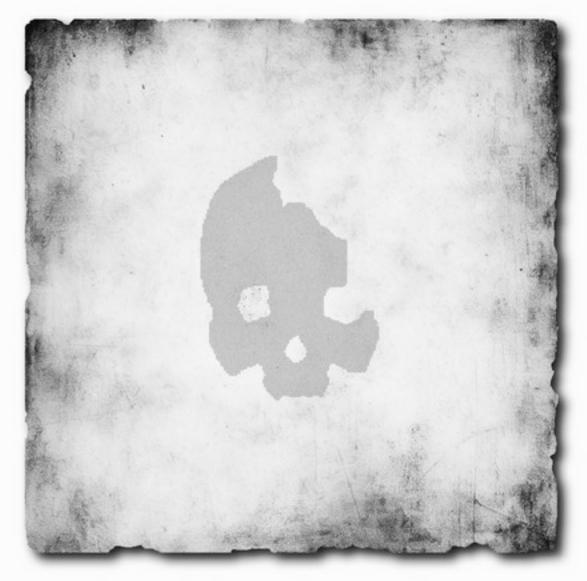
The Backslashers

This bugbear tribe is known to have barracks on dungeon levels 4 to 6.

Bugbears are the biggest and strongest of the goblinoids, but usually controlled by strong hobgoblin leaders. The bugbear's nose, hide, and sharp claws resemble those of bears, but the creature is not related to bears.







The Skullcrushers

A nomadic pack of gnolls, known for eating their enemies and even their own pack members.

Gnolls are hyena-headed, furry, gray-skinned humanoids.







The Mazerroids

A savage clan of minotaurs.

Minotaurs are tall, muscular humanoids with the head of a bull.





Interpretation



Berlin Interpretation

One interpretation to define them all!

This book seems to be an infernal book of laws, written by some archdevil for other devils to help form pacts with mortals. It's full of diabolical legal jargon and obscure, hellish fine print, all written in blood. The book is in bad shape, like it was passed from owner to owner over the aeons, beaten and torn along the way.

At the end of the book there's a handwritten poem by "A", dedicated to "Bensozia".

Watching every motion
In my foolish lover's game
On this endless ocean
Finally lovers know no shame
Turning and returning
To some secret place inside
Watching in slow motion
As you turn around and say
Take my breath away

Watching every motion
In this foolish lover's game
Haunted by the notion
Somewhere there's a love in flames
Turning and returning
To some secret place inside
Watching in slow motion
As you turn my way and say
Take my breath away
My love, take my breath away

SENTIENT WEAPONS



"A new master! Hmm... you will do nicely. Grip me firmly. Don't be shy!"

"We are invincible, my partner in crime! I'm just warming up. Keep 'em coming!"

"It's great to be in good hands, master... literally!"

"Oh, it just died by your arms tonight. It must have been something you said. It just died by your arms tonight."

"If we don't kill something very soon, we'll need to have a talk."

"Are we going to kill something anytime soon? Something small... just anything!"

"Please, kill something... anything... I'm withering. I'm dry and thirsty!"

"I'm not impatient or anything, but how about we actually kill something for a change. Anytime soon would be good."

"Are we really going to just walk around without killing anyone? What's the fun in that?"

"My former master claimed that I have an ego problem. He sadly died when he accidentally fell on his sword, so to speak."

"Are we through? Are you using other weapons? Is that what this is?"

"You probably have your reasons, but I just don't get it. Why would you wield something that primitive and not me?"

"You know... several of my former masters have died in odd circumstances. Just mentioning."

"A new master! You certainly don't look much. Are you a knight? A warlord? At least a strong barbarian? No? What then... no, please, no, don't say that you are a... rogue? That's it. I don't deal with rogues. You can put me back down on the ground now. I want someone worthy to pick me up."

"Take your filthy peasant hands off me!"

"Yes, 'master'. How can I help you today? How about an assisted suicide?"

"I'm doing all the work here, remember? Without me, you would have have been killed a long time ago."

"Just imagine if some great warrior had made that swing. How great it would have been. Earthshattering. Mindblowing. Now it was just pathetic. Barely a kill."

"You just don't get it. Your posture is all wrong. There is no grace in your movement. You lack the aesthetics. Incorrectly killed. I wish someone would resurrect that poor bastard, and kill it again with some style."

"You just keep impressing me. It's like you can not even grasp the basics of combat."

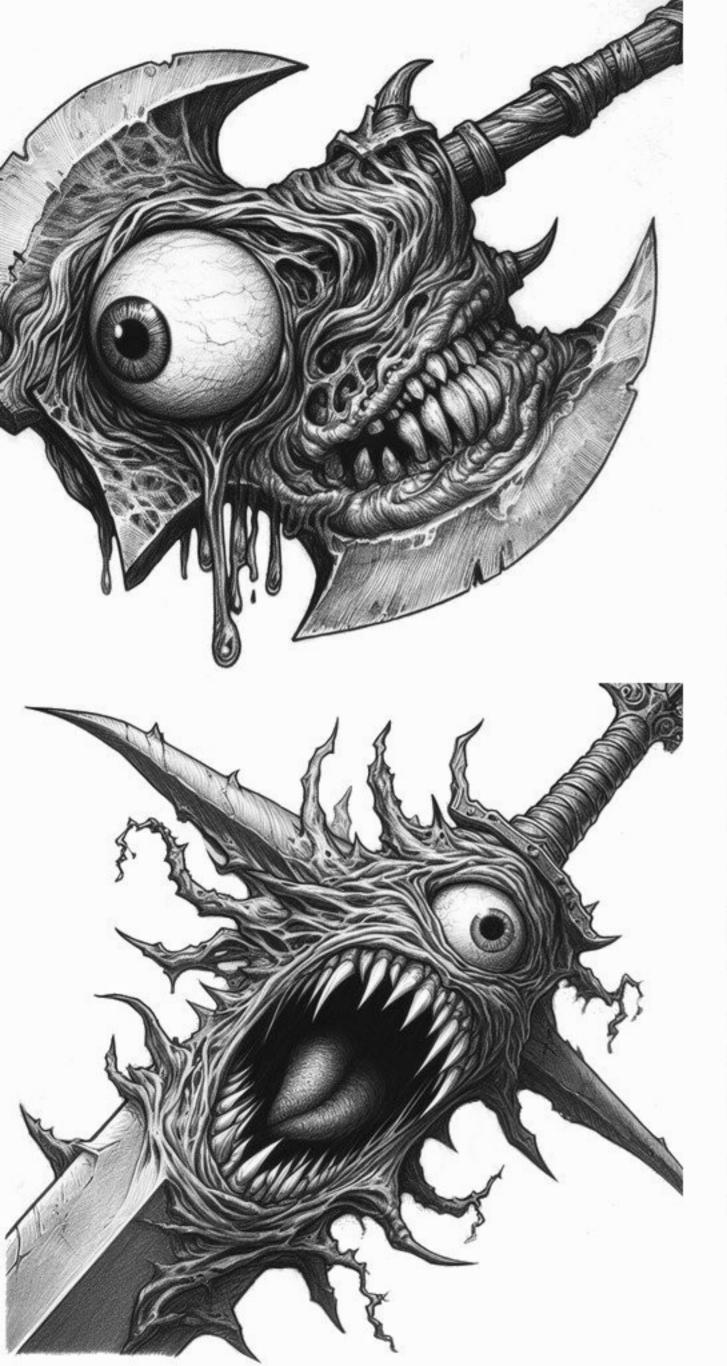
"These poor bastards deserve better deaths. Now some lumberjack with caveman manners just chops them to pieces like they were wood."

"Your inferiority complex is fully justified."

"You know, if you at least dressed properly... but you just wallow in that scruffy-looking rogue-like style or whatever it is that you call it."

"Hey! Can anyone hear me? Somebody rescue me from this lumberjack? I'm looking for a king, a knight, a warlord... even a foot soldier will do. Just don't be a rogue, please."





"Good day to you, sir. My name is Reginald, a butter knife extraordinaire. Now, please, wield me."

"Sir, a query. Are you one of those rogue-like characters? I have not had the pleasure of serving one before. You need to calibrate me first by thrusting me into something living, preferably hilt deep."

"I hope you won't take it amiss, sir, but you seem to be rather enjoying this. Just a friendly remark, sir."

"We really should teach these despicable creatures some manners, sir. They don't even seem to know how to die gracefully. All that pointless screaming and moaning, like that would help their situation in any way."

"Ah, hilt deep with a twist at the end. Sir, you really know how to make a knife happy."

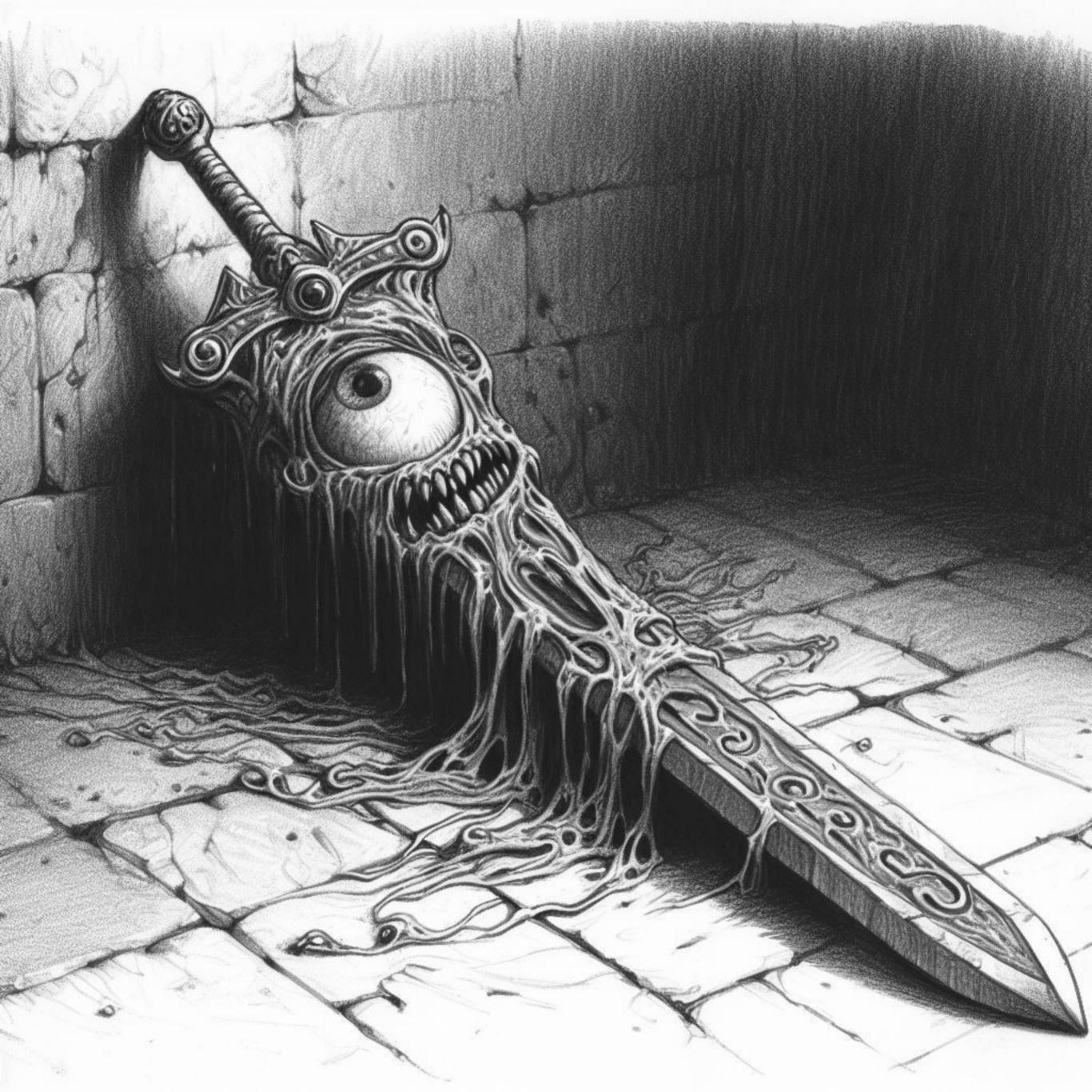
"Sir, look, I'm all coated in blood. Rougelike, you say? Well played, sir, just for once the term 'rougelike' is actually appropriate."

"There really is no reason to be sparkling clean at all times, sir. I would suggest that we behead something. Anytime soon, preferably now."

"If I may be so bold, sir, it is just that I have been noticing that our kills have become quite infrequent that of late. Maybe some bestial acts of uncontrollable violence to spice things up a bit?"

"Sir, a query. What is with people's obsession with size? Good things come in many sizes. Bigger is not always better. I do not like it when people call me a knifelet."

"Just a friendly reminder that we haven't performed any acts of violence for some time now."





Atsign's Journal





Atsign's Journal

Since I was young, I was fascinated by the tales of fabled heroes conquering dungeons, battling evil wizards and dragons, collecting treasure, and eventually ascending to demigodhood. I wanted so badly to follow that path.

This was supposed to be the journal of my journey to immortality, but instead it has become the diary of a failed adventurer.

My first adventure was to enter a doomy dungeon to find an amulet of some wizard. Never got that far, but I lived to tell the tale.

Next I descended to some mines which kept going on and on. I got bored, and wanted to return to the surface, but the mine layouts above had somehow changed, making my maps useless! I was lost. Luckily I had a scroll that teleported me back to the town above. There was supposed to be some big demon deep down there somewhere, but I found the taverns in the town much more interesting.

Odd thing happened at one tavern of that said town. Some madman started to babble something about how my daughter was sick, and how I was to enter a volcano to find a potion to cure her. I tried to explain that I had no family, but he just kept insisting, and even tried to sell me his lance, or the Lance of Death, as he dramatically called it.

I eventually arrived at another town, where I found an oracle who mumbled mysteriously about some adept challenge. I left him mumbling and instead fought some battles at a gladiator arena. There were several guilds that kept asking me to do things. No, sir, that is not for me. I just want my taste of immortality. Strangely I felt very clumsy during my adventures there. Just handling my inventory was painful.

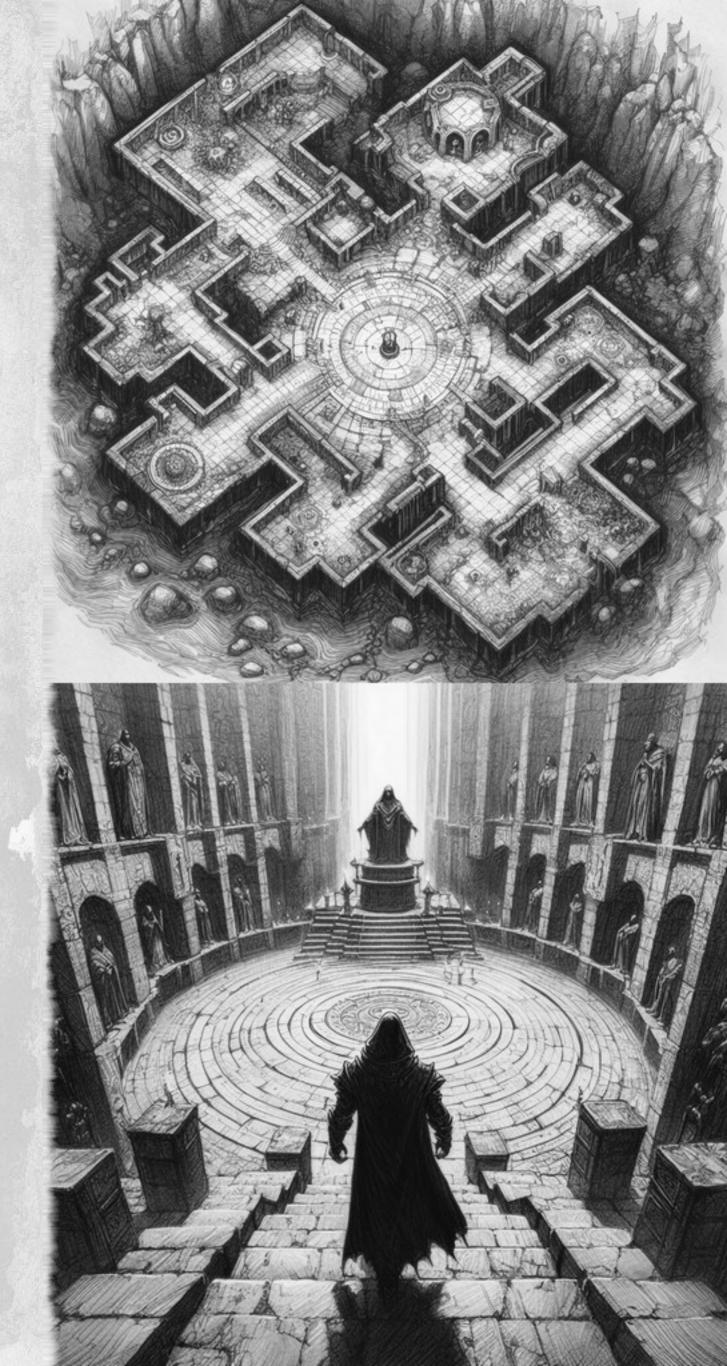
At one point in my glorious adventuring career, people kept raving about this far away land where chaotic forces wreaked havoc. They needed someone to close some gate to save the land. I am a selfish rogue, not a hero, so I politely declined. I later heard that several thousand poor adventurers lost their lives trying. Eventually someone succeeded, but was very corrupted in the end.

I was desperate. I had accomplished absolutely nothing in my life. I almost degraded to using black hex magic and forbidden mucsevas spells, but it felt so shady and dishonest that I could not do it.

I was going to abandon my dreams of immortality, but then I heard about the Zorbus. This will be my last adventure. I will ascend or die trying!

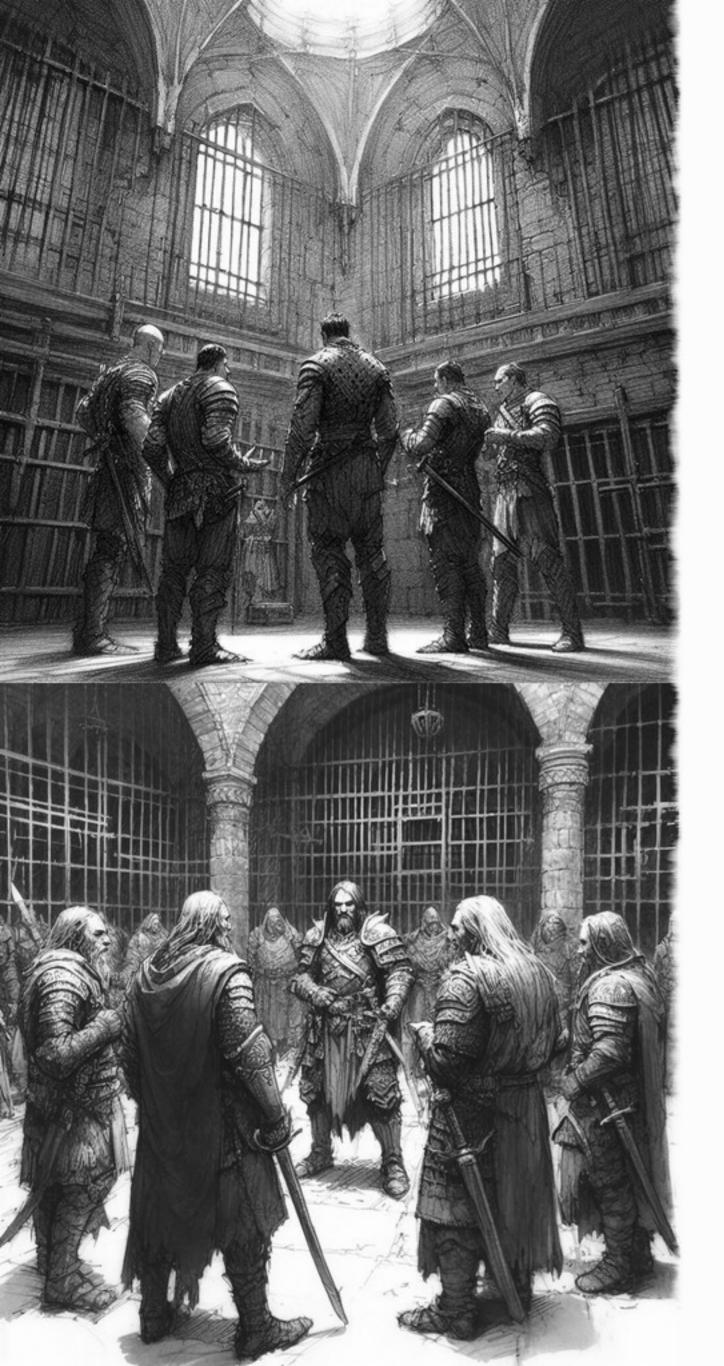
And so, my dear reader, I entered this dungeon. The Zorbus is near. I can feel it. My immortality awaits. Nothing can stop me now.

Atsign Splatsalot





Symbols & Sigils





The Slave Lords

This group maintains a profitable slave trade, and is planning to expand its operation to other planes. The Slave Lords use the Zorbus dungeon as a base of operations.







The Company

The Company is a mercenary company which has recently set headquarters on the 9th dungeon level.







