



DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

ORENTHIS:

RESISTANCE & REDEMPTION

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Welcome to the Resistance

Welcome to Orenthis, a once-prosperous and proud kingdom, now ruled by fear, corruption, and infernal law. There is no leaving it.

Not long ago, Orenthis stood as a beacon of trade, culture, and civic order. That era ended abruptly when a Goristro demon lord rose to power, exploiting unrest, resentment, and fear to seize control of the realm. What followed was not open conquest, but something far worse: the weaponization of the very institutions meant to protect the people. And then the Mists came. They rose at the borders without warning, swallowing roads, rivers, and every path that led away from Orenthis. Those who walked into them did not return. The kingdom did not merely fall. It was sealed.

The streets once filled with laughter now echo with the synchronized march of faceless Merregon enforcers. Propaganda broadcasts, delivered in the strained voice of a magically bound Kenku, justify every raid, detention, and disappearance. Neighbors inform on neighbors. Families are torn apart. Truth itself is regulated. And somewhere above it all, in his gilded tower, the Goristro endures. Not merely ruling, but trapped, bound to Orenthis as surely as every soul within it. The Dark Powers do not grant dominion without a price. What torments him, the citizens can only guess. That it does not make him merciful, they know for certain.

One of the regime's most complete fictions concerns the borders themselves. The Mists sealed Orenthis without warning or the Goristro's involvement. No one can leave. That truth, stated plainly, would undermine everything. A ruler who cannot open his own borders is not a ruler who secured them. So the regime built an apparatus to obscure it. The Rakshasa's garrison network, the Merregon checkpoints, the detention quotas, and the authorization papers required for travel all serve a single purpose. They exist so that citizens experience the border as a regime function rather than a supernatural fact. This

allows the Goristro to perform sovereignty over a prison he did not choose and cannot leave. However, the Mists are more than a physical wall. They are a manifestation of the Goristro's failure to achieve true legitimacy. They will only part when the collective will of the people renders his authority irrelevant.

The adventurers find themselves drawn together not by destiny, but by refusal. Each has seen the regime's cruelty firsthand. Each has either lost something or stands to lose everything. Whether motivated by conscience, anger, loyalty, or survival, they share a single conviction:

This regime cannot be allowed to stand.

Rumors speak of a growing resistance: scattered, fragile, and hunted. A whispered password. A plea from a refugee. A message passed in a tavern and erased from memory minutes later. Answering that call is not a heroic charge into battle, but a dangerous first step into a long war. There is no sending word beyond the Mists for help. No cavalry coming from outside. Whatever saves Orenthis will come from within it, or it will not come at all.

This is not a simple tale of slaying a monster atop a tower. The Goristro's strength is not just physical; it is systemic. Enforced by a coalition of corrupted officials and opportunists who have bent Orenthis's laws, faith, and traditions to serve tyranny. And even if the coalition falls, even if the Goristro himself is brought low, the Mists do not part for victories alone. Freedom must be earned.

If the adventurers can survive long enough to unite the resistance, expose the regime's lies, and dismantle its power structure piece by piece, they may yet save Orenthis from itself.

But first, they must learn how power truly works, what it costs to challenge it, and what it means to fight for a home you cannot leave.

USING THIS BOOK

Orenthis: Resistance & Redemption is a complete campaign designed to function as a standalone Domain of Dread within the Ravenloft setting.

The adventure is designed for characters from 2nd through 16th level. It is intended to span approximately 30 to 40 sessions, divided into three acts, each with its own tone, objectives, and challenges.

This book provides:

Story Overview

A three-act narrative arc with clear objectives at each stage, designed to give players genuine freedom in how they pursue them.

DM Guidance

Advice on pacing, tone, handling difficult themes, and adapting the campaign to your table.

Customization Notes

Guidance for adjusting satire, difficulty, and thematic weight, based on whether you want a subtle allegory, a grim political drama, or a more traditional fantasy rebellion.

Chapter-by-Chapter Guidance

Each chapter includes encounters, NPCs, locations, and multiple resolution paths.

Regime Compendium

Detailed information on the Goristro's coalition, including motivations, lairs, stat blocks, and tactical guidance for each major antagonist.