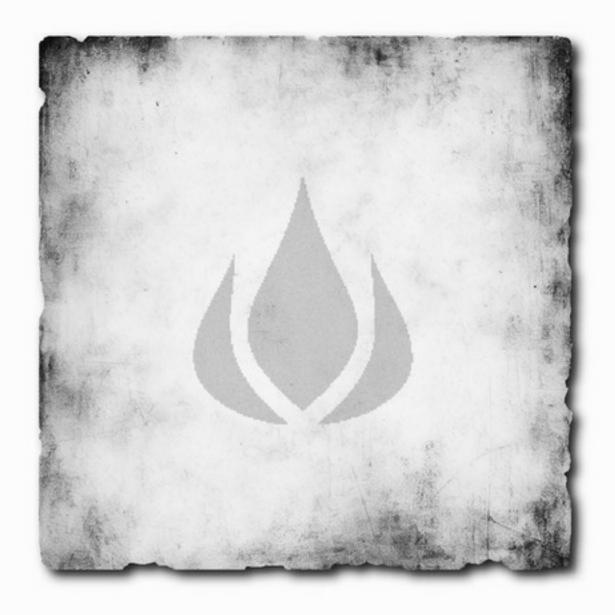
The Astraloth

The astraloth have set up several temporary camps in the dungeon. Lately they have formed search parties to locate the infamous Lord Kricerius.

The astraloth are tall, slender humanoids from the astral plane. Survivors of a long enslavement by squiduraks, they have become ruthless pillagers and raiders of many worlds in the prime material plane.







The Fire Giants

The fire giants have set up a camp on the 10th dungeon level. Their king, Svartr Aska, is planning to dethrone the ruling giant god. Deicide in his indomitable mind, the king is known to be searching for the legendary weapon, the Godsbane.





Clonomicon





Clononomicon

DAY 1524

I did it! After all these years, I successfully cloned myself! I will become the greatest clonomancer ever! Greater than even Manshoon!

DAY 1537

For some reason, the clones slowly turn to stone. It must be the cockatrice ingredients, but the potions won't work without them.

DAY 1544

Hooray! The potion no longer needs the cockatrice parts, so the problem is fixed!

DAY 1546

I will build an army of clones! I will storm the gates of Zorbus!

DAY 1547

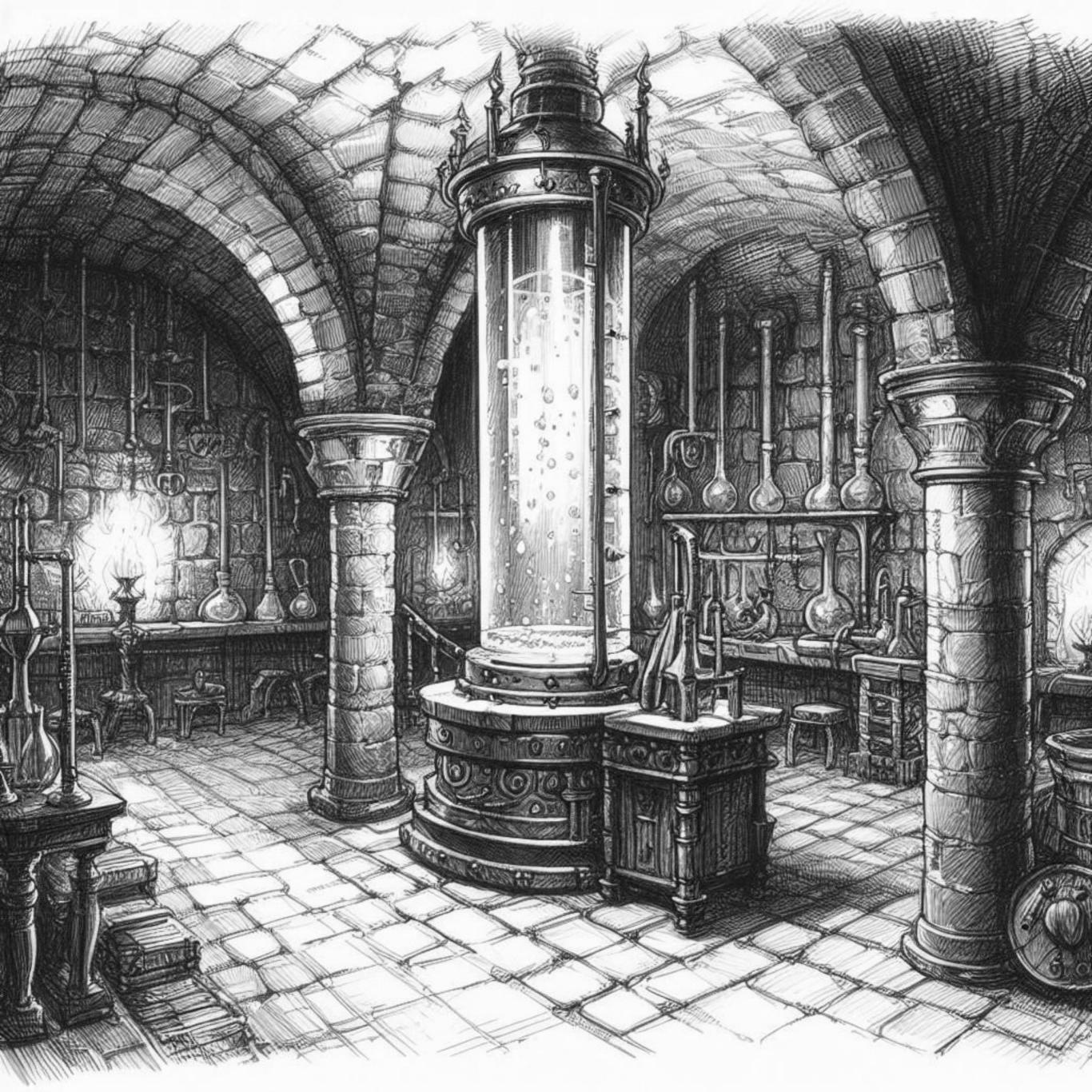
Strange... I have no memory of writing the day 1546 entry. Could a clone have written it?

DAY 1562

Hmm... I am no longer sure if I am the original one or a clone. Does it really matter?

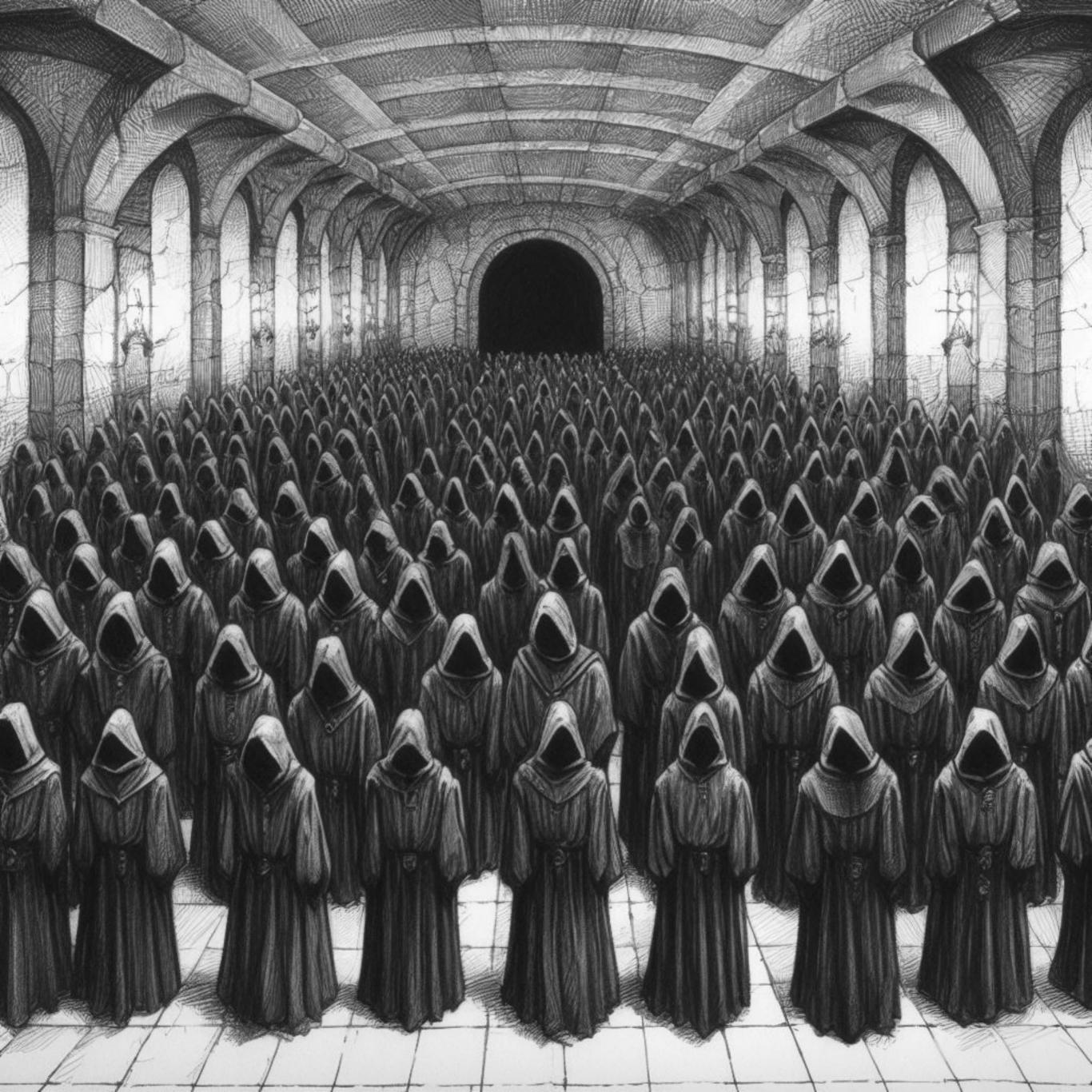
DAY 1565

Was my name Manshoon at some point? In some other life?









MAGUARTX MARABELLIX











Cults. & Cabals



Cults & Cabals

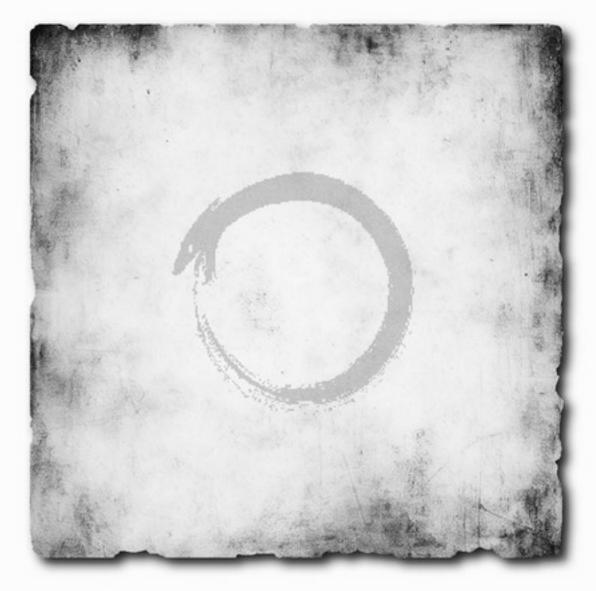
Recorded here are some of the most powerful cults that have a strong following in the dungeon of Zorbus.

Information is scarce as these cults are consistently openly hostile towards outsiders.

What is also common between these groups is that they attract mostly powerhungry lunatics, who have no qualms about destroying everything in their path to reach their goal. And so often that goal is utter darkness, the end of everything.







The Serpent Sigillum

These cultists worship some serpent deity, or that is what most of the cult's members believe. In truth, the serpent is not a deity, but an ancient, evil primordial that even the gods fear.







The Disciples of Demogorgon

This vile cult worships Demogorgon, the prince of demons.

The cult is currently in disarray as the demon lord no longer answers the prayers of its worshipers.







The Doomdreamers

This mysterious cult plots to release some ancient, forgotten god from its astral prison.

The priests of the cult are called Doomdreamers, fanatically followed by the cult's devotees, the Chainbreakers.

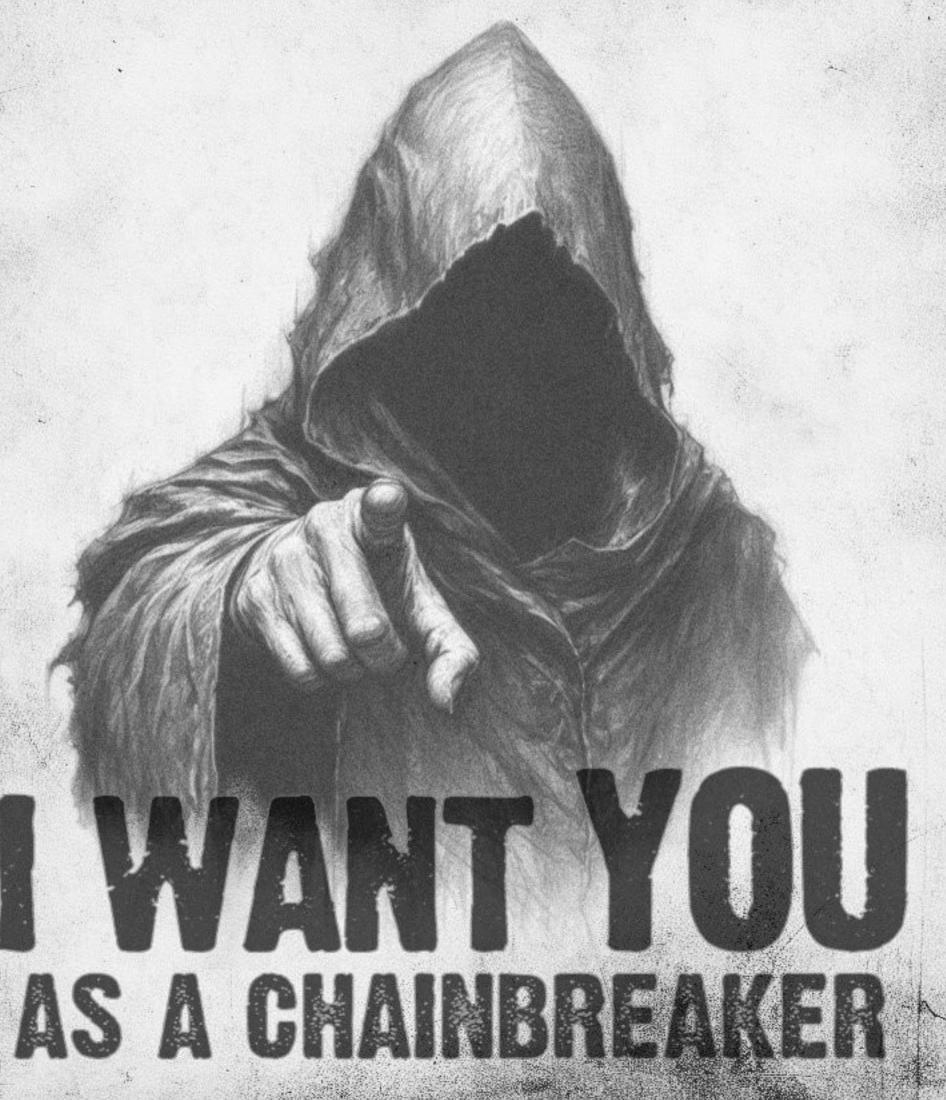
The cult seems to be full of lunatics and psychopaths who would rejoice in seeing the multiverse end in chaos.



Excuse me, sir, do you have a moment to talk about our lord and saviour, the Chained God?



ASK NOT WHAT YOUR GOD CAN DO FOR YOU ASK WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR YOUR GOD





Legend of Kaduria



Legend of Kaduria

This book seems to be a collection of random musings about an imaginary kingdom called Kaduria. Someone has clearly spent years writing this book, but it's badly unfinished. Pages have been ripped off, and many paragraphs have been rewritten several times.

"I scrapped my old plans, again. It has to be perfect."

"...will show them all! The greatest kingdom of all time! Oh Kaduria, oh my sweet Kaduria."

"One lifetime isn't enough to build something like Kaduria! Must seek a way to prolong this miserable life!"

"Something went wrong! Instead of a lich, I transformed into a death knight. This is rather disappointing. Can't I do anything right?"

"...and it does have a rather evil, morbid ring to it.

Lord Kricerius, a death knight. Yes, just like that Lord

Soth guy! Now I have all the time in the world to

finally build my kingdom."

"This isn't enough! I need more power! More! The power to shape the lands! The power of the gods! The Zorbus awaits!"

"Oh well, this wasn't as easy as I thought it would be. Had an appointment with this mysterious Robed Figure, who told me that I would have to challenge and defeat one of the sitting gods to gain divine power. Should have just splatted that guy on the spot. So overly dramatic and pompous, even had an angelic choir following him! Just who does he think he is?"

"So, it turns out that the gods won't just voluntarily give up their power. There must be some way..."

"Godsbane! That's it! Now I just have to find it!"

"...but that damned sword is nowhere to be found, and it doesn't really help that the king of the fire giants is looking after it as well."

"...an alternative, an astraloth Silver Sword?"

"I am a mastermind! I tricked the astraloth, and now I have a Silver Sword! Now I'm ready! For Kaduria!"









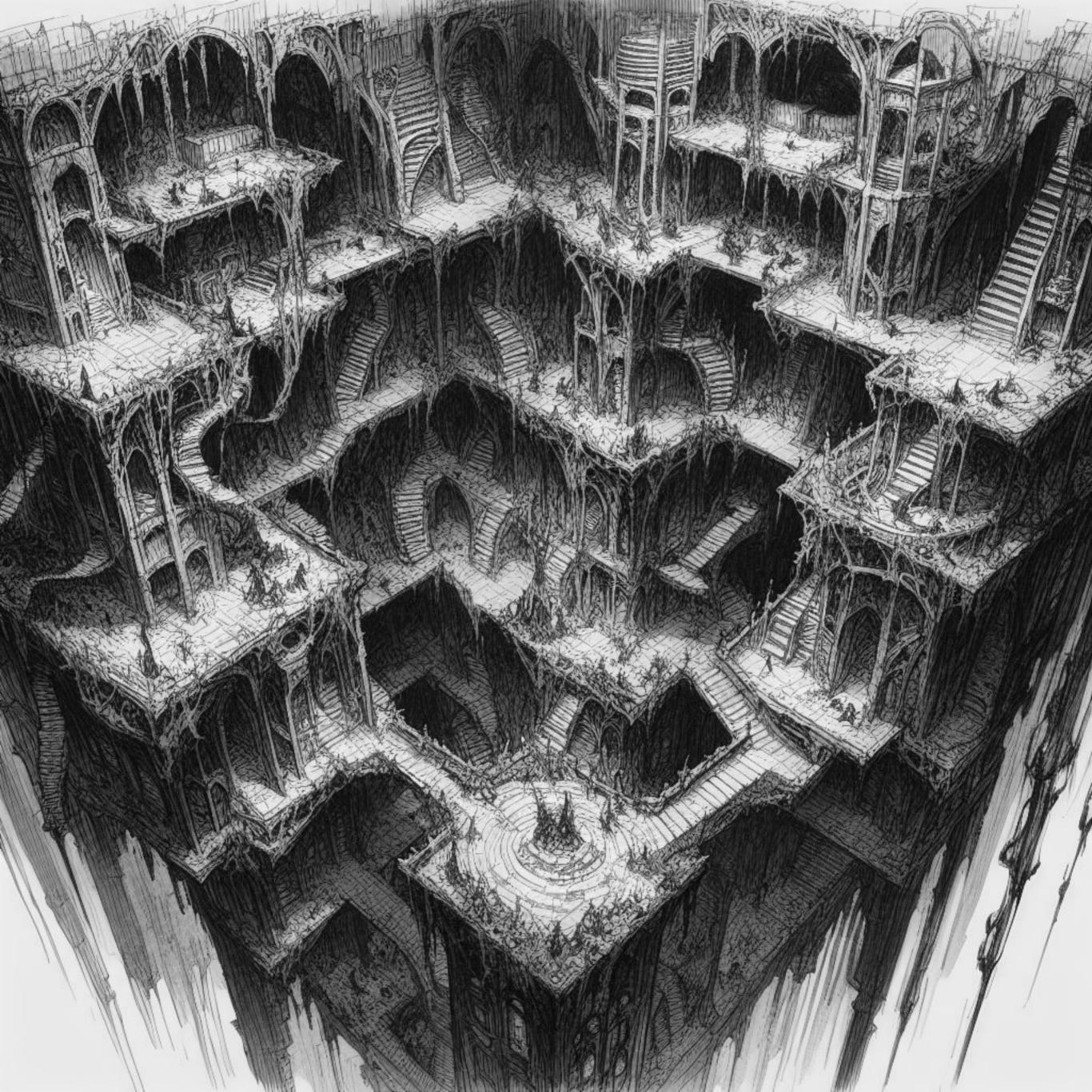










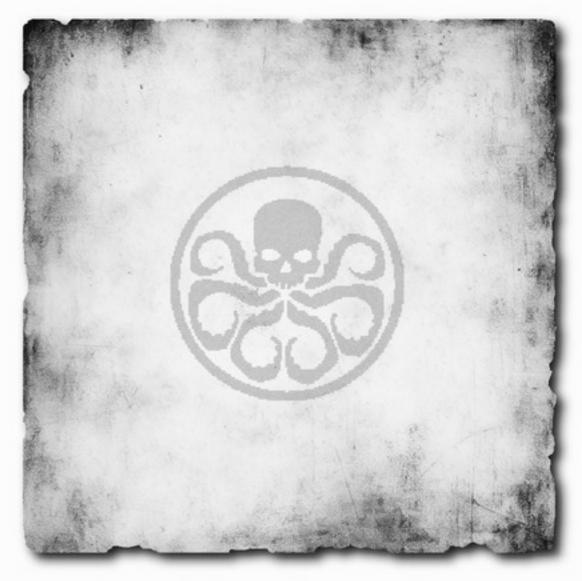












The Dagonoth

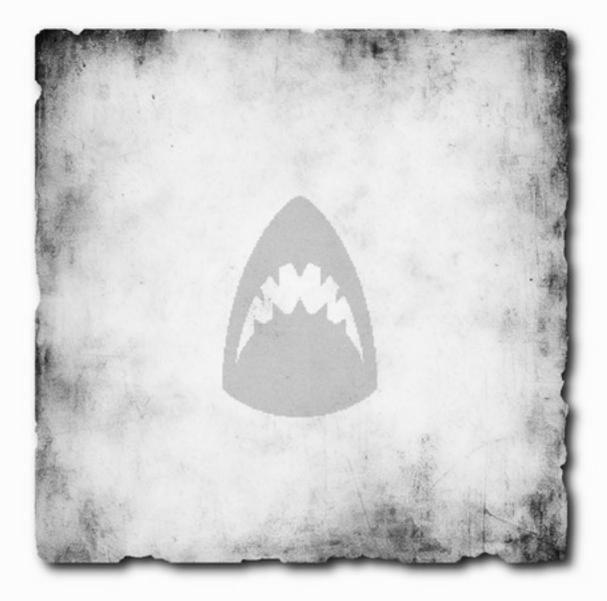
The dagonoth is a sinister natured aquatic humanoid, little smaller than an average human. Its body is greenish and covered in fine scales. The head is fishlike with bulging eyes.