Resistance Compendium

Detailed information on the party's allies in Resistance, including motivations, stat blocks, and guidance for each supporting character.

Appendices

- Appendix: Maps and other supplemental materials

Orenthis: Resistance & Redemption is a campaign of political intrigue, moral complexity, and high-stakes rebellion. It is not about overthrowing a tyrant in a single heroic blow, but about breaking systems of power and deciding what replaces them.

The Central Conflict

A Goristro demon lord rules Orenthis through a fragile coalition of self-interested villains. Some serve for profit, others for ideology, and one waits patiently for the perfect moment to seize power for himself.

The kingdom itself is divided. Many citizens genuinely support the regime, believing it will restore stability and prosperity. Others suffer in silence. Some resist quietly. Most are simply afraid.

The adventurers must navigate this landscape carefully. Victory takes more than strength; it requires winning trust, exposing lies, exploiting divisions, and proving that a better future is possible.

Key Themes

Resistance and Solidarity

The power of unity in the face of crushing tyranny. The party cannot save Orenthis alone; they must build a movement.

Truth vs. Propaganda

Fighting lies with evidence, courage, and the restoration of silenced voices. The Kenku spokesperson represents complicity under coercion, not redemption.

She is suffering and aware of what is being done to her. But she is not an ally waiting to be freed. She is making decisions within her constraints, and those decisions will harm the party.

The players are not asked to redeem her. They are asked to decide what responsibility means when someone is both victim and participant.

Redemption and Accountability

Not every villain is beyond redemption, but redemption must be earned, not freely given. The party must decide who can be turned, who must be stopped, and what justice looks like.

Exploiting Division

ABOUT THE ADVENTURE

The regime is held together by greed and fear, not loyalty. The party's greatest weapon may be turning the villains against each other.

Civic Responsibility

Heroes can lead the way, but ultimately the people must save themselves. The campaign doesn't end with defeating the Goristro; Orenthis must choose its own future.

Tone and Style

This campaign blends political satire with serious D&D adventure. While the inspiration is pointed, the game should still be fun. Balance moments of catharsis (defeating objectively evil villains) with genuine moral complexity (dealing with citizens who genuinely support the regime).

The tone should remain rooted in fantasy, not modern parody:

- Institutions are guilds, courts, and orders (not modern entities).
- Propaganda is magical and ritualized.
- Power is expressed through law, faith, contracts, and fear.
- Political allegory exists, but fantasy comes first.

The style is balanced by design:

- Combat, social play, investigation, and strategy are all important.
- Early encounters emphasize survival and discretion.
- Later acts reward planning and regime-breaking over brute force.

The adventure works best when:

- Players feel empowered to make meaningful choices
 - NPCs are three-dimensional, not just walking punchlines
 - Combat encounters are mechanically interesting, not just thematic
 - Heavy themes are balanced with moments of hope and heroism
 - The table has established clear boundaries about sensitive content
-

RUNNING THE ADVENTURE

While **Orenthis: Resistance & Redemption** provides a complete adventure, every table is different. Here's guidance on customizing the campaign for your group.

Session Zero is Essential

Political satire can hit close to home, so ensure everyone is on board. This campaign deals with heavy topics: authoritarianism, family separation, detention camps, propaganda, betrayal.

Before beginning, have open conversations with your players.

Comfort Levels and Boundaries

- Establish what topics are off-limits or should happen "off-screen."
- Use any safety tools (X-Card, Lines & Veils, etc.) the table finds helpful.

Define Tone Expectations

- How much satire vs. serious fantasy?
- How much moral gray area vs. clear good / evil?
- How much combat vs. intrigue?
- Is humor appropriate or does the group want this played straight?

Character Connections

- How did the regime affect each character personally?
- Does anyone have ties to the resistance or the regime already?
- Are there pre-existing connections between PCs?
- What are each character's hopes?

Expectations Around Consequences

- Will player choices have lasting effects on Orenthis?
- How lethal should combat be?
- Are there "wrong" choices or just different paths?

The Dials of Resistance

Orenthis is not a static world. The actions of the player characters actively reshape the balance of power.