The Sahuagin

The sahuagin, also called sea devils or sharkmen, are fishlike humanoids with webbed feet and hands, gills and a finned tail.







The Duergar

The duergar, also known as grey dwarves, are evil and tyrannical dwarves living in underground cities. Most duergar are bald and have ashen grey skin.





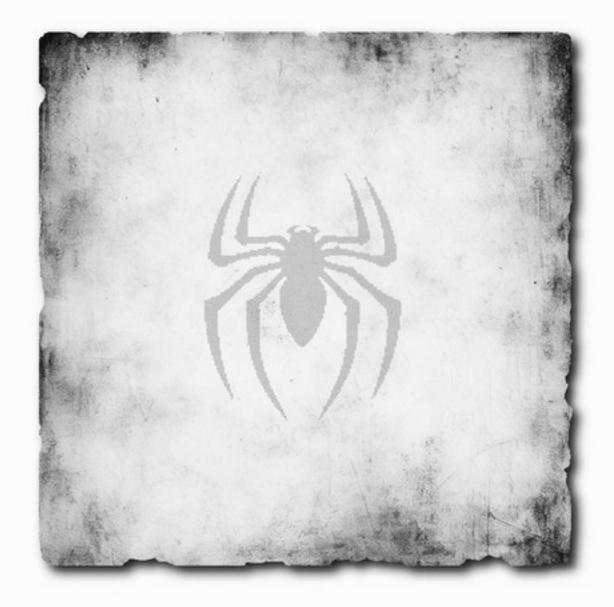












The Drow

Dark elves, or the drow, are evil and malicious, black skinned, white haired elves that live deep under the earth in underground cities, led by scheming matron mothers.















The Squidurak

The squidurak is a humanoid-shaped monstrosity with slimy, rubbery flesh, and whose head resembles an octopus with two bloated eyes. Squiduraks bend others to their will, shatter the mind of their enemies and eat their brains. Their psionic blast deals mental damage.

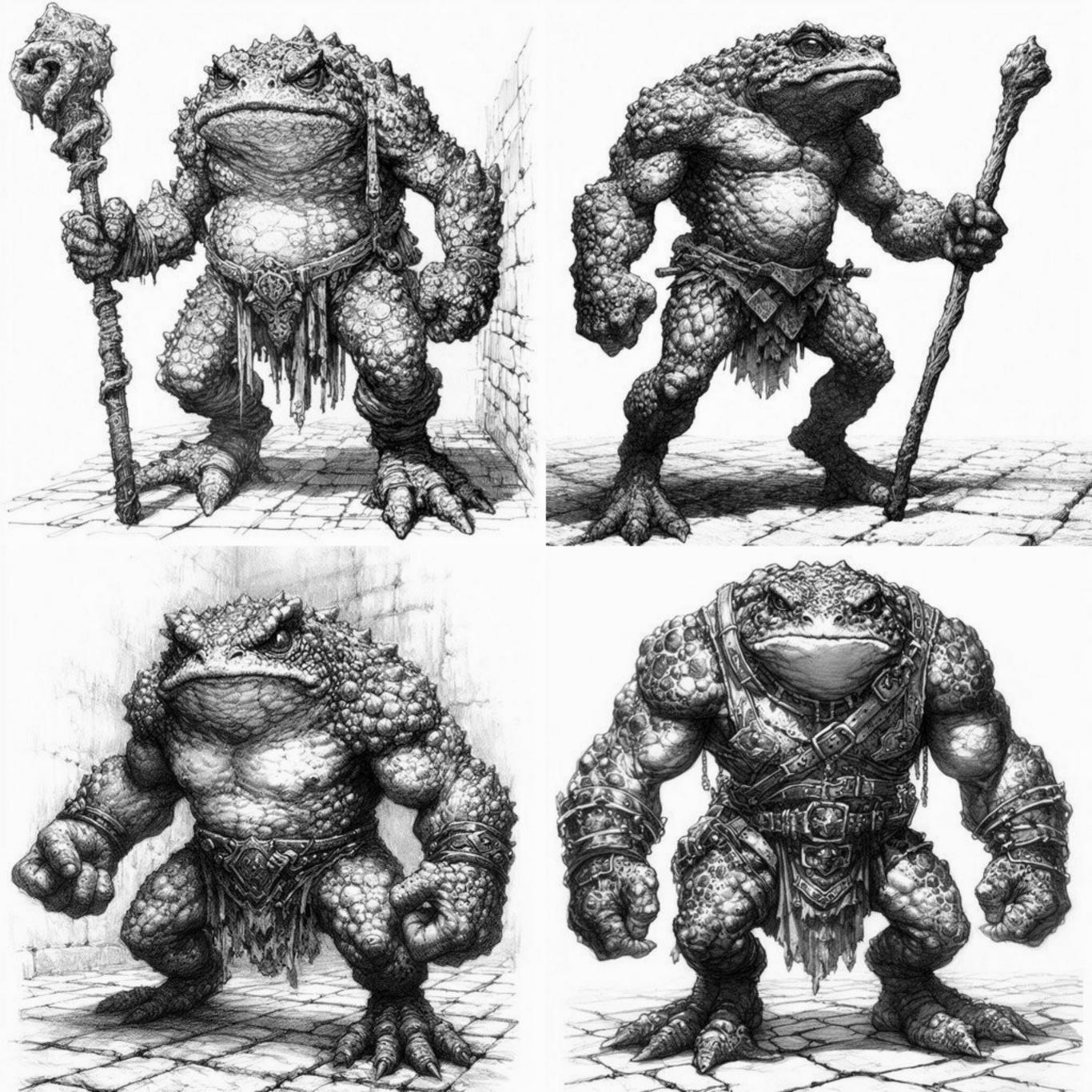






The Toadaloth

These monstrosities look like a big humanoid toads.









DUNGEON MASTER'S GUIDE



Dungeon Master's Guide

This book is written by some wizard called Halaster. The book is filled with information and rules on how to handle day-to-day dungeon mastering.

Someone else has kept a diary at the end of the book:

"First day at the job! I'm so excited!"

"Painted several new occult symbols on the floors. Some of them are very pretty. Manshoon congratulated me on them, but Halaster mumbled something about 'symbol inflation'. Huh?"

"I need more gelatinous cubes. The floors are getting filthy."

"The maze under the regular dungeons is finally ready. Personally, I'm not a fan of mazes and find them utterly boring, but I have my orders. 30 levels of zigzagging corridors filled with deadly traps and monsters. Now who wouldn't love that?"

"Had a small work related argument with Halaster. During his last worldwalk session, he brought elephants into the dungeon! Elephants! This is a dungeon, not a jungle. I just hope he forgets about the tarrasque."

"A group of priests came asking about the kingdom of Kaduria. I told them that Kaduria is nothing more than an imaginary place invented by Lord Kricerius, and that he died here in this dungeon while trying to reach the Zorbus. I didn't reveal them the location of his tomb."

"Something troubles Halaster. He seems to think that the gods themselves are after him!" "I hope the hassle with adventurers performing mucsevas-rituals is finally over! Is there no honor among rogues nowadays?"

"Those damn drow! They constantly push me around! I wish there was a rule to prevent that. I am the Dungeon Master after all! I already sent a message to Halaster, but haven't heard anything from him for ages."

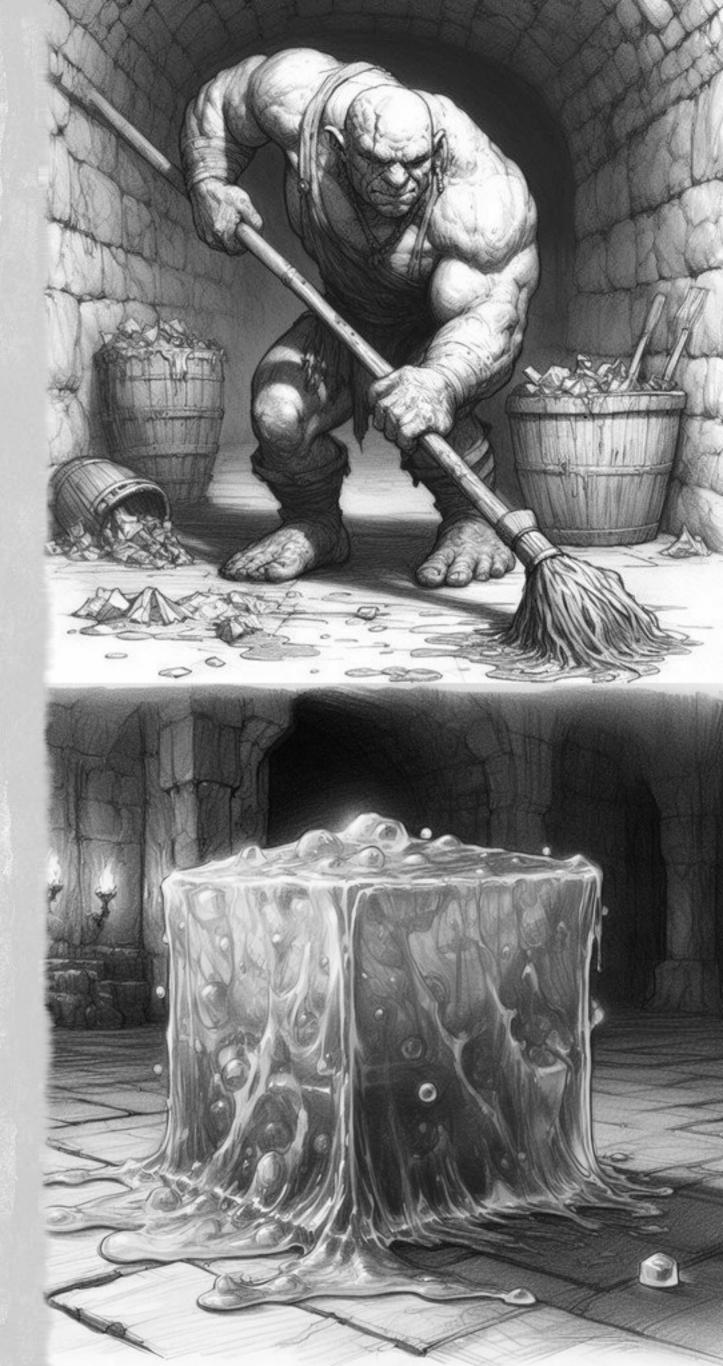
"It's not only the drow, but other denizens as well, who keep lecturing me on how to run my dungeon. I know the rules. I know my game."

"It's Zorbus time again. Lots of young, greedy adventurers coming, only to die in thousand stupid deaths. I need to make more room in the morgues. Zorbus season is a great time to be the Dungeon Master. It's just so much fun to go through the identified possessions of perished adventurers, find magical weapons and other trinkets."

"Another adventurer died today when he tried to steal an item from a myconid altar. Yet another stupid death."

"It is probably adventurers who keep writing 'Elbereth' on floor tiles around the dungeon. Who is this Elbereth? In a few cases they seem to have died on the spot after writing it, as if writing the word was their last hope. Very odd."

"There are other strange writings on the floor as well. The writings seem to be like from some foreign world or culture. They often seem rhythmic like words from a poem or a song. Maybe the writers wanted to write something on the floor, but couldn't come up with anything meaningful? Well, I have to get rid of those texts eventually, and replace them with proper Zorbus lore."





"Manshoon visited again. He set up several cloning chambers in the dungeons."

"The courtesan in Carillo told me that her two sisters are trying to reach the Zorbus. Haven't seen them yet."

"There's something odd going on in Carillo. The bouncer and the shopkeepers seem friendly, almost too friendly, but I have a feeling that there's some sinister power scheming behind the scenes."

"An elite mercenary company called the Company has set home in the lower parts of the dungeon. They seem to be professional and haven't caused any trouble so far. Are they trying to reach the Zorbus?"

"The giants are fighting again. The fire giant king wants to enter the Zorbus. The storm giants don't seem to like the idea."

"What to do with the clonomancer? I don't like him filling the dungeon with clones of himself. One Manshoon is more than enough."

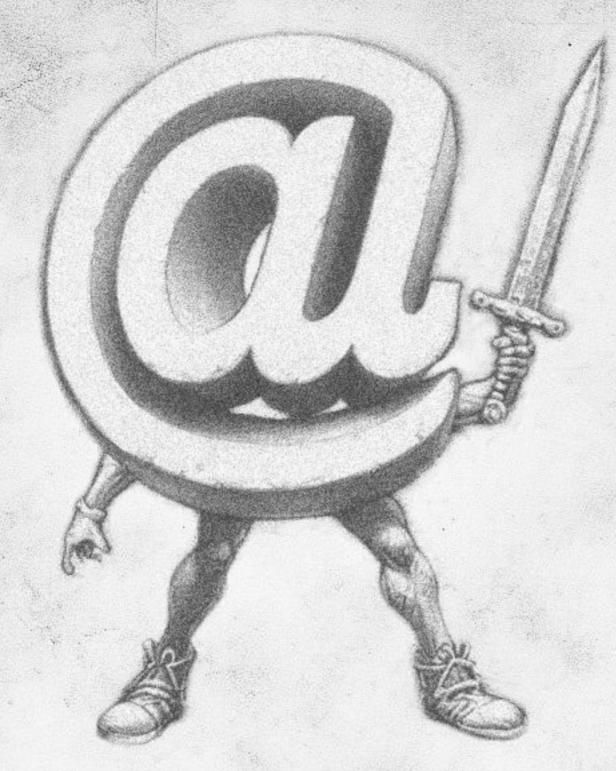
"The Temple of the Chained God seems abandoned, and I haven't seen any of the priests around for a very long time. I'm happy that they are gone. I shudder at the thought of the Chained God actually getting free some day."

"Some upstart adventurer has caused trouble in the upper levels. I need to teach that rogue a lesson. No one messes with my dungeon!"

"Where in the Nine Hells is Halaster?"



HAVE YOU SEEN THIS ROGUE?