To represent this, it is recommended that the DM employs three hidden narrative dials to track how the world is responding to the party's choices:

Hope (Public Morale)

Hope represents the population's belief that resistance is possible and that the party's actions make life better, not worse. Hope determines how willing civilians are to help, hide, lie, and take risks on the party's behalf.

Increase Hope when the party:

- Saves civilians or prevents visible harm
- Wins confrontations without collateral damage
- Exposes regime lies or hypocrisy
- Protects resistance members or innocents at personal risk
- Allows civilians to see defiance succeed

Decrease Hope when the party:

- Causes unintentional civilian casualties
- Abandons civilians in visible danger
- Betrays, exploits, or sacrifices civilians
- Is perceived as self-interested or violent
- Triggers reprisals through recklessness

Hope reflects collective perception, not just propaganda alone. But Hope is fragile. It rises slowly, but can collapse quickly when people believe resistance only brings suffering.

Grip (Regime Unity)

Grip represents how unified, cooperative, and strategically aligned the regime's leadership and enforcement apparatus are. High Grip means coordinated responses and shared intelligence. Low Grip means rivalry, sabotage, and fractured authority.

Increase Grip when the party:

- Repeatedly confronts the same faction head-on
- Allows lieutenants to cooperate
- Publicly fails in ways that reinforce regime authority
- Eliminates rival factions without exploiting tensions

Decrease Grip when the party:

- Turns lieutenants against one another
- Exposes secrets or betrayals
- Disrupts communication or supply chains
- Forces factions to compete for credit or survival

- Breaks contracts, alliances, or chains of command

Grip is the regime's true weakness. Clever play can dismantle the enemy long before a final battle is fought. Grip reflects political pressure, not battlefield losses alone.

Heat (Regime Attention)

Heat represents how visible, notorious, and threatening the party is to the ruling regime. Unlike Hope and Grip, Heat only increases and therefore never drops below 0. Once attention is drawn, it cannot be undone.

Increase Heat when the party:

- Acts publicly against the regime
- Kills or humiliates officials
- Is identified by name or visual clues
- Destroys regime property in populated areas
- Leaves witnesses who survive and talk

A Heat-related incident will not always mean the party was explicitly identified.

- **Visibility** means the regime knows an incident occurred.
- **Identification** means the regime knows who is responsible.

Keep track of the distinction between Heat from visibility versus identification. They would manifest through different effects.

Early actions often increase visibility without full identification. Later actions begin to collapse that distinction. Laying low, misdirection, or shifting blame may slow identification, but visibility gained is never fully erased. Heat creates pressure, not punishment. The DM may narratively slow the regime's identification efforts through party misdirection or disguise, but the underlying Heat value should never be reduced. Treat this as a delay in consequence delivery, not a reversal of the dial. High Heat makes the world more dangerous, but also shows that the party's actions matter.

These dials are designed to ensure:

- Non-combat victories matter
- Player choices reshape the campaign
- The world reacts credibly to success and failure

Using the Dials

The dials can be updated at the end of each scene, based on any meaningful events.

Players should feel the effects but not be aware of the numbers themselves. Announce consequences as storytelling elements (patrols increase, allies emerge, enemies turn on each other, etc.).

Example Dial Mechanics

Hope

Despair (-10 and lower):

- Civilians avoid the party entirely
- Persuasion checks with civilians have disadvantage
- Informants actively report suspicious behavior
- Safe houses are compromised or abandoned

Fear (-3 to -9):

- NPCs require DC 17+ Persuasion to assist
- Help comes with conditions or costs
- Rumors blame the party for regime reprisals

Baseline (-2 to +2):

- NPCs are cautious but neutral
- DC 14-15 Persuasion to gain help
- No standing safe houses

Hopeful (+3 to +9):

- NPCs require DC 10-12 Persuasion
- 1d4 safe houses per district
- Civilians offer minor aid proactively

Defiant (+10 and higher):

- NPCs offer help freely
- Persuasion checks with civilians have advantage
- Spontaneous civilian distractions possible
- Safe houses in every district

Grip

Broken (-10 and lower):

- Lieutenants sabotage one another
- Coordinated ambushes not possible
- Any ability that coordinates multiple enemies (Merregon Orders, Garrison Authority, Forward, Soldiers) has a 50% chance of failing as creatures prioritize self-preservation. Apply through DM discretion rather than mechanically (the goal is that it feels like a disorganized enemy, rather than a series of coin flips).