DEAD OR ALIVE 5000078 REWARD

MONSTER MANUAL

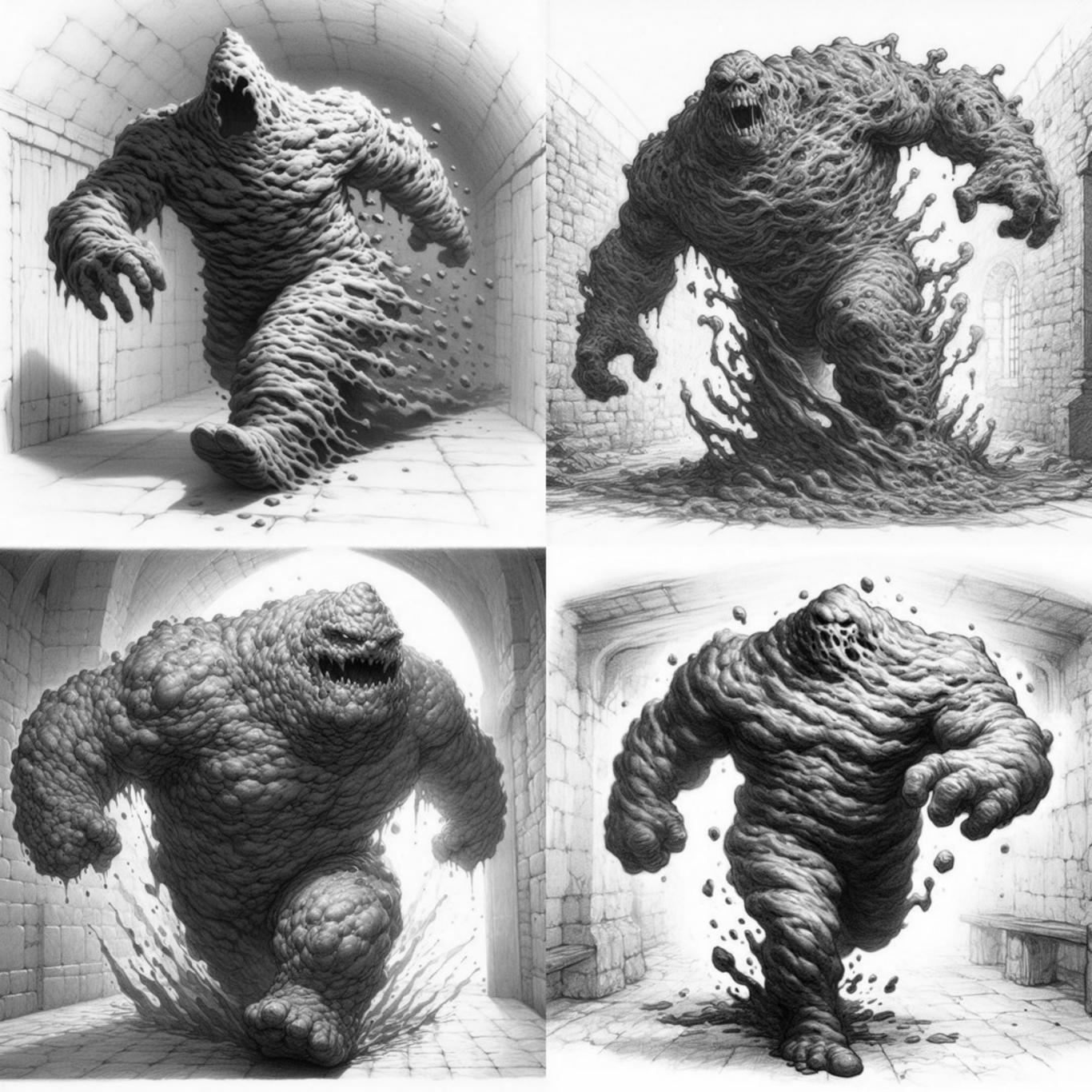


















































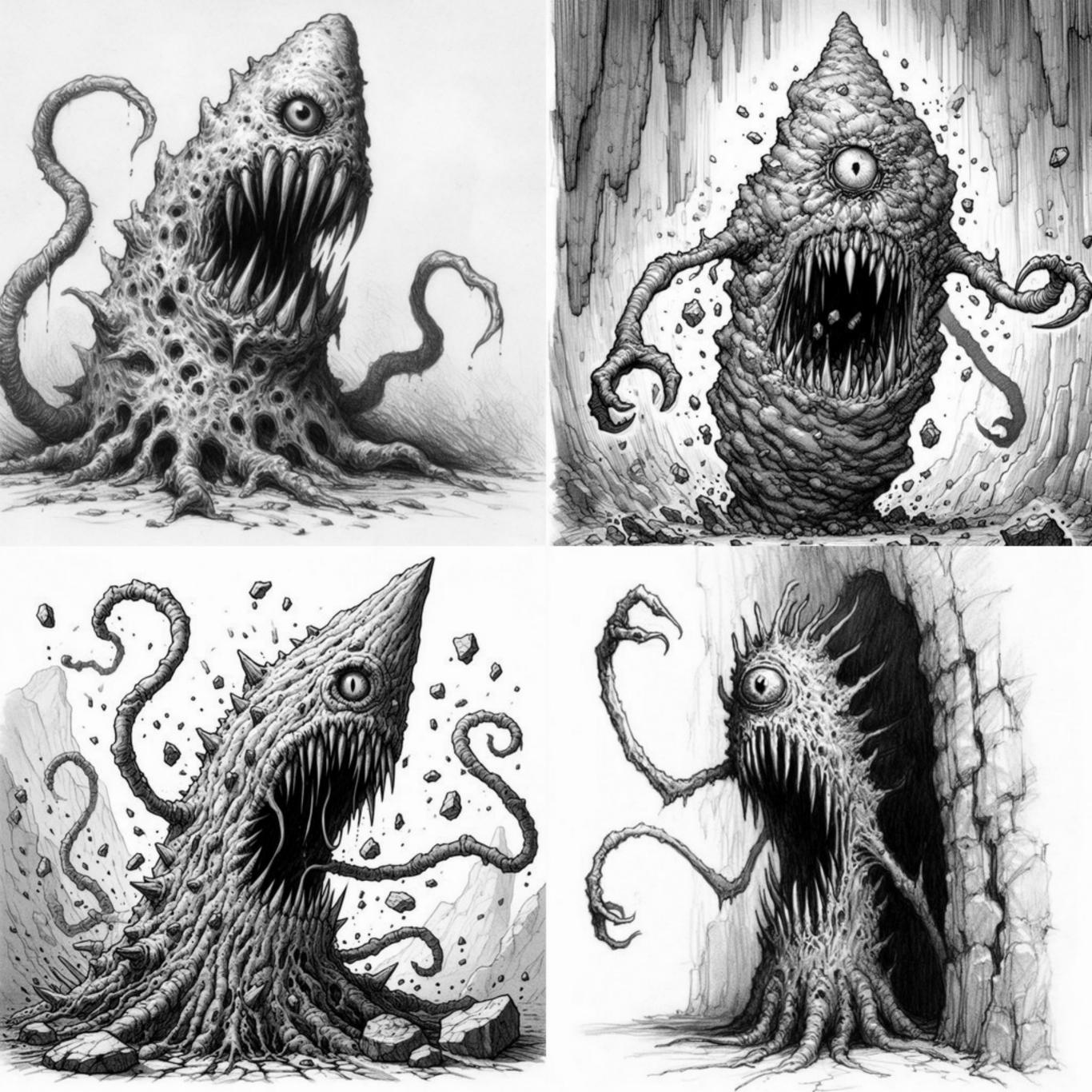


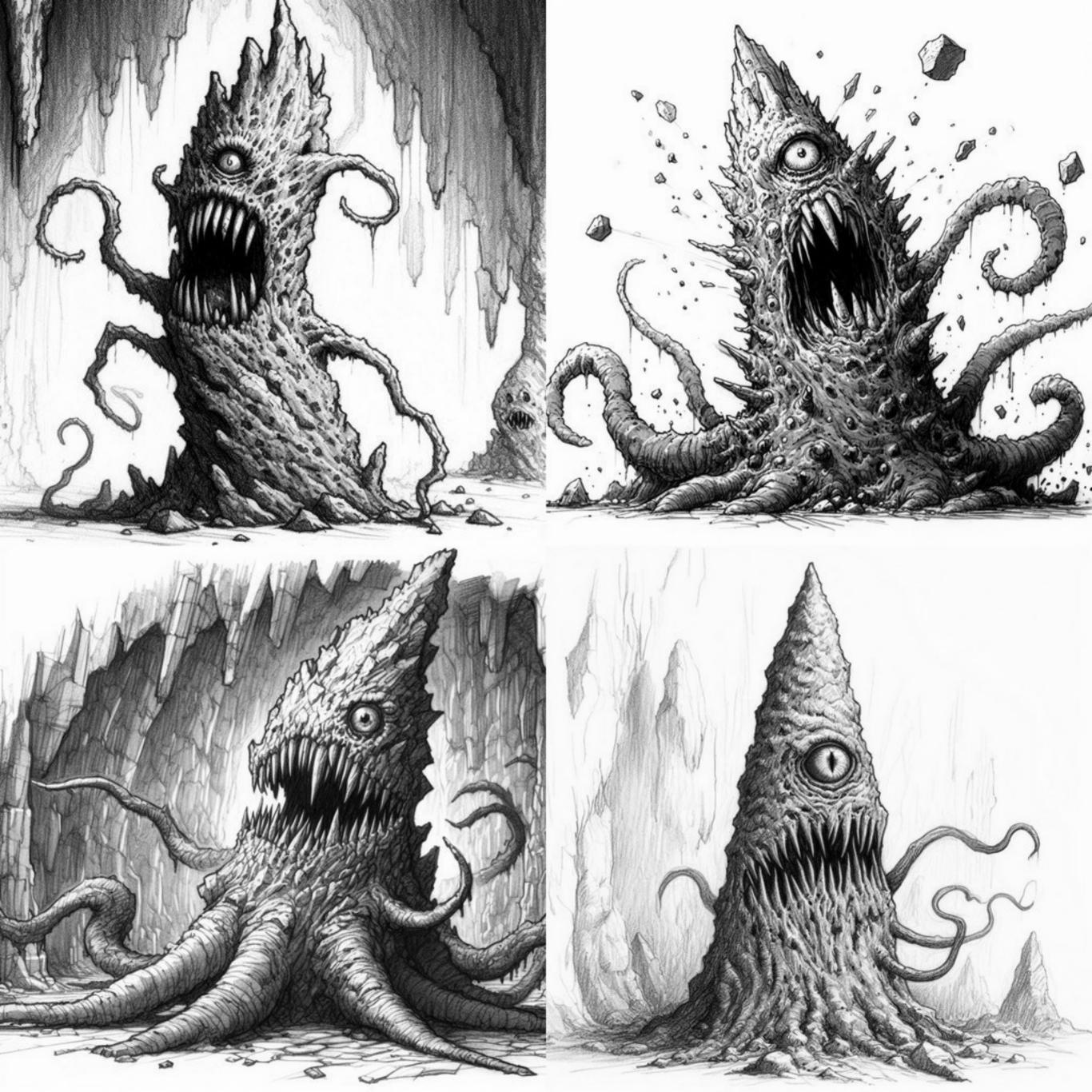


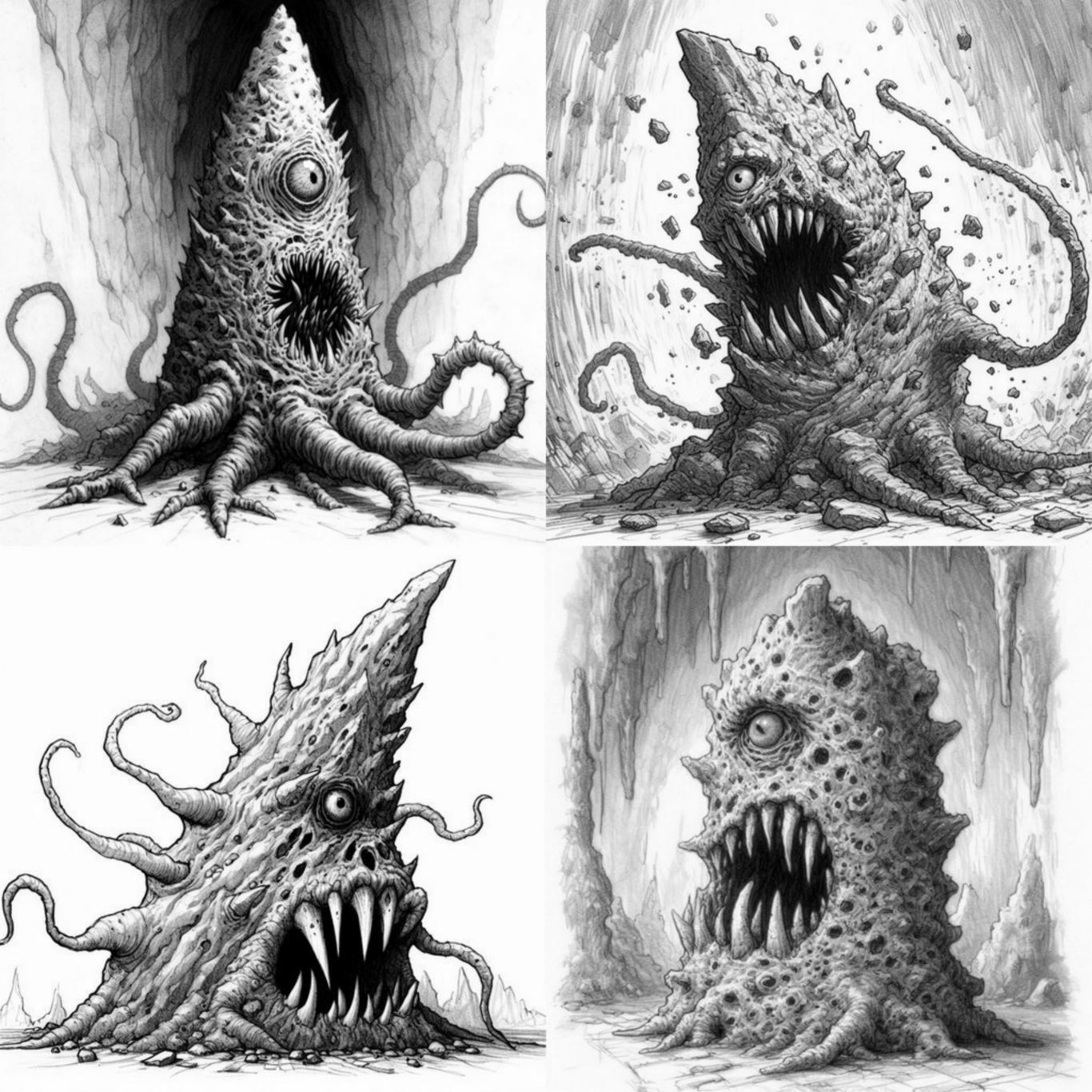




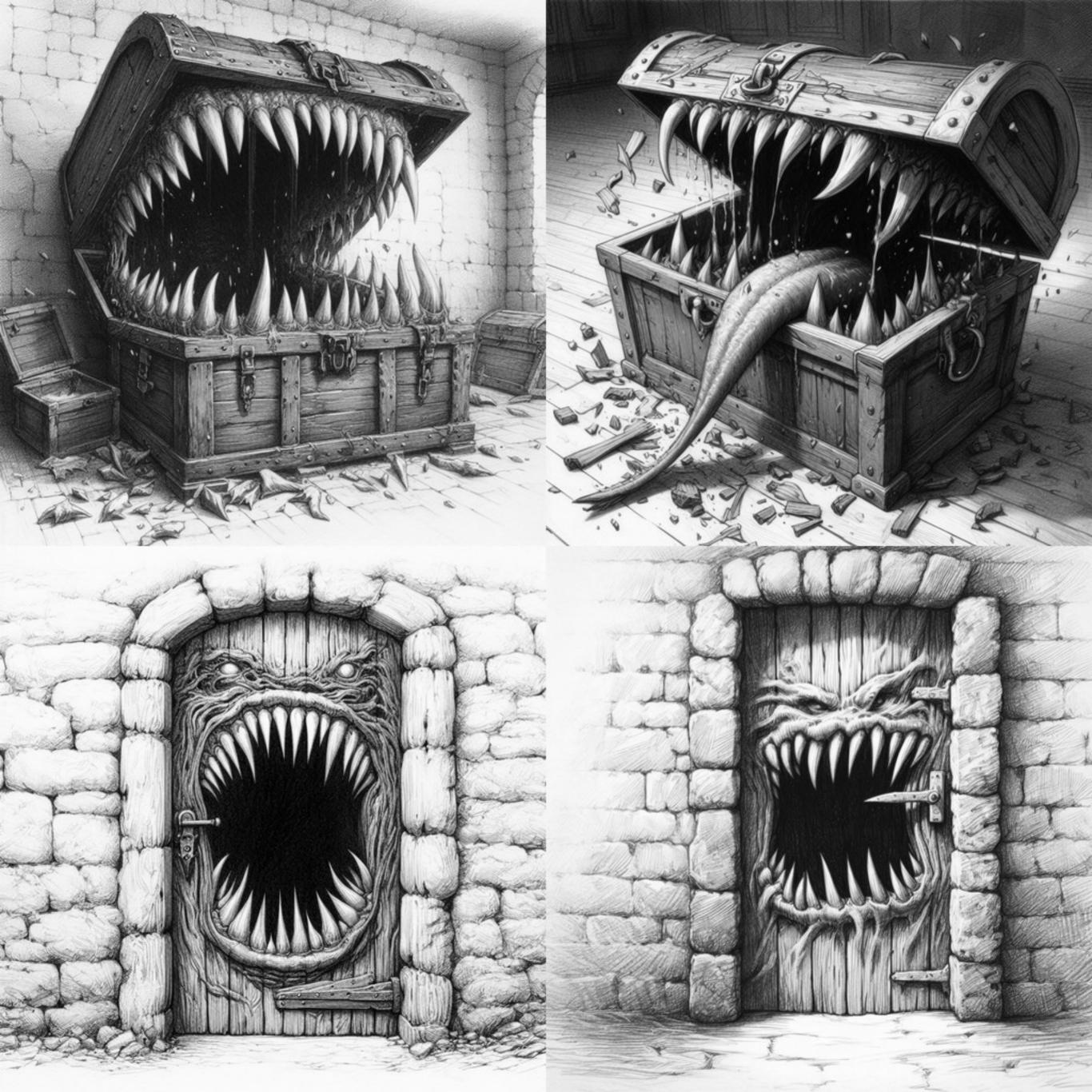




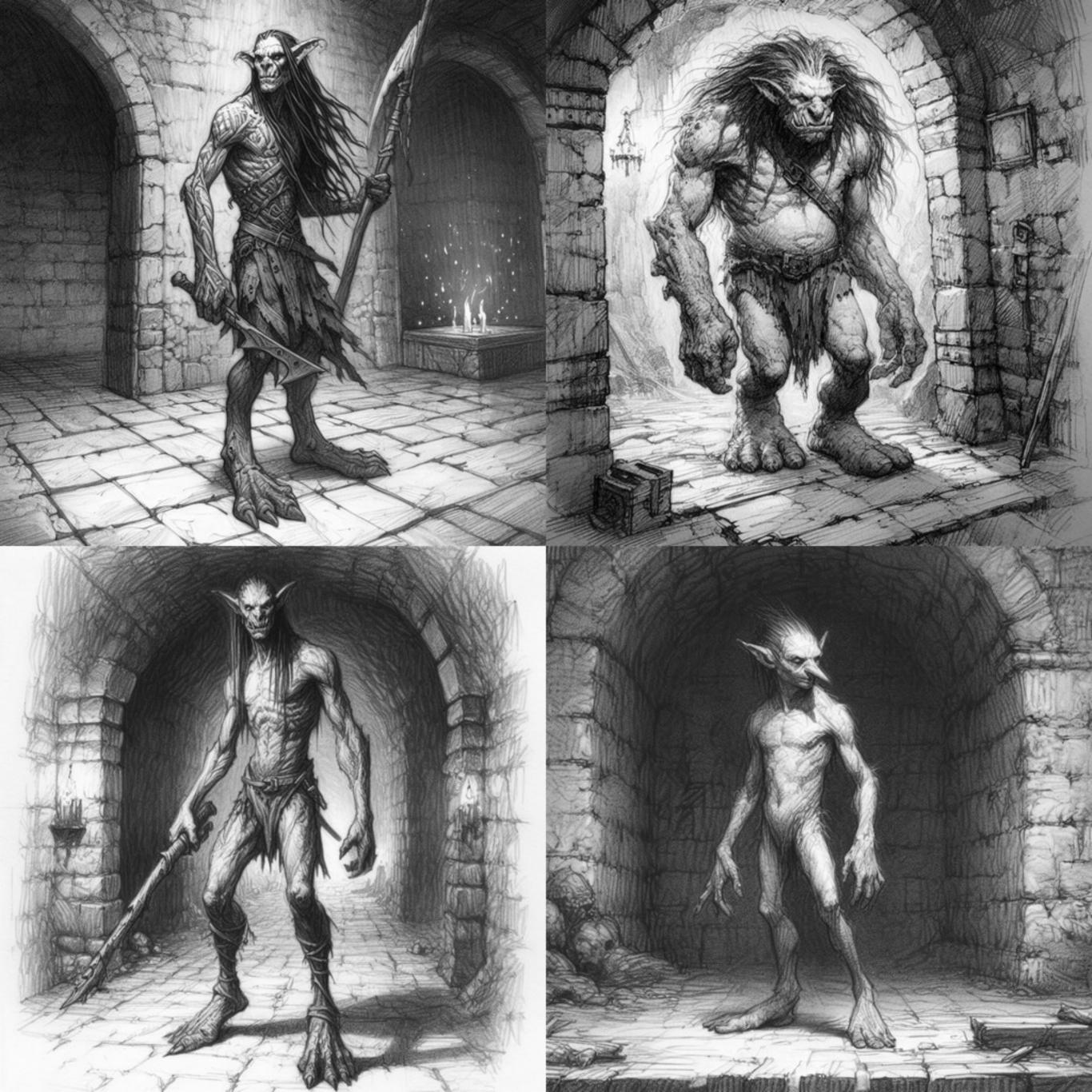










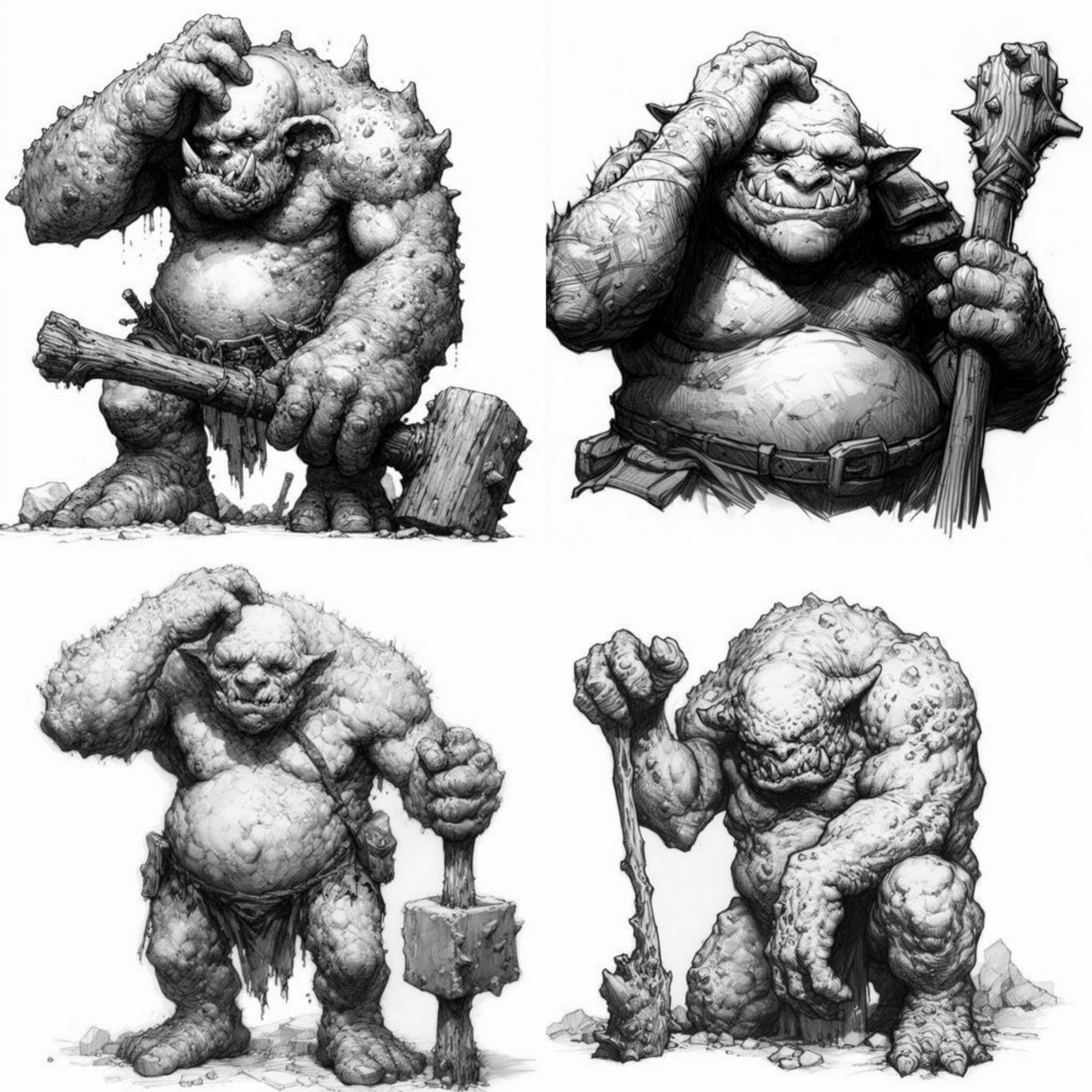






























JOURNAL 6F AN ASTRALOTH PATHFINDER



Journal of an Astraloth Pathfinder

JOURNAL ENTRY, DAY 3

Successfully landed and acclimatized to the planet. Terrain is lush forest, rolling hills, towns teeming with humans and the labyrinth, the Zorbus. I have my orders. Mission is to infiltrate the Zorbus, find and dispatch the target, and exfiltrate with the package. I have one month of local celestial rotations to execute. Glory be to Vlaakith, the CLVII of Her Name. I am confident this will only take a week.

JOURNAL ENTRY, DAY 5

Pathfinding arrested. The Zorbus is a protean, highly magical structure. It's corridors and rooms shift and change upon entry. Normal maps are useless here. Tracking by terrain is useless here. Scrolls of magical mapping may be needed. That thaumaturgy can map out all doors and walls on a given level of the labyrinth. It is known to even reveal secret doors, but it will not penetrate the details of those chambers. I have heard rumors among the local kobolds and hobgoblins of a portal to a demiplane called Carillo, a place of trade. Most fortunate for me, for I always travel flush. I will be able to resupply and bivouac there.

JOURNAL ENTRY, DAY 7

By Vlaakith's Eternal Visage, what a night. Successfully infiltrated Carillo. Bartered with mercane for supplies and magic goods. Then... then I found the tavern. It had been so long since I was on leave. I only intended to reconnoiter the building and interrogate some of the revelers, but then I saw it. They had my favorite brand of space-mead; chilled, frosty and delicious. I only planned to stay a few hours but I ended up sprawled outside and left for what serves as dawn in that half-plane. No more distractions. I have my mission. I will save some space-mead for a celebratory affair, tea and medals, once all this is done.

JOURNAL ENTRY, DAY 9

My target is one 'Lord' Kricerius. Intelligence indicates he has shuffled off this mortal coil and joined the ranks of the unliving. A death knight. This transformation does not, however, make him noble like our Magnificent Lich Queen, Vlaakith. Debrief stated he is a liar and betrayer to the astraloth people. Scuttlebutt around the barracks suggested Kricerius was involved in some sort of transaction with astraloth agents against the hated squiduraks. There was a double cross. Regardless, one of our knights perished along with subordinates and Kricerius now is in possession of a silver sword. This is a stain upon the honor and pride of our people. A silver sword is exclusively a knight's weapon and a gift from the Lich Queen herself! I must identify the target and exfiltrate the weapon. The celestial cycles are counting down. I can feel it.







JOURNAL ENTRY, DAY 19

Squiduraks! I thought I had detected their taint when I was assaulted by a couple of vacant-eyed ettins. The unlucky giant-kin were mind-thralls. Thralldom is usually the first indication that a location has been infested with one or more of the cursed squiduraks. These were the creatures Kricerius was supposed to exterminate on our behalf. They are my people's ancestral enemy, bloody aberrants from strange and foul crystal spheres in the far realms of space. They enslaved the astraloth long ago with their psionic powers and we have never forgotten. Thus, my mission now becomes twofold: I must track down Kricerius and eradicate the squidurak threat.

JOURNAL ENTRY, DAY 25

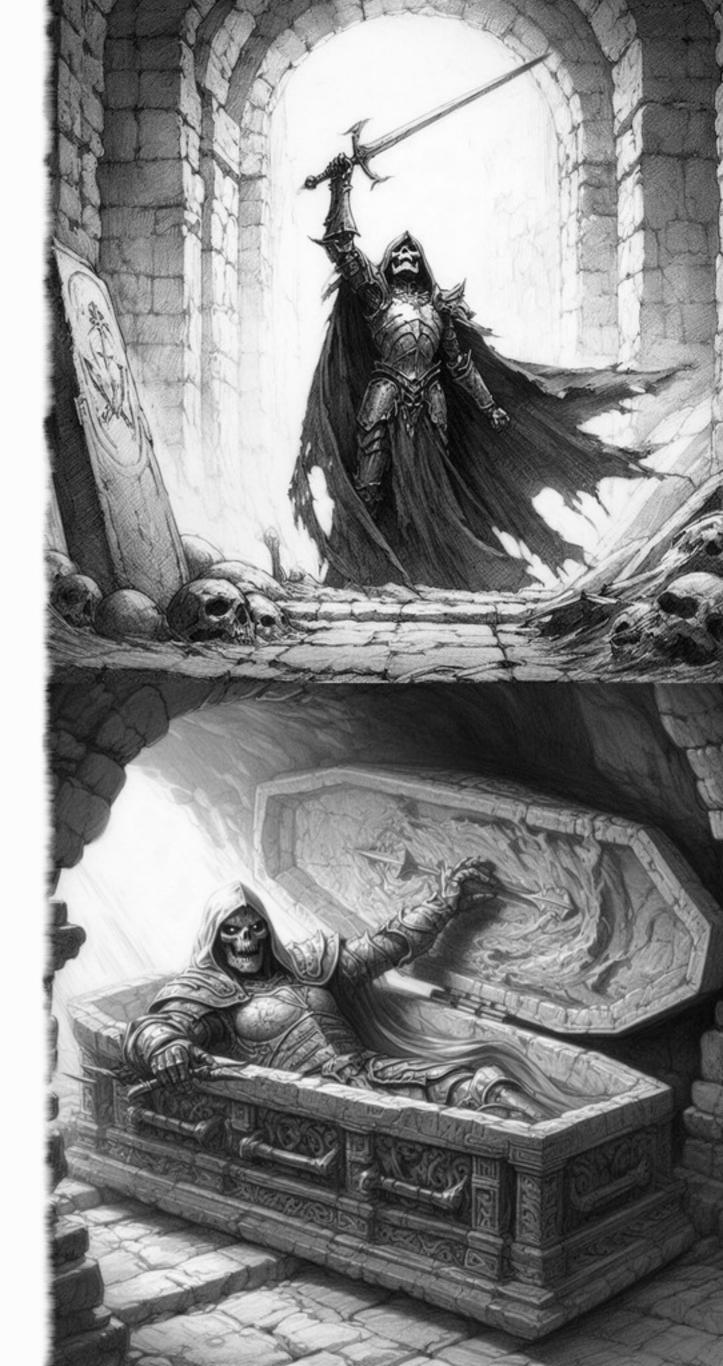
A prison. Fitting enough lair for a squidurak, since they are all about psionic domination. I can hear the howls of incarcerated monsters and the pleas for help from the others. No matter. I have a good view of the battlespace from an adjoining room. Though the stones in the Zorbus shift, there is a strong keystone arch on which I have placed a fireball trap. Now to coat my arrows with poison and make a ruckus when the hated squidurak comes hovering around to check on the noise his thralls-to-be are making.

JOURNAL ENTRY, DAY 26

Operation successful. The squidurak turned crispy when he floated after me, and a few volleys of poisoned arrows were enough to dispatch the still-burning threat. I can hear the cries of the humans and the elves receding. It was a simple enough thing to dangle freedom in front of the incarcerated people in exchange for information. They gave me all I wanted and more.

Evidently, Kricerius has aspirations to become a god. He has sought out adventurers and scouts to scour the Zorbus for scrolls of enchantment and obscure ritual materials. He intends to make the silver sword a weapon of power to rival the Godsbane. Treating one of our sacred silver swords as such is an obscene blasphemy.

My time is limited, but I was informed to search the levels above the prison to find Kricerius' tomb. The prisoners were very forthcoming. I can still hear their cries and screams echo through the halls as I march up the stairs. My quarry is close and my mission nearly complete. I can taste it.





AGAINST THE GIANTS





Against the Giants

What can we say of the great giant races of our time?

To be a giant...

Is to parlay with dragons as if one was a peer.

Is to wield elemental power that would leave demons quaking.

Is to walk with the surety that few beings can trouble your plans.

But one thing is left outside their grasp; the power of the gods themselves.

Wisely so, for the power of the divine should be left to aloof beings who balance cosmic forces and shepherd mortals souls to their ultimate destiny, not scruffy rogues who see the energies of the divine as some shiny trinket to purloin and hoard. Yet still mortal adventures arrogantly pursue this trail of folly deep into the depths of the dungeon known as the Zorbus. And they are not alone, for it is with overreaching hubris and a mad-man's will that Svartr Aska, the king of the fire giants, entered the Zorbus with the express purpose to usurp divinity from the Titan, the god of giantkind.

Regency and kingship was not enough for the fire giant king, for he has deicide on his mind and he lusts for dominion over all. When it became known that the king moved his very throne to the lowest level of the Zorbus to search for the thrice-dammed weapon, the Godsbane; war erupted among the giants. Now the giants are a house divided. Giants of fire, clouds, and hills fight with their brethren, frost, stone, and storm, to support their king. The king's loyalists and antagonists rally their allies and stalk their foes in the lowest bowels of the Zorbus. Perusing adventure in those dread lower halls is suicide, for the giants are militant in their very nature and will slaughter interlopers without a second thought.

Rumor has it that the fire giant king sits restless upon his throne, surrounded by his favored hellhound pets and his most loyal warriors, waiting for word that the Zorbus has mystically transmuted itself so he may walk the new halls of the labyrinth, upturning every nook and cranny for the Godsbane weapon. Some say he waits impatiently for some foolhardy adventurer to appear upon his doorstep with the Godsbane in hand, so that he might slay them and seize the power of that weapon for himself.

In either case, the giant king is single-minded in his purpose, and completely oblivious or uncaring about the destruction that is wrought upon his people as a result of his mad quest. Even ettins and cyclopes have joined the fray, these "lesser giants" serving as foot soldiers and scouts of either side, often patrolling the middle layers of the Zorbus, alert for any rival players in the giant war.





This clash of the titans has spilled over to the upperworld, where giants raid towns for slaves and even wizards' towers for magical items. There are rumors that giants traffic with slave traders and monstrous entities deep in the Zorbus to acquire magic weapons that they turn on each other in their ever-burning conflict. Destruction is widespread and never ceasing in this fratricide, and the blame for all this chaos lies at the foot of the mad fire giant king who thirsts for the power of the divine.











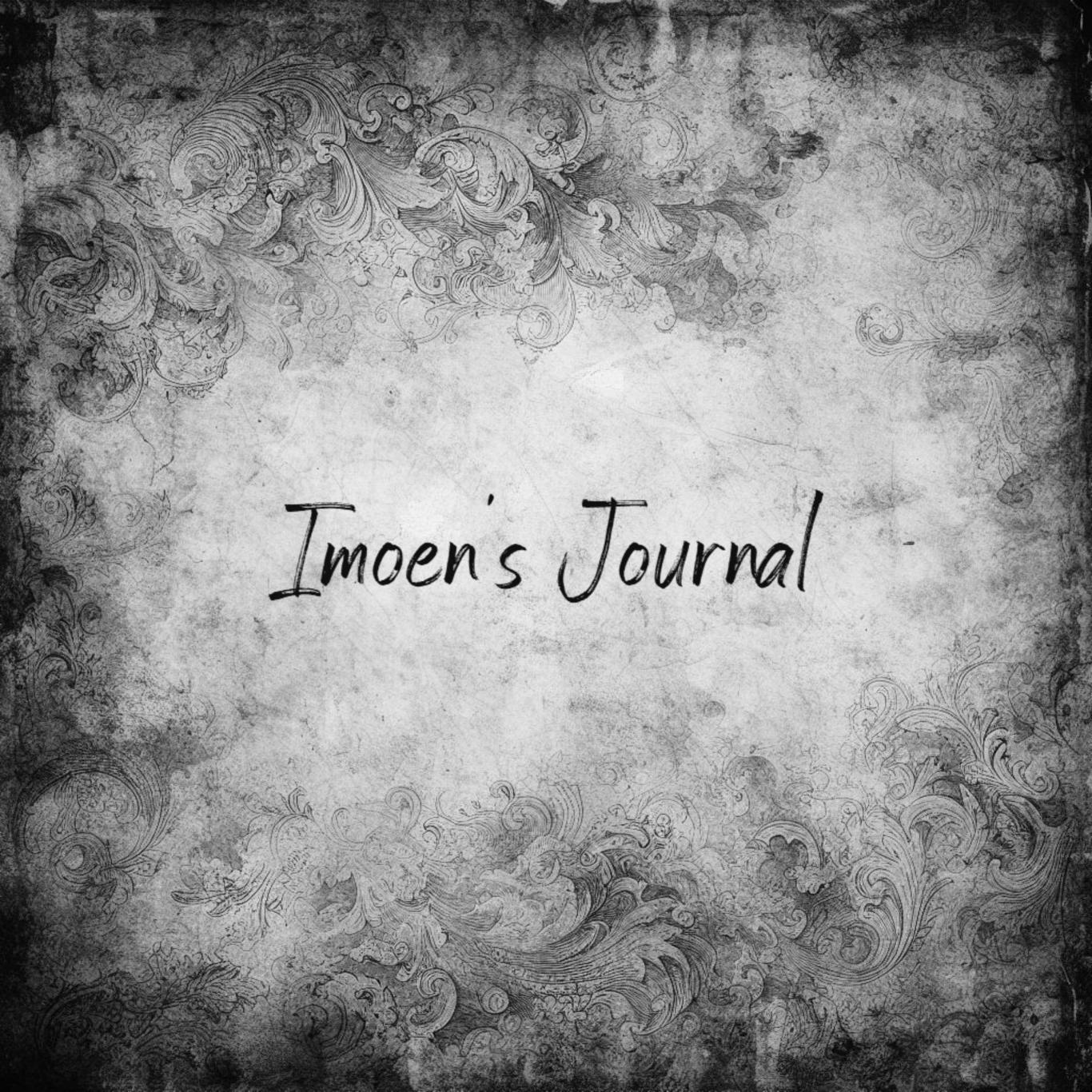


















Imoen's Journal

Heya! It's me, Imoen!

After some lengthy research, Edwin told us about this Zorbus thing. Go down to the bottom of a dungeon, step into a portal and ascend to demigodhood, just like that? Sounded almost too good to be true, but something that we just had to check out. One last adventure for the heroes of Baldur's Gate? After defeating Sarevok, The Five, and Melissan, a simple dungeon crawl should be easy enough?

And easy it was, as we practically waltzed through the first eight floors of the dungeon. Nothing could stop us, the veterans of Throne of Bhaal. Giant rats, kobolds, goblins, drow, dragons... you name it, they got it. It was like someone had dumped the whole cliched monster catalogue here. Oddly talkative sort, the monsters here.

I have to say that this dungeon was very "exploration friendly". On every dungeon level there was a teleporter that led to Carillo, which is sort of an entertainment center demiplane with several shops and a tavern. One of the shops was managed by the Tomb Raiders Guild, and that shop had a very annoying bodyguard who started insulting us the moment we stepped in there. Minsc was absolutely furious, and we barely managed to drag him out of there before he went into a berserk state. Free beer was served in the tavern and it was absolutely heavenly! We had so much fun there that we practically had to force ourselves to return to the dungeon.

Funny think happened in one of these laboratories that we found. Boo accidentally drank a Potion of Growth, and is no longer a miniature giant space hamster but grew to the size of a regular space hamster! Poor Minsc seemed a bit confused, but maybe the effect is just temporary?

To ease the boredom, Minsc, Korgan, and I started splatting those big mushrooms that grow everywhere in this dungeon. We must have smashed at least fifty of those, and I think several myconids and vegepygmies got accidentally splatted too as we looted the potions from their altars. Jaheira tried to warn us of some silly myconid curse, to little avail.

Nothing wrong with having a little fun in our last days as mortals, I thought, until we got to dungeon level 9...

Minsc splatted yet another mushroom, and suddenly all hell broke loose. Some sort of a myconid demigod appeared, and it didn't look happy at all! With an enormous rage on its face, it practically one-shotted Minsc, then conjured a poisonous cloud that eventually killed Edwin and Jaheira. Boo went berserk after seeing Minsc fall. Korgan tried his best, but was no match for the myconid. That's when I decided to flee...

And here I am, hiding. Four of the heroes of Baldur's Gate now lay dead. How arrogant we were. The thought of demigodhood has been completely erased from my mind as I now cling to the remains of my dear mortal life.

I just can't forget the look in its eyes, the pure, bottomless rage...

















Saga of Svartr Aska

This is the Saga of Svartr Aska, Fire Giant: King of Kings, Warrior among Warriors, Guiding Flame to His People. It is with these shaking hands I will tell the tale of my reign.

Riches. War. Death and peace. All these mark my rule as the glaciers mark the very earth. Once long ago, all was peaceful. Each giant was subject to the Ordining, our tradition and standard by which giant-kind was organized. It is a social order where each giant knew who was lesser and who was superior. Each giant had his own place.

Now all is chaos. Giant wars against giant and the lesser schemes to overthrow the superior, as the superior exploits the lesser. Shall this be my legacy? No. As long as I have strength in my bones and breath in my body. It falls to me and me alone to repair the wounds of my people.

Some may ask, why not fall to the knees in front of the Titan, the god of giantkind? Supplicate oneself to him and let the wisdom of the gods flow through our people. I. Have. Tried. Aloof and uncaring, the Titan is more interested in politicking with the other divine to maintain the status quo instead of listening to the wails and worries of those devoted to him. He turns a blind eye; thus I turn my back. He is not our savior; He is an impediment. A blockage to unity and peace. A silent millstone around the neck of my people. He must be removed and one more worthy must ascend to his throne. I speak of myself, and I shall do it with the weapon the Godsbane. That and these trembling hands.

The Godsbane is a terrible weapon. Forged only for deicide, it shudders with pleasure upon drinking blood and it mocks all who wields it as if they were its servants. So the priests and sages of my court say. I have yet to grasp the dammned blade. It is here, somewhere, in the lowest level of the Zorbus. Here where I hold my court, and I search the everchanging halls for signs of It's mocking laughter. I must seize it! I don't have much time.

Unity. So delicately built, yet so easily shattered. Once I was king over all of the giants! Fire parlayed with frost, cloud broke bread with storm, and hill was at peace with stone. Then it became known I search for the Godsbane. Civil strife sundered the once proud nation of giants. Frost, storm, and stone giants condemned me for "an unholy act", and went to war with their brothers. But I cannot blame them, for they cannot know the reasons behind my decision.

I am cursed. A strange malady hides in my bones. At times darkness enters my thoughts and I awake, fallen and writhing upon the floor. At first, I blamed an excess of mead. Then the attacks became more frequent, striking before battle or in advance of holding court. These things I hide, for rulership requires strength, tenacity and a singular purpose. There must be no weakness in our monarchy lest we be beset by enemies from without and within.

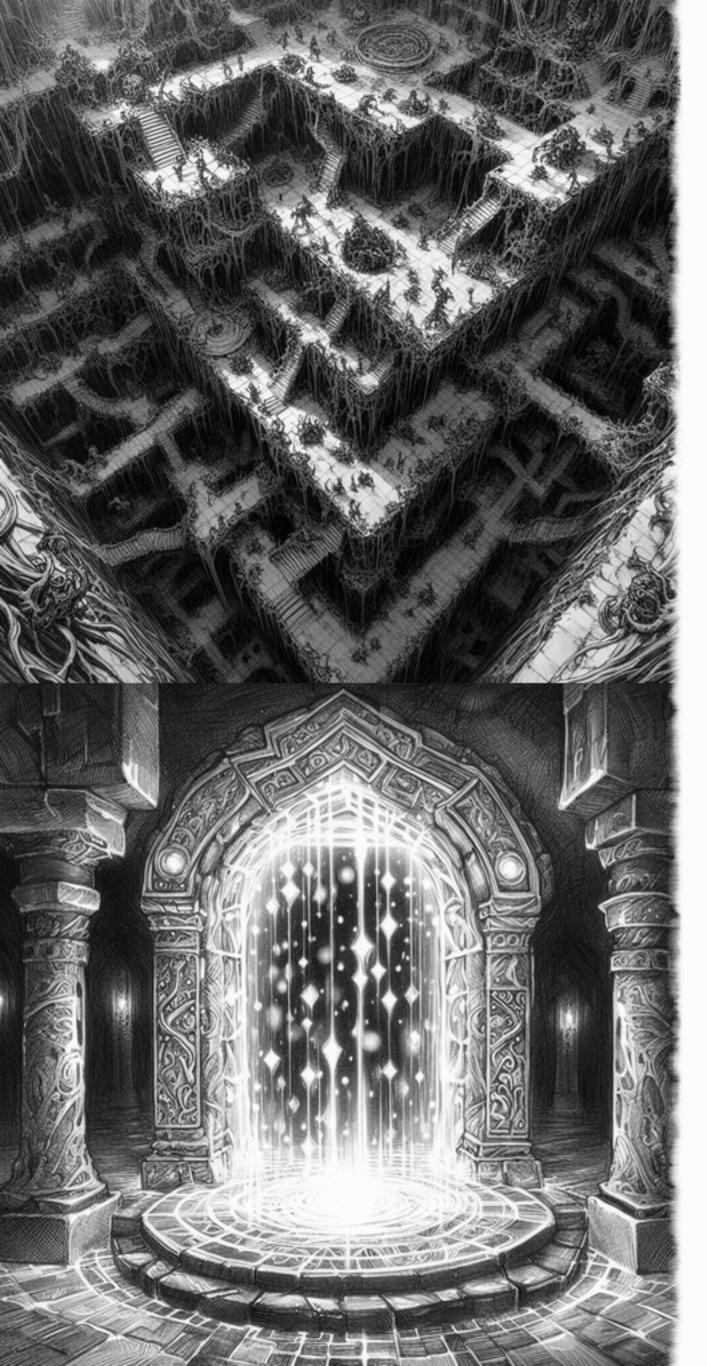
But I cannot deny my trembling fingers nor the increase in blackouts. I am dying and my people need me. They cannot be ruled over by a mewling pup! But whispers of the Godsbane reach my ears. They say It makes a giant strong, potent enough to overthrow a god! And from there, that seat of divinity, all ailments are quenched, and a giant becomes whole again. From there I shall reign supreme and at once shall the giants turn their weapons, not upon each other, but upon our ancestral enemies: the dragons, the demons, and the smallfolk.







Manual of the Planes



Manual of the Planes

What a wonderous thing it is to walk the planes!

How breathtaking it is to see all manner of flora and fauna in their infinite varieties across all possible ecosystems! How joyous it is to experience all the culture multidimensionality has to offer! One never gets bored!

However, in all my travels, in all the planes, there is but one place that is truly unique, the Zorbus.

The Zorbus, both a multileveled dungeon and mystical meeting demiplane for the gods, is described more thoroughly in other tomes; but for fellow planeswalkers and myself it is a dimensional anchor that holds stable portals to the outer planes and other magnificent places.

Beware though, the Zorbus has such the reputation that its halls nearly run red with the blood of would-be adventurers questing for godhood. Such intrusions are met by a panoply of entities from all walks of the multiverse; some amicable, most hostile.

Due to this carnival of diverse creatures, scholars speculate that the dimensional walls of the Zorbus dungeon are somewhat threadbare; capturing rare species and sentients who stalk the halls looking for escape. In fact the number of "teleporters" in the dungeon (really rifts the in dimensional walls) can be encountered as early as the first level of descent; whisking away travelers from one point on a given level to another in a fraction of moments.

The Zorbus is also home to the mercantile demiplane Carillo. Carillo is small as demiplanes go, but it is packed to the brim with trade goods by the resident mercanes and other trade-minded beings. The mercanes are an interesting sort; tall, blue-skinned creatures with spidery, fluttering hands. They are highly profit-driven, yet they maintain reasonable prices for the wares a plucky adventurer would find essential. If you visit the mercane's stall, make sure to bring all the gold you can carry, for more than one adventurer has found a sparkling rare item that enhanced their survivability to plumb the lower depths. Even a relative pauper can come away with a puissant enchanted arrow or bullet that may make the difference between their life or death in the early levels of the dungeon.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention Carillo's tavern. Even now I find myself grasping for one of their cold and frosty ales as I pen this manuscript. Delicious and refreshing! Apart from their essential beverages, the tavern is a hotbed of gossip and gems of wisdom from retired, or drunk or both adventures. I highly recommend one green to the planes and Zorbus to listen closely while they are within. Such knowledge has saved more than one adventurer's skin I wager. In addition, Carillo's tavern holds a turnover of semi-permanent visitors. Once, a cowled man whispered to me that said visitors also bring along the treasure they have acquired throughout the planes, but I digress. Such thoughts are reserved for only the most unscrupulous among us.





I hesitate to speak on this last matter because Carillo is so open and welcoming. I can't put my finger on it, but there is a slight air of menace about the place, as dissonant as the most miniscule drop of blood in a cup of milk. I attribute this to the enigmatic countenances of the iron golems that patrol and clean the plane and who are most stern to the more inebriated revelers. Party animals, they are not, and one sobers up quite quickly when met with "Intruder: begone!" when one is simply trying to find a warm shadowed corner in which to retch in peace.

Moving away from the lively and wonderous streets of Carillo, there is a more dangerous element of the Zorbus found deep below in the dungeon. I am of course referring to the coterminous nature of the Zorbus with both the Nine Hells and the 666 layers of the dread Abyss. Only the brave or the foolish tread the lower levels in search of godhood. As speculated previously, the planar walls of the Zorbus are very thin, permitting temporary portals to both of those inimical Domains to open up and disgorge entities from their origin planes: demons and devils of every stripe.

Not only are the demons and devils ferociously hostile, they are also locked horn and claw in a vicious cycle of violence known only as the Blood War. The vagaries and origins of that conflict are better left to another tome, but know this: the infernal and abyssal beings detest each other strongly. I suspect a wise adventurer could bring the two camps to violent distraction while one slips away, with only a few choice words.

Sergamthin, planeswalker

MORBID ASCINATION OF UNDEATH















































Blood War



Blood War

The Blood War is an ancient conflict that rages between the fiends of the lower planes. The two main sides of the war are the demons, inhabitants of the evil plane of chaos of the Abyss, and the devils, representing the equally evil, but lawful realm of the Nine Hells. The conflict is massive, spanning entire planes of reality, and hosting an almost infinite number of fiends.









Sunk into the Abyss

THE DEMONS

Whistle while you work! Isn't that what the dwarves say? Ta da de da ta da tum!

It takes on a new meaning when your day job is torture and slaughter. It will send a prisoner white with fright, or a devil into a confused rage because you are not acting like a 'proper' soldier. Devils. Always surrendering their freedom and initiative to their military superiors just to get that ramrod called 'discipline' shoved straight up their ass. So predictable. It's march right, left, yes sir, no sir, don't let me bother to think, sir.

It's sad, really, and I would have more sympathy for them if they didn't keep trying to step foot on the mighty six-hundred and sixty-six layers of the Abyss! What's that? We are talking about the Blood War of course! Now try to keep up!

Ta da de da ta da tum!

You would think that for a race devoted to law and order that the devils would know to bow to their superiors. But nooo. Every time I rip a swath of ichor through the armored devils on a layer of the Nine Hells it is always, "Oh save me, Asmodeus! Oh gods, my spine!". It is never "What an impressive strike, balor" or "How mighty you must be to take on a regiment of us all by yourself, balor". It is a sad thing to have such an artistry for murder and mayhem and never have an appreciative audience. Quite depressing at times. That is why I whistle! You just have to keep yourself entertained.

Ta da de da ta da tum!

Despite all of the waving banners and boasting from lesser demons, you do have to respect the opposition, just a little bit. On one hand we strike in waves with overwhelming force, but it's dammned hard to dislodge a small core of devils from the trench line if they are on defensive footing. Well, it usually is, until I get there at least. Here I go again, erupting from the earth and making the most *artistic* slashes for veins and bellies. There goes a limb or two.

Ta da de da ta da tum!

So yes, the Blood War has been going on for quite a while. No one really knows why. Well, except for me of course. It boils down to pure jealousy and spite. You see the devils look at the freedoms we have and that just sticks in their craw. We don't bow and scrape to some overlord! It is survival of the fittest (or most cunning) out here! If you are not stretching your skills to the utmost on a day to day in the Abyss then something bigger and harder working than you will scoop you up as lunch! That's the joy of a being a demon. The constant striving to be your most perfect self, any way you can. And we demons, we don't hold grudges about petty differences in doctrine. It is be free with whatever way you can to spread evil and destruction. We welcome the entire spectrum; all of it.

Well, with one exception. Those brats called the yugoloths. Schemers the lot of them. Not too disciplined, not too chaotic; they steal from both sides both philosophically and literally. I say they play both devils and demons against each other to become obese and wealthy. They say the war is their own personal experiment into the nature of evil. Balderdash! The way to expand evil is to embrace it in all of its forms. And don't go neglecting opportunities. That's why we demons agitate for opening new fronts on all the planes in the Blood War. Not only can we strike with surprise at some new beachhead; seeing a new place, well it breaks up the monotony of lava flows and screaming souls.





So when you are out there on the planes, join us in the Blood War. It is tons of fun and all the meat you can eat! And remember, put on a smile as you charge into a line of devils!

Ta da de da ta da tum!





Hellbound

THE DEVILS

"Join the devil army", they said. "See the planes", they said. Imp dung. "Come seize great treasure", they said. "Earn fame and the respect of your infernal peers", they said. Demon piss. Do you know what it's like at a devil gathering? It is all about who is the "greater" devil, who planned the most outlandish Blood War stratagem, and who gets to push the lesser devils around. It's all a racket, I say.

Listen up, lemure. This is the one and only time a devil is ever going to tell you the truth about the Blood War, so you better listen good.

The secret is: nobody wins. Except the yugoloths. Maybe.

The Blood War is, as they tell ya, a conflict between the noble and lawful devils and the dastardly and chaotic demons. How long has it been going on? Well, that's where things get fuzzy. It's been raging for as long as I've been stomping about and that is for several mortal generations! Some of the devil scholars, and yes we do have them, some of us do get ourselves educated, say that the war has it's origins in the primordial battles between law and chaos, way back at the beginning of all things. According to those scholars, the deities of law and chaos had a scrap as to who was going to rule the prime material. None could overcome the other so they just got tired of the mess and signed a truce to divide up the outer planes.

Not us of course. We devils love a good fight and there is nothing more fun than taking a smaller, more disciplined force and just cutting down the chaotic masses like reaping a field of wheat. As much as I'm jaded, I still get a bit of a sparkle in my eye when the boys all line up on parade and sing their regiments boastful songs. It's not the rank and file I don't like, it's the propaganda. That any one battle actually means a damn. Half the time it's repelling actions, and the other half we storm some beachhead that everyone is familiar with, because we stormed it just last week! The eternal grind, yeah, that's what gets me.

The demons, you see, they are not like us, fundamentally. They are all hopping and skipping onto the battlefield without a care for the order of battle or a little thing called discipline. That's why a smaller force of devils can out maneuver and beat their chaotic hoard. Every time. The problem is, there is just so damned many of them and they act in such unpredictable ways that we often get overrun. Then we have to abandon territory. Oh, we take it back, as I said, usually with some sort of brilliant maneuver, but the number of times I have stepped foot on the first layer of the Abyss only to be pushed back, well, I've lost count.

Who benefits you ask? The merchants, the money men. Those thrice damned servants of Mammon that are so bloated with greed that their innards prolapse with gold bars. Yes, I've said it before: the yugoloths.

The yugoloths don't have it in them to be regimented devils like us. No, they fall somewhere midway between the spectrum of devil and demon, a more neutral evil flavor of the infernal. They are always behind the scenes though; scheming, playing one side against another, or brazenly selling weapons and material to both sides while racking up the gold.







As I said, they are the only side that appears to be doing well thanks to this little eternal war we have going on here. But buck up, lemure, if you ever get bored with eternal damnnation and you just want to sink your claws into some tasty demon meat, well, then go get yourself lost in the violence and spurting scarlet of the Blood War. It will be here waiting for you. Always.









HERE BE DRAGONS















DARY THE DEPRESSED DEMIGOD



Diary of the Depressed Demigod

I presume that you are, like I once was, a mortal craving for power? Maybe the title of this diary caught your attention, and based on the title, maybe you think this is a work of fiction? Since how could a powerful being like a demigod ever be depressed? Well, read on.

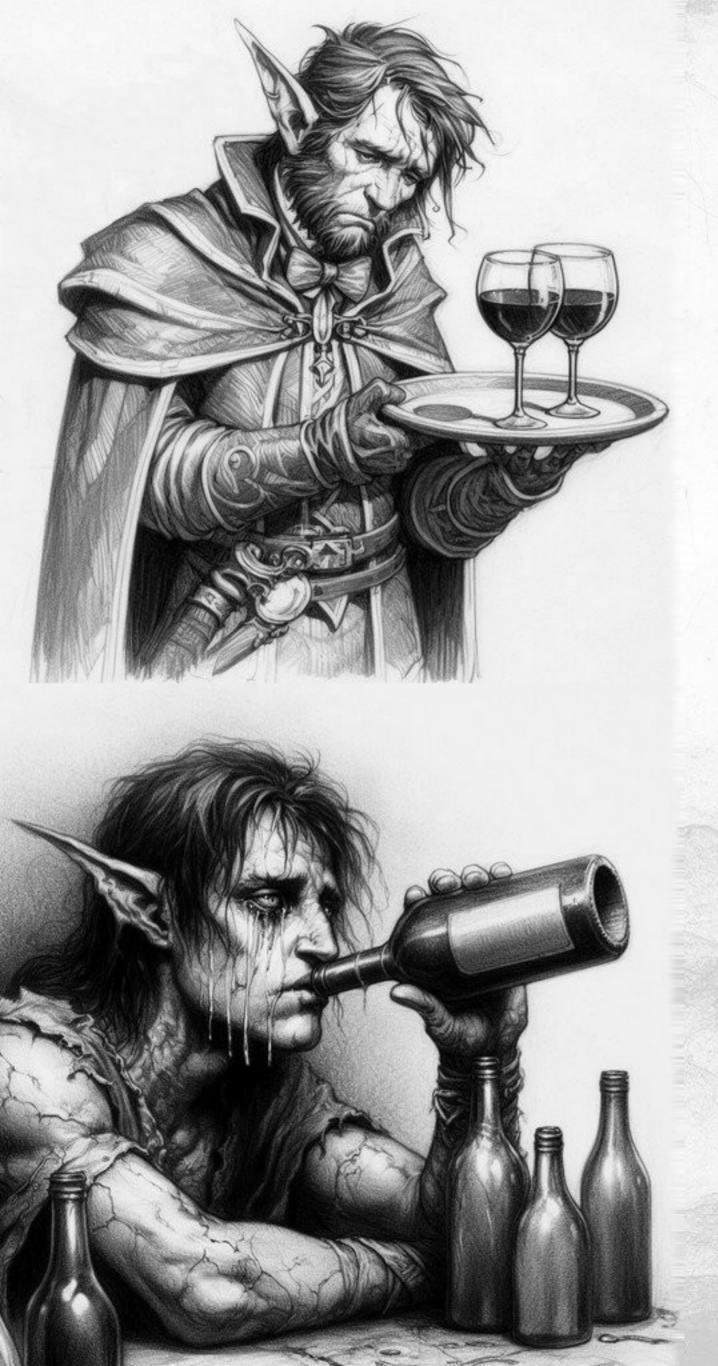
I really once was a power-hungry mortal who eventually ascended to demigodhood. Fought through the dungeon, stepped into the portal, entered the Zorbus. An angelic choir sung beautifully as I appeared in a great hall, and was circled by the ruling pantheon who eyed me with arrogance and hatred. In their eyes, after all, I might be bold enough to dare to challenge them! Oh, how these creatures radiated power! I felt like an insect at that point, my once so trusty sword arm sweaty and trembling, my self-confidence crushed.

A robed figure appeared from the shadows. It was man-shaped, but otherwise so otherwordly and powerful that I immediately collapsed to my knees with tears in my eyes. Its face was of utter darkness, and I swear I could see stars twinkling in the emptiness of it. With a booming voice the robed figure congratuled me for making it to Zorbus, then narrated my options. I could ascend to demigodhood, non-violently and without contest, just by declaring my wish. The second option was that I could challenge one of the ruling gods for godhood, but that was a fight till death, and could easily lead into my quick demise.

The great hall fell silent as the crowd waited for my response. It was almost like the whole multiverse was staying still, its eyes on me, awaiting for my decision. I had been so patient and had come so far... it would be madness to get greedy now, to throw it all away! Demigodhood was what I was after, so after a moment of silence, I cried with a frail voice: "I want to ascend to demigodhood!". The crowd exploded, someone announced "We have a new demigod!", "Attamortal!" was shouted, and I swear I heard a collective sigh of relief from the gods. I felt an enormous power accumulate into my body. Not only great physical power but my mind and senses felt sharpened, too. I made it! I was an immortal!

After the coronation ceremonies, the bleakness of the everyday life of a demigod came into reality. My new immortal life consisted of chores ordered by the ruling gods. At best, I was given "quests" that I hated already in my mortal days: go there, fetch this, kill that. At worst, I was a choir boy in the angelic Cosmic Choir, a library assistant in the Cosmic Library, a cupbearer for the gods in their feasts, a footstool for the bloated goat god! I was constantly reminded that I was just a "godlet", and not a true god. For the first century, the gods even forced me to wear a necklace that read "I'm new here". I was bullied and humiliated. I, who once had battled dragons and liches, was now diminished to this? Would it be like this for the rest of my life, or in my immortal case, for the rest of the eternity?





This miserable life kept going for centuries. I should have aimed higher, I should have challenged one of the gods! Like most men, I tried to drown my sorrows with wine, but as an immortal becoming even a bit intoxicated required weeks of drinking. At my worst, I became reckless and self-destructive, tried to end my days in various ways, only to find that an immortal needs to be killed by another to be truly dead. And believe me, I tried even that. I begged for others of my kind to end my misery, only to hear that I was a disgrace to all divinity, and should take a relaxing trip to the Seven Heavens or find a new hobby.

Lo and behold, it really was a new hobby that eventually saved me. As a mortal, I wasn't much of a reader, but in this eternal misery, found great comfort along the books in the Cosmic Library. I stumbled upon some ancient texts about reincarnation and became fascinated by the subject. I found out that divine beings could fraction a part of their divinity to form new life, and could transfer a tiny part of their consciousness to that being. It seemed that I had found my escape route! By reincarnating as a mortal I would get to experience the thrills of adventuring life once again. Camaraderie, taverns, near-death situations, dungeons and dragons! I would re-enter the Zorbus, and this time defeat one of the gods... if not all of them! This godlet would have his revenge!

It will be interesting to see what form this new life of mine takes. Will I be an elven archer, a grey-bearded warrior with a polearm fascination, or... or could it be that I am actually a part of you, my dear reader?

P.S. I may or may not have participated in the writing of the Book of Deicide, just to give the future me and all other zorbeciles a chance to achieve true godhood.





Boss Fights

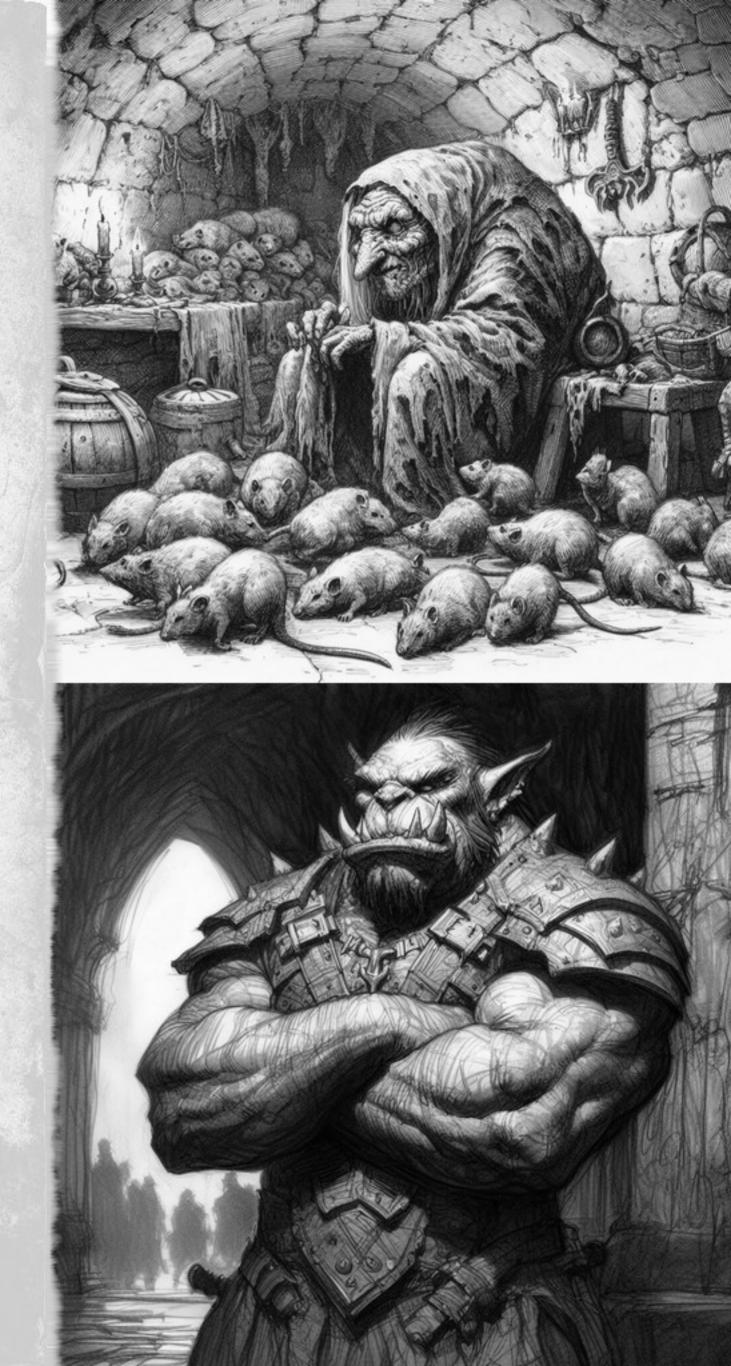


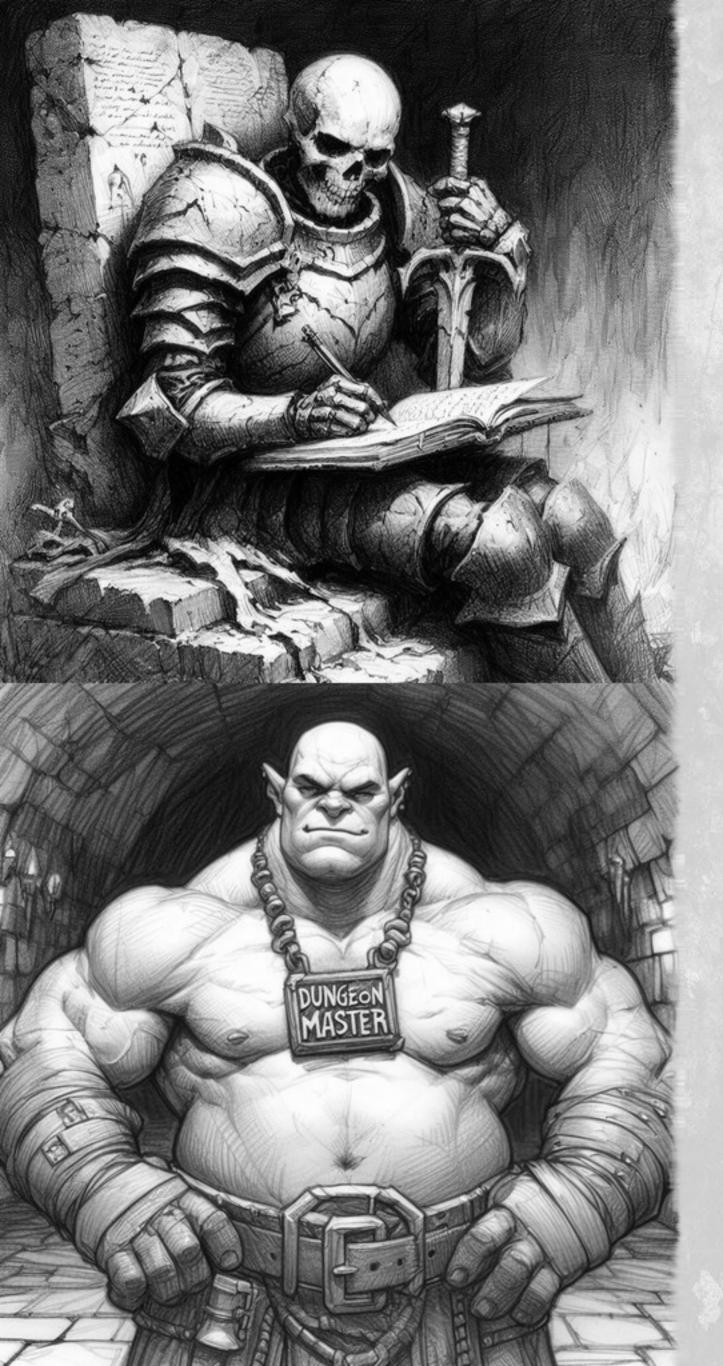
Kobold Tribe Leader

Goblin King

Rat Queen

Hobgoblin Warlord





Lord Kricerius

Dungeon Master

Magyarix

Marabellix





Dagonoth Archpriest

Duergan King

Drow Matron Mother

Drow Weapon Master





Company Leader



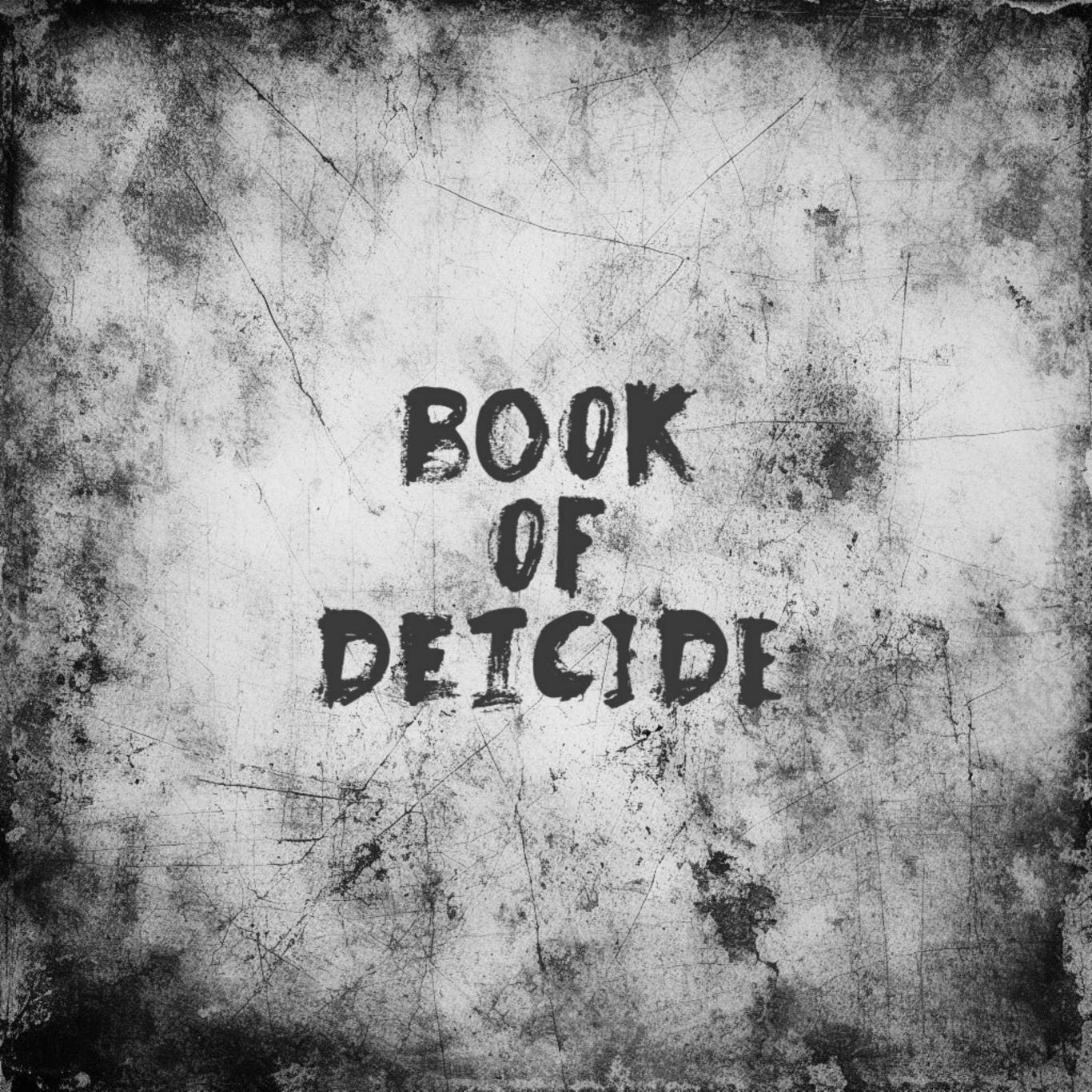
Myconid Lord

Fire Giant King

Archlich









Book of Deicide

So, you finally reached the Zorbus. Congrats! You'll be greeted by the Robed Figure, who will then recite your options: ascend to demigodhood or challenge one of the ruling gods!

This is where the stakes become sky-high. Since you've reached the Zorbus, you probably now feel very powerful, ready to handle anything thrown at you. You could ascend to demigodhood just by declaring it as your wish, or challenge one of the gods, and lose everything in a wink of an eye. How greedy are you?

Twilight of the Gods

As expected, the gods don't exactly give away their divinity. They are hard to kill, and have a habit of getting back from the brink of death. However, in their avatar form, they're as vulnerable to withering as mortals are.

Another annoying habit of theirs is that they can teleport away from you, so be prepared with means to anchor them.

The Zorbus demiplane acts also as a secret, hidden, cosmic prison. The creatures imprisoned there are feared even by the gods, and could cause great havoc if freed.

Now this is something that the gods don't want you to know about. A divine being can fraction a part of its divinity to a mortal. If the divine being and the mortal were ever to meet, they would share a bond between them.

What this means is that you can ascend several times, each time bringing a different mortal to Zorbus, each mortal sharing a bond with you. All these ascended beings will stay in Zorbus, and will help you in fights against the original gods.







Kezef the Chaos Hound

Kezef the Chaos Hound was a powerful primordial, feared by gods and mortals alike.

Kezef appeared as a huge mastiff with unearthly malevolent red eyes and a ratty tail. Maggots teemed in his fur, which made the coat shift incessantly over barely covered sinews and bones. His flesh oozed like pus from an old sore, and his paws left burning prints in the ground that spread into pools of burning ichor in his wake. Pointed teeth glittered like daggers of jet in the light. His blood was a dark, corrosive, liquid ooze, and he radiated a pestilent aura of decay. The fetid air of his breath extinguished all nearby fires, and he reeked with the sweet stench of ancient death. Those with a sense of smell could catch this scent from many miles away. The Chaos Hound spoke in a low and rumbling growl.

He was a unique being who roamed the Outer Planes constantly hunting the Faithful, which were the souls of those who had chosen to venerate one god above all others. He had no taste for the Faithless or the False, and was sickened by the taste of the spirits of the still-living.

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Dendar the Night Serpent

Dendar the Night Serpent was an elder evil and a primordial.

Dendar was a colossal serpent who spent her time devouring the nightmares and fears of both mortals and immortals in hopes of bringing about the end of the world. She had blue-black scales, yellow eyes, and a huge maw filled with four fangs, spittle, and the bones of some of her former victims.

Dendar was thought to have been created when the first mortal dream occurred, and she devoured the nightmares of the living ever since. Even the gods were not immune to her ravenous appetite for their dreams.





Atropal

An atropal is an undead humanoid creature that resembles an overgrown, dead human foetus. Notable physical traits include rotten skin, patches of exposed muscle tissue, clawed hands and feet, razor-sharp teeth and eyeholes that have been fused shut. Also of particular note, an atropal will usually have an umbilical cord still dangling from its belly.

This creature is an incomplete weapon that was to fight in the Dawn War between the gods and the primordials, only to be sealed away and forgotten. Some, however, have been allowed to roam free across the planes, bringing death and destruction everywhere they go.

Meanhed Arcana



Unearthed Arcana

This book is a journal of a wizard called Halaster Blackcloak.

"Finally set up a retirement lair in this Zorbus dungeon. Undermountain became just a bit too restless for this old wizard."

"The current Dungeon Master is hopeless. No ambition, no imagination. He has completely forgotten his administrative duties, and seems to spend most of his time drinking beer and mastering some odd dice game at the tavern in Carillo. Dungeons & Dragons, he calls it. A grown-up man!"

"One of the first things I did here was to completely remove hunger and item identification. Permanency spells be praised."

"Carillo is fine and all, but I do miss the Waterdeep taverns."

"Got invited to the 'backstage' of Carillo's Guild shop, and had some nice magic-related discussions with the inhabitants there."

"Stumbled upon Lord Kricerius! He's now a death knight! Hilarious! He just doesn't give up, after all these years it's still Kaduria this and Kaduria that. From what I understood, he's got into trouble with the astraloth, something about stealing their silver sword?"

"Retirement is boring! I need a hobby. Was it a mistake to move in here?"

"Did some magic brainstorming today, and as a result got some ideas for 11th level spells! 11th level! When you're at 10th level, all the way up, where can you go from there if you need that extra push over the cliff? Nowhere. Exactly. Push it up to eleven! One louder!"

"One particularly interesting new spell idea is what I call the 'Halaster's Avatar', a spell that snuffs the divinity from a god, and transfers it to the caster, making him the god! The god doesn't even get a saving throw! Haven't been this excited for centuries! Finally some challenge! Off to research!"

"Manshoon visited. Told him about my ideas for the powerful 11th level spells. He wondered why I just didn't make the 10th level spells more powerful. Bah! It's one louder. These go to eleven."

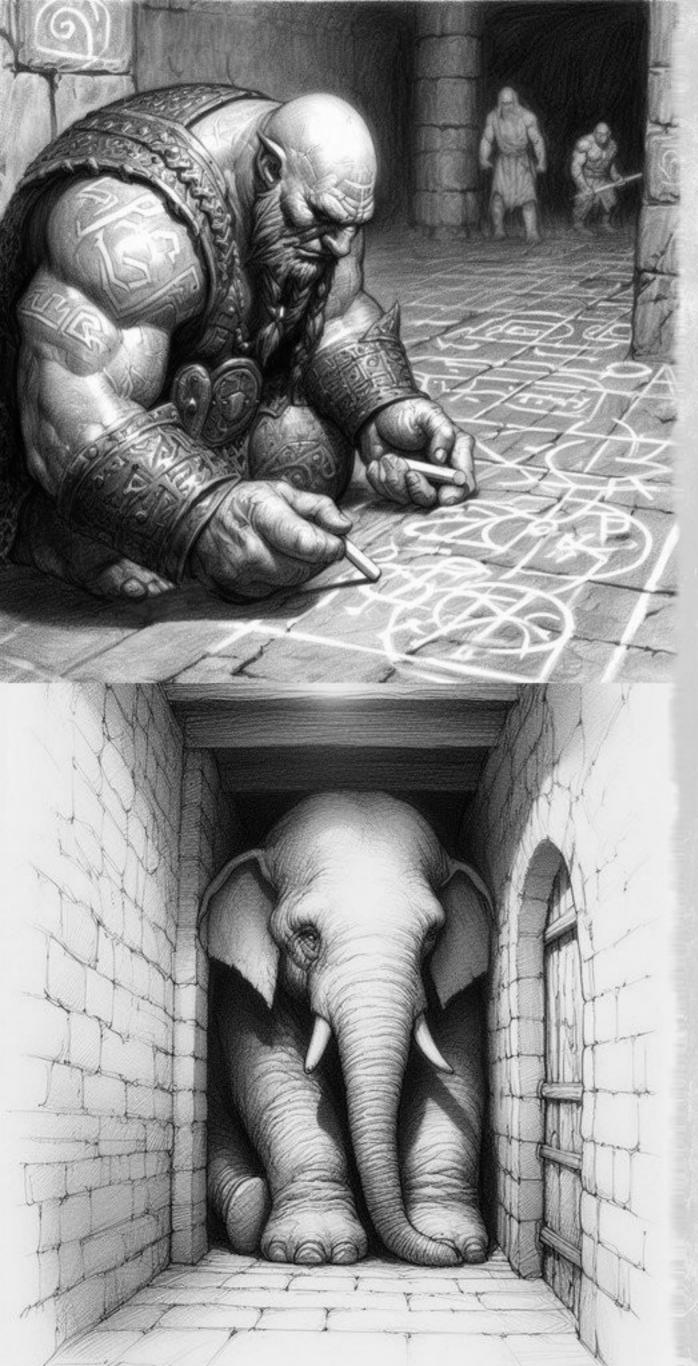
"Caught Elminster scrying on me! What a nice throwback to good old Undermountain days. Well, I opened a portal to the Nine Hells, and sent him there! Let's see how quickly his beloved Simbul can find him."

"Speaking of Manshoon, he seems to be completely hooked on cloning. A clone junkie? He has countless clones stored in a temporary stasis. Nothing wrong with that, but because of this clone reserve, he lives recklessly, dies over and over again, and must do the grind for experience points again and again, never really reaching the archmage levels. Elminster must have killed him at least a dozen times in the last decade or so."

"I need a new Dungeon Master. Some rogue killed the old one in a bar fight."

"I've been wondering... what am I ever going to do with the power of a god? Am I doing this just for the challenge and thrills, or do I have an endgame in this? Is the chase better than the catch?"





"Heard from a pretty reliable source that the gods have captured Demogorgon. Well, Orcus must be pleased. Quite the zoo they have up there as they already have the hound and the serpent."

"Recruited a new Dungeon Master. He seems to take the job pretty seriously, and immediately started painting new occult symbols on the floors. Made a friendly mention that a pentagram on every closet floor may cause symbol inflation, but he didn't seem to register it. Well, I'll let the boy have his fun."

"Got some really bad news today. The cult of the Chained God, the Doomdreamers, are trying to assault Zorbus and free T, who is about the only creature that makes these old knees tremble."

"Did some worldwalking today, and brought all kinds of creatures to the dungeon from all over the multiverse. The new Dungeon Master made some remarks that some of the creatures might not be a good fit in a dungeon environment. Nonsense! Every dungeon needs elephants!"

"Do these cult leaders ever do any research? I mean, this new cult of the week, the pompously named 'Serpent Sigillum'... do they even know what their 'god' really is?"

"It's my birthday! I'm now 1138 years old! Doesn't time just fly when you try to achieve divinity?"

"Am I imagining things, or are there suddenly more celestials skulking around my lair?"

"I knew it! A solar visited me today! A solar! The solar had a very passive aggressive demeanor, and it carried a message from the O.G. that I should give up my research on divinity related spells, or else... Bah! Not even the gods can scare old Halaster!"

"I'm almost ready to cast the spell, but I'm pondering which god of the current pantheon would be my target. Definitely not Orcus, Lolth, or Juiblex. Maybe Vecna... or should I aim higher, straight for the O.G.? Hmmm...."

"Someone destroyed my favourite stone golem! There was a scroll in the debris with a message: 'Your actions are causing a disturbance amongst my children. A woman in my position can't afford to be made to look ridiculous.'. How dares she? I won't be bullied by a godmother!"

"I woke up this morning with a severed unicorn head in my bed! This means war!"













Divine Newsletter

Dear children!

Zorbus season is getting near. Exciting times for all of us! The Cosmic Lottery has again drawn out the names of the eight gods to participate in the event. Prepare yourselves, handle any unfinished business on other planes, and explain the situation to your most loyal followers. Just in case.

Some time ago, Halaster Blackcloak, a capable wizard from Faerun moved his lair into the Zorbus dungeon. In his own world he was called the Mad Mage of Undermountain, and the nickname seems apt since he very quickly returned to his old habits of worldwalking around the planes and bringing all sorts of odd creatures into the dungeon. Unfortunately that doesn't seem to keep him busy enough as he has also started dabbling with 11th level magic, notably a spell that would steal the power of a deity and transfers it to the caster! This would lead to terrible consequences! I've already sent a solar to try to talk him out of this plan, but if that doesn't succeed, I have no other option than to imprison the mage. You all know that I very rarely intervene in mortal affairs, but this could seriously wiggle the Cosmic Balance. This is top priority! Related homework: read about Karsus, the Netherese archwizard.

The Serpent, even when imprisoned, has tricked mortals into worshiping him as a "snake god". The cult calls itself the "Serpent Sigillum".

Glasya, the Princess of Hell, visited bearing a gift. The devil army had captured Demogorgon, the Prince of Demons. She gave a detailed lengthy speech about her and her father's motives and reasons, but maybe it's just easier to say that the multiverse is a better place when Demogorgon is safely locked up. This might even calm the Blood War a bit, at least until the power void is again filled.

The cult of the Elemental Eye is on the rise. Their ultimate goal is to free He of Eternal Darkness, but at the present the cult isn't powerful enough to get anywhere near his prison. Still, be ever watchful.

Happy Zorbus season!

Mother















Cinatas the Fallen

Catanis of the Seven Heavens was once the mightiest of all solars, whose battle prowess exceeded that of the lesser gods, always in the frontlines when evil was to be fought.

Eventually Catanis grew arrogant and proud, viewing many of the peace-loving heavenly deities as passive and weak. In the ongoing bliss of bloody battles, Catanis eventually forgot what he was fighting for. The aspiration to vanquish evil was replaced by the rejoice of causing pain and suffering to enemies. At some point the line between friends and foes got blurred, and that's when Asmodeus, the King of Hell, made his move by whispering lies and deceit into the solar's ear.

Corrupted by evil, Catanis was cast out of heaven. As a failure of heaven, his birth name was erased in shame and is now all but forgotten. In Asmodeus he found a new master, and has since been known as Cinatas the Fallen, the devil's advocate.





MEMORANDUM OF DROTECT

PROJECT CARILLO



Memorandum of Project Carillo

Attendees:

The ruling pantheon, several demigods

Spokesperson & scribe: Cinatas the Fallen

Cinatas: Ladies and lords, welcome! This meeting was initiated by my master, the Lawyer of Lies, the Lord of the Ninth, the King of Hell, His Infernal Majesty... Asmodeus. Since my master is currently busy with many other things, I, Cinatas, act as his spokesperson and scribe.

The Titan: A solar as the devil's advocate? Fallen or not, why should we listen to you?

The Dark Knight: The old romantic is probably busy with writing poems dedicated to his dead wife and babysitting Glasya, haha!

The Beauty: Um, what? Did Bensozia, like, die? And no one told me! That bitch could throw a helluva party, for sure.

The Queen of Spiders: Busy devil, that Asmodeus. When was the last time anyone has actually seen him? Seems like it's Glasya who's running the Nine Hells nowadays.

The Prince of Undeath: Asmodeus? Literally, what the hell? That's it. I'm out of here!

The Undying King: Shut up, all of you! Let him speak! It's Asmodeus, after all.

Cinatas: Thank you, Lord Undying King. My master anticipated your reaction, Lord Prince of Undeath, and as a gesture of goodwill, he presents you a gift. The Prince of Undeath: Huh? A gift?

Cinatas: Yes, my lord. My master knows of your eternal rivalry with the other demon lords, notably with the Prince of Demons himself. And as such, my master has captured Demogorgon, who is now prisoned on the Zorbus demiplane.

The Prince of Undeath: Old baboonhead has been captured?

Cinatas: He has, my lord.

The Prince of Undeath: Well, I am impressed! And all ears, but I'll listen better when there's a goblet in my hand. You, godlet, fetch me some wine! And you, act as a footstool. And you there, hum some abyssal anthem.

Demigods (in unison): Yes, my lord.

Cinatas: On that note, let's continue. We have gathered here today to discuss the construction of Carillo, an entertainment and shopping center demiplane that could be accessed from the Zorbus dungeon.

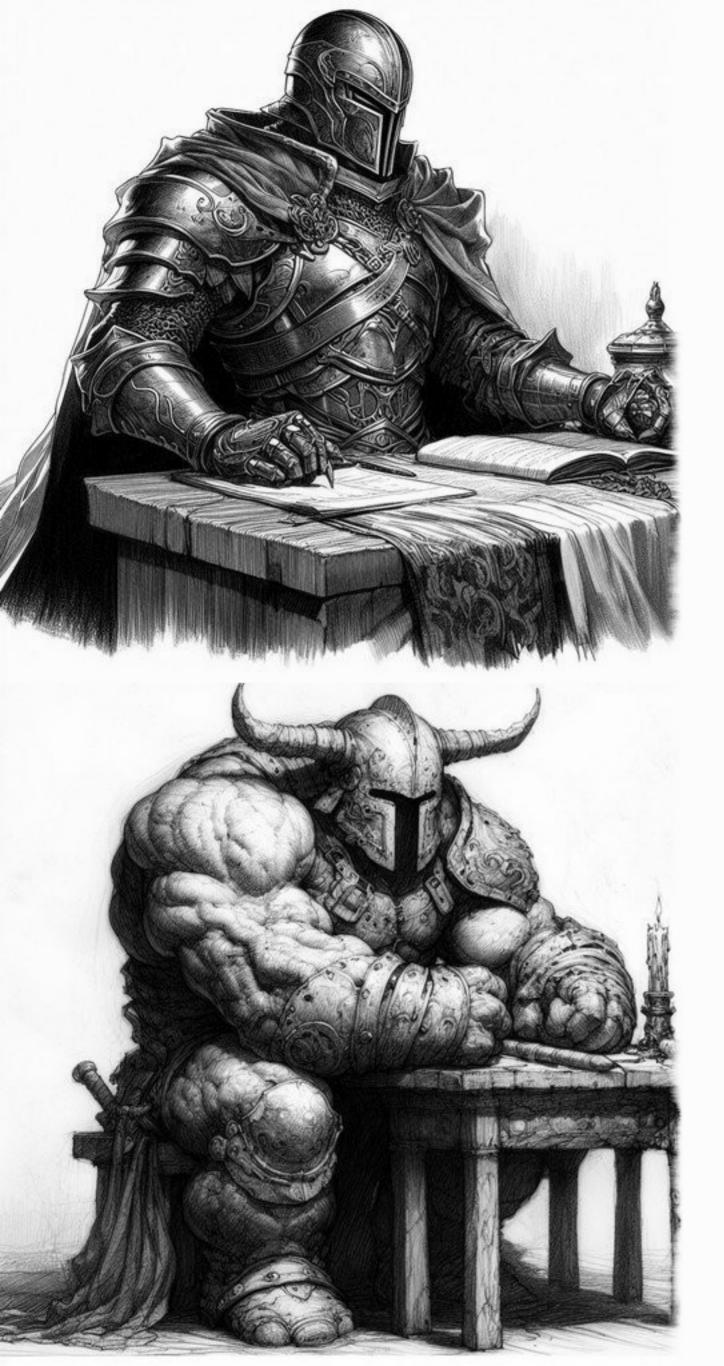
The Beauty: Bla, bla, bla, like, who cares? Boooooring! Oh, sir fallen-from-grace talking-so-very-seriously, show some emotion! Would you scream if I rip off your wings?

The Queen of Spiders: I'm with you!

The Faceless Lord: Guuuorrggglghh.

Cinatas: Well, yes... the purpose of this demiplane is to ensure the continuous wellbeing of all of you. As you know, the Zorbus season is getting closer, and my master has foreseen that there are several powerful mortals wanting to try their luck against you.





The Dark Knight: Bah! How dare you? Nothing can beat me! I am the Ultimate Warrior!

Cinatas: I meant no disrespect, Lord Dark Knight. Certainly no mortal warrior could defeat you. But even you, the Ultimate Warrior, could be in trouble against a legion of demigods working together?

The Dark Knight: That could never happen! The godlets could never team up! Just look at those three there. A cupbearer, a footstool, a choir boy. I'm trembling just at the thought of those joining up!

Cinatas: You're probably right, my lord, but as of late, things have changed. Classified information has been leaked out into the mortal realm. Divine memorandums such as this that I'm writing. Books that give hints on what to expect in Zorbus. Detailed tips on how to defeat you. But worst of all, mortals now have knowledge of multiascension. As you very well know, a divine being can fraction a part of its divinity to a mortal. If the divine being and the mortal were ever to meet, they would share a bond between them, and could then team up against any of you.

The Queen of Spiders: How is this possible? This could get dangerous! Who leaked this?

Cinatas: We don't yet know, but the source must be divine as no mortal has ever laid eyes on this information. And as if things were not bad enough, there's one another thing. There are rumors that Godsbane, also known as the Sword of Deicide, has been found by a mortal. That blade has an ugly habit of randomly appearing in the Zorbus dungeon, and since the dungeon enjoys a steady flow of godkiller candidates, it was but a question of time until it fell into the wrong hands.

The Titan: Aw, shit. Here we go again.

The Beauty: Noooo! I don't want that blade anywhere near my perfect skin! I so hate that sword! Can't we, like, melt it or something?

The Faceless Lord: Aaooorrggglghh.

The Undying King: Godsbane! Damn it, things just got serious. But how exactly would this Carillo thing help us?

Cinatas: The idea behind the Carillo demiplane is that it would secretly and subtly weaken the mortals who visit there, slowly strip them of all of their ambitions and goals, and most importantly to you, completely strip them of their lust for divine power.

The Wizard: Interesting. I thought that the Cosmic Laws forbade arcane spells from affecting the powerhungriness of mortal minds? As the acting Master of Magic, I should know!

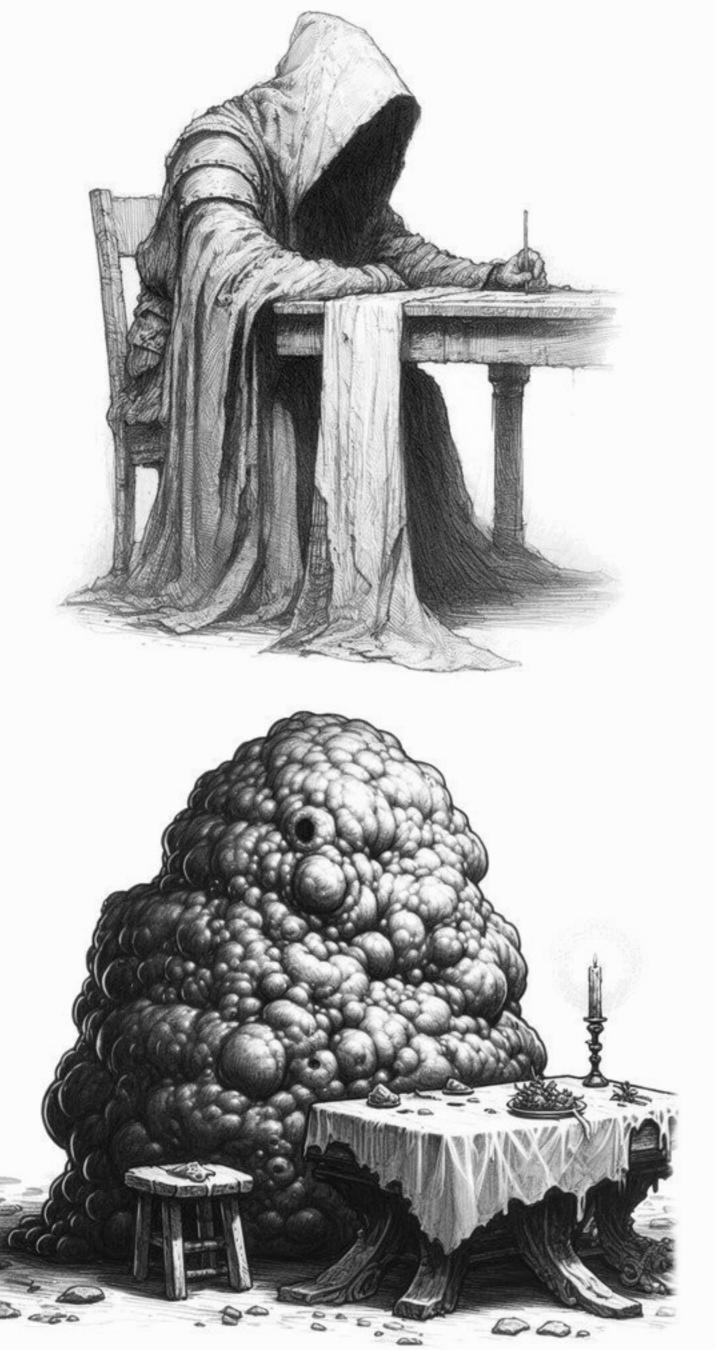
Cinatas: You are absolutely right, Lord Wizard. This depressive effect is not caused by an arcane spell, but rather by a chemical ingredient hidden in an alcoholic beverage. Beer! Our initial tests have proven that mortals absolutely love it. And, best of all, it's highly addictive. They will drink it for joy, for sorrow, for boredom, and for no reason at all. It has an effect, albeit mild, even on us, the divine. Just one tankard is often enough for a person to completely forget about his family, friends, and job, let alone any plans of divine ascension.

The Undying King: Ingenious!

The Prince of Undeath: You wouldn't dare to use us as test subjects? Is this what this wine tasting event was really all about? Bwahaha!

The Wizard: Who's behind the chemical ingredient?





Cinatas: Dionysos, the God of Wine, who owed a favor to my master.

The Beauty: I once partied with big D. What a bore he was. Like, he supposedly has pleasure in his portfolio, but really, all he did was whine. Pun oh so intended. He knows his drinks, for sure, I'll give him that. At least he is good for something, right? Um, speaking of drinks, I could use one now. Godlets!

Demigod: At once, my lady.

Cinatas: One more thing. When observing the behavior of the test subjects, we noticed a peculiar detail. Consuming alcoholic beverages often creates an urge towards salty food, loud music, company of others. In this case, the test subjects developed an exceptional urge towards mushrooms. Not as a nourishment, but an urge to smash and squash them in various violent ways. The bigger the mushroom, the bigger the urge. The sound produced by smashing a mushroom also seems to be a key factor here, as it seemed to greatly satisfy the gratification center of the test subjects. Some developed an unhealthy obsession towards this pastime.

The Wizard: Addicted to beer, obsessed with smashing mushrooms. Is this going to be a problem?

Cinatas: No, my lord. We are moving forward with the project despite this oddity. However, we may witness a slight population decline of giant mushrooms and myconids, since the Zorbus dungeon is so packed with them. This is inconsequential, of course, in the big picture.

The Wizard: I have a gut feeling that old Dionysos may have played a trick on you, but like you said, it's meaningless.

The Titan: I have but one question! Does Mother know about this?

Cinatas: She doesn't, my lord, and for the safety of us all, it's best to keep it that way.

The Beauty: As if! Do you really think that Mother doesn't already know? She is, like, omnipotent and all? Um, she's probably watching us now. Or monitoring, as Mother calls it!

Cinatas: The Cosmic Laws don't exactly allow a thing like this, but don't really forbid it either. And my master, being very good at what he does, always finds a loophole. There are currently no laws that prevent serving free alcoholic beverages to mortals if they drink them by their own free will.

The Beauty: Um, so, we should, like, just be all quiet and stuff?

Cinatas: Yes, my lady, that would be desirable. Totally.

The Queen of Spiders: Wait, did he just...

The Titan: I think he did. Haha!

The Beauty: Ha ha. Very funny, guys. Besides, I can totally hold a secret... if I want to!

The Wizard: The plan sounds promising. What is needed of us, regarding the demiplane?

Cinatas: We are already in the process of constructing the demiplane. Your extraordinary powers would be invaluable in the process. We are also seeking for capable individuals to run the place, so your vast amount of cosmic contacts would be of certain use. There will be a front with shops and taverns that looks as normal as possible to mortal eyes, and then, behind the scenes, someone very powerful really holding the reins. Obviously a person that can be trusted with cosmic secrets of this magnitude.







The Undying King: I might just know a guy, or a lich, actually. Cosander, my former apprentice and follower.

Cinatas: Excellent, my lord. I feel like we are already making progress! I shall pass this proposition to my master.

The Prince of Undeath: Wait, wait, wait! What does Asmodeus get from this? What is his angle?

Cinatas: A fair question, my lord. As always with my master, his far-reaching schemes and intricate twists are of cosmic proportions. I simply lack the competence to even begin to understand the complexity of them. Nor will I insult your intelligence by claiming that my master doesn't have an angle in all this, as he most certainly does.

The Prince of Undeath: I expected as much. Well, I'm satisfied as long as old baboonhead is out of my way.

Cinatas: Another benefit of this demiplane is that we could hide Godsbane there, to prevent it from falling into the hands of any would-be godkiller.

The Undying King: One more reason to place Cosander in charge of the place.

Cinatas: Ladies and lords, I have now introduced you to my master's idea. It's time to gauge your interest in actually pledging to the project. What say you?

The Wizard: I'm in.

The Undying King: As am I.

The Faceless Lord: Mooaaaaooorrggglghh.

The Prince of Undeath: Yes, yes, let's do this. Hey, godlet, fill my cup!

The Dark Knight: Affirmative.

The Titan: Count me in. Hey, knight, want to arm wrestle after this?

The Queen of Spiders: Count me in.

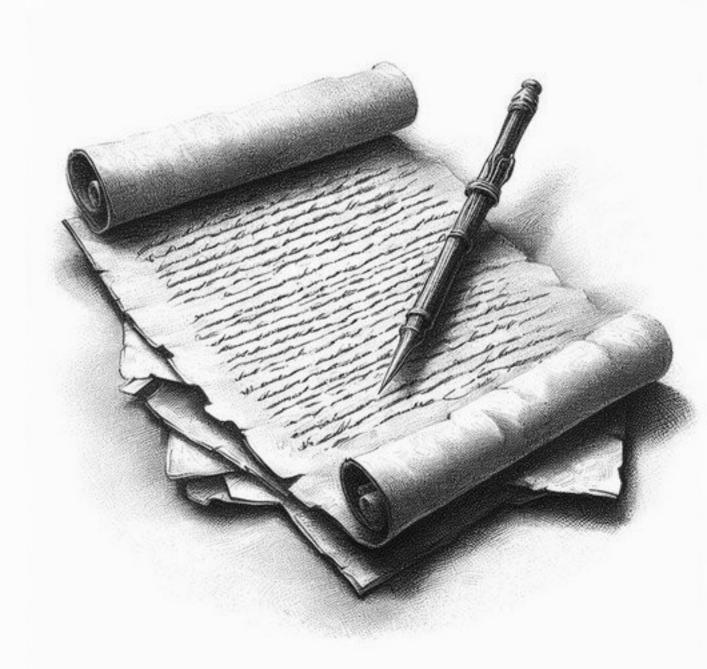
Cinatas: And Lady Beauty?

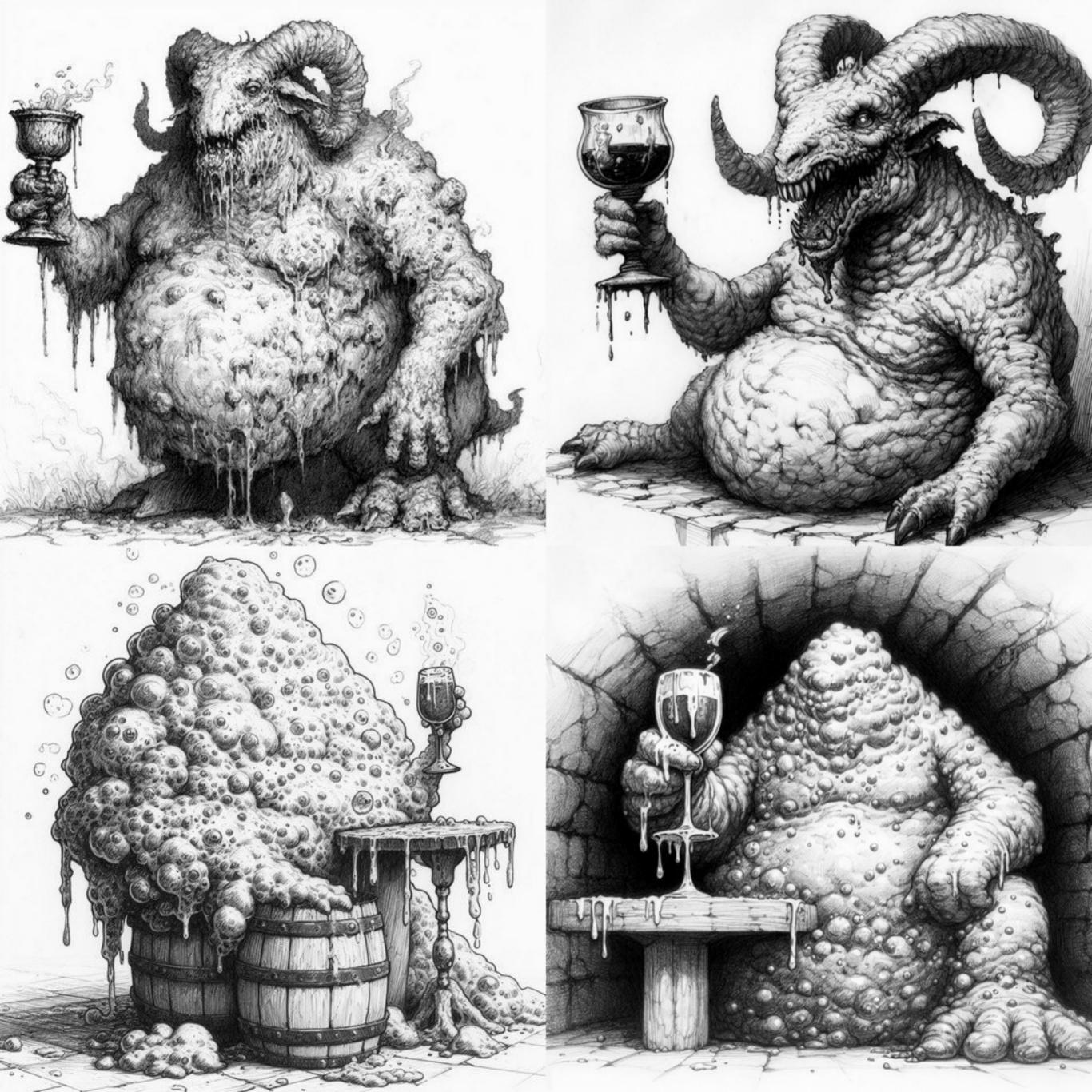
The Beauty: Yeah, yeah, whatever. Um, so, is this, like, over now? Let's have an afterparty!

Cinatas: Excellent, excellent, it is settled, then. My master will be most pleased. Now, if you would just sign these contracts... yes, there on the dotted line.

Cinatas: Ladies and lords, I thank you. Our company will be in touch.









CONTRACT The Dark Knight

Project Carillo Layout Draft

Shop

Tavern

Teleporter Main area

Rooms

Shop

Sleeping chamber

Guild shop

Boss candidates: Lord Kricerius (death Knight) Cosander (lich) V

To-Do:

Secret area - Merchants for shops

- Welcoming party?







Epilogue

Cinatas: Are you there, master? Are you ready for my report?

Asmodeus: Yes, Cinatas. The meeting is over? Did they sign the contracts?

Cinatas: They all did! Without any persuasion, without anyone really reading the fine print.

Asmodeus: No surprise. Well done, excellent work! Now that you've met them, what do you think of them?

Cinatas: Permission to speak freely?

Asmodeus: Of course. Always.

Cinatas: They are like children! It's like they've degenerated to only care about matters strictly related to their own divine portfolio. Even when discussing topics where they should be the ultimate experts in the multiverse, their thoughts and opinions are almost always very straightforward and impulsive. Not something you would expect from gods!

For example, in his mortal days, the Dark Knight was a king, a conqueror, a diplomat, a brilliant military strategist, and not just a highly skilled swordmaster. But now... now he probably prefers to solve most problems just by whacking them into small pieces, and I wouldn't be surprised if he has lost something in that area too. You don't seem to be very surprised?

Asmodeus: No, this actually confirms my suspicions. Godhood can be degenerative. Oddly the demigods seem largely unaffected, and most likely the Godmother, of course. I first came to suspect this with the Prince of Undeath. Through countless skirmishes, scrying and spying, I got to know the demon lord quite well before he finally ascended. And now he's just a bloated goat marinated in wine, a bleak shadow of the terrifying thing I once respected as a foe.

Cinatas: What could cause this?

Asmodeus: I suspect that this has something to do with the Chained God and the proximity of its prison to the Zorbus demiplane. The Cult of the Elemental Eye is on the rise again, so He of Eternal Darkness certainly hasn't been idle. If he can affect mortals, who's to say if divine beings are also vulnerable to his charms.

Cinatas: Should we be worried?

Asmodeus: No, this probably will just aid us. Our plans are finally coming to fruition. I'm now in the hands of a powerful mortal, a rogue, of all things, who managed to defeat the fire giant king and is now in possession of the blade. He's probably entering the Zorbus very soon. We'll see how things turn out from there. This mortal seems confident and clearly knows what he's doing, so it's possible that he has ascended before in some other life. A winner type. We are in good hands, literally. I might get to taste god flesh in the near future.

Cinatas: Sounds like the rogue is not one of those Splatsalots, then. Are you eventually going to make a move against the Godmother?





Asmodeus: Yes, but we must be patient. I have foreseen that in time a powerful mortal will try its luck against the Godmother and will, if not destroy her, at least weaken her, and that's when we will step in. There are also some unpredictable factors that we may have yet to consider. The imprisoned creatures on the Zorbus demiplane, among others. Eventually we can also utilize the fine print of these contracts.

Cinatas: What's next for me? Should I report back to Glasya?

Asmodeus: Glasya can now handle things on her own. Go to the Zorbus demiplane and wait there. Get ready for some possible action.

Cinatas: Understood. Oh, I almost forgot. When reciting your titles at the meeting, I was quite tempted to mention "the Bane of Gods"!

Asmodeus: Ha ha! In their current state, even that wouldn't have tipped them off.