Fractured (-3 to -9):

- Lieutenants act independently
- Conflicting orders delay responses
- Reinforcements arrive 1 round late
- Use of any lieutenant's "order another creature to..." ability is delayed by 1 round.

Baseline (-2 to +2):

- Normal villain coordination
- Standard response times
- Lieutenants share little intelligence

Unified (+3 to +9):

- Lieutenants share intelligence
- Reinforcements arrive 1 round faster
- Patrols act with clear intent

Iron Fist (+10 and higher):

- Fully coordinated operations
- Pre-planned ambushes
- Enemy forces anticipate common tactics

Heat

Anonymous (0 to +7):

- The party is unknown or insignificant
- No mechanical penalties apply
- Patrols follow standard routes and procedures
- Mistakes are attributed to "local unrest," not specific individuals

Identified (+8 to +15):

- The party has been noticed or identified
- The party has disadvantage on Stealth checks made in the city of Oren
- Random patrol encounters increase by +1 per session
- Citizens are more cautious about offering help

Hunted (+16 and higher):

- Wanted notices circulate with descriptions or likenesses of the party
- NPCs have advantage on checks to recognize or identify party members
- Merregon patrols increase to 4-6 enforcers in affected districts
- Checkpoints, curfews, and targeted searches become common

At extremely high Heat values (+25 or higher), the regime has committed maximum available resources to the party's capture. Further Heat accumulation does not add new mechanical effects but should be reflected narratively in the desperation and intensity of regime responses.

Starting Values

Begin the campaign with both the Hope and Heat dials at 0, and the Grip dial at +5 (the regime is unified and in full control at campaign start).

The resistance's early victories should push Hope positive, Grip will erode as lieutenants fall, and Heat will accumulate naturally from the party's actions.

Pacing the Campaign

Act I:

Introduction and establishing the resistance. It should feel oppressive but establish hope. It ends with a meaningful victory, a resistance community, and the destruction of any illusion of safety.

Act II

The bulk of the campaign. Momentum builds from guerrilla resistance to genuine threat to triumph.

Act III

Betrayal, recovery, final battles, and epilogue. It should feel desperate, determined, triumphant, bittersweet.

This assumes 3-4 sessions per chapter on average, but some chapters might be single sessions while others might take 4-5.

Adding Content

Extending Act II:

- Additional Council members in the form of Maurezhi (demons) or similar creatures
- Economic ministers (Mammon cultists, greedy merchants)
- Intelligence/spy networks (Rakshasa agents, Intellect Devourers)
- Regional governors

Add Side Quests:

- Protecting refugee caravans
- Sabotaging regime infrastructure
- Investigating regime crimes
- Rescuing specific NPCs important to player backstories
- Personal vendettas against lieutenants
- Building resistance capabilities
- Dealing with collaborators who were friends/family
- Epilogue conflict with the Arcanath Master of Contracts

Removing Content

Skip Act I:

- Start the story at Act II and the party at level 4

Streamline Act II:

- Skip one or more outer circle lieutenants chapters (but mind the expected level progressions)

Remove Side Quests:

- Reduce Merregon contract subplot
- Skip the Arcanath Epilogue conflict

Adjusting Difficulty

The adventure assumes a party of 4-5 characters using standard array or point buy. Adjust for your group:

For Stronger Parties (high optimizations or 6+ players), DM levers can include:

- Adding Merregon reinforcements to major fights
- Giving lieutenants more legendary resistances
- Increasing saving throw DCs by 1-2
- Adding environmental hazards and reinforcements

For Weaker Parties (lower optimizations or fewer/new players), DM levers include:

- Reducing enemy hit points by 10%
- Reducing minions from major fights
- Providing more NPC assistance during key battles
- Allowing clever tactics to bypass some encounters entirely

Adjusting Tone

To add humor, consider:

- Making the Goristro bombastic and ridiculous
- Emphasizing the cognitive dissonance of the regime's justifications
- Making Xvart supporters cartoonish
- Allowing humor even in the dark moments

To be more serious, consider:

- Emphasizing the human cost of tyranny
- Making NPC suffering more present and visceral
- Treating villains as genuinely dangerous, not jokes
- Focusing on the difficult moral choices

Handling Difficult Themes

This campaign touches on sensitive real-world issues. Handle them with care:

Family Separation

- Don't dwell on suffering children for shock value
- Focus on reunion moments as victories
- Allow players to prevent separations, not just witness them
- Respect players who want this veiled or minimized

Authoritarianism

- Show both the cruelty and the banal bureaucracy
- You do not need to force everyone into a binary of victim or villain
- Complexity can make moments more impactful rather than being cartoonish

Propaganda

- Show how it works (repetition, fear, false promises)
- Demonstrate how truth counters it
- Let players create their own counter-messaging
- Keep in mind that the Kenku character is tragic without being safe. Her suffering is real, but the campaign does not frame her as a hidden ally or a redemption arc

Violence and Revolution

Since the party uses violence against the regime, some NPCs might question if they are any better.

- Discuss justification of violent measures
- Show that violence alone can't fix things

Betrayal

The betrayal by Bowman (The Changeling) should hurt but not break the campaign. But keep in mind that some players don't enjoy betrayal narratives, so read your table.

Softening Themes

If at any point your table is uncomfortable, pause and adjust. The campaign can work with lighter or heavier emphasis on any theme.

Consider:

- Keeping Merregons as faceless enforcers without the family separation angle
- Focusing on fantasy elements over the political parallels

Balancing Satire and Gameplay

Remember: This is still D&D.

While political commentary drives the narrative, don't sacrifice good game design.

Combat encounters should be mechanically interesting:

- Varied terrain and environmental effects
- Enemies with different capabilities and tactics
- Strategic objectives beyond "kill everything"
- Opportunities for creative problem-solving

NPCs should be three-dimensional:

- Even the villains have motivations beyond being "evil"
- Regime supporters genuinely believe the lies they're being told
- NPC relationships change over time
- Some resistance members aren't traditional "heroes"; some are openly flawed characters

Player choice matters more than "the right answer":

- There are multiple solutions to most problems
- Decisions have consequences (both good and bad)
- The epilogue should reflect the party's choices

Exploration can give players a break from the heavier themes:

- Infiltration missions with stealth and social challenges
- Mysteries to investigate
- Dungeons to explore
- Ancient magics to discover

The Regime's Fragility

A key strategic element is that the villains don't trust each other. Show this by emphasizing the regime's various internal conflicts:

- The Changeling makes everyone nervous
- The Rakshasa pursues her own agenda
- The Fomorian's madness alienates others
- Yugoloths are proudly mercenary

Encourage creative solutions. Some of the best victories might not require combat at all:

- Exposing the Changeling's plots to create in-fighting
- Using the Fomorian's delusions against him
- Bribing Yugoloths to stand aside
- Playing lieutenants against each other

Recurring Elements

Resistance Growth

NPCs should reference the resistance growing stronger. Show this through:

- More volunteers joining
- Better equipment and resources
- Public support growing more open
- Enemy desperation increasing

The Kenku's Voice

Should be present throughout. Her broadcasts create atmosphere and track the party's progress (while she vilifies their victories).

Xvart Mobs

Serve as low-level encounters throughout. Show their cowardice (scatter when leaders fall) and their cruelty (emboldened by strength).

Merregon Patrols

Should appear regularly as mid-level threats. Their facelessness makes them rife for moral complexity. Discovering and breaking their contracts is a subplot with major payoff.

The Changeling's Presence

In Acts I and II, he will appear at key moments, always dubiously helpful, always positioning himself well, always slightly off if players pay attention. Build trust that you'll later break.

Given the campaign tone, the party may see through the Changeling's deception early. Let the party be suspicious, but unable to prove anything.

- Guide them towards a "lesser of two evils" debate
- Make his betrayal gambit more complex (he may take hostages or try political blackmail)
- Consider adding an accomplice, a lieutenant from another office

Rewards and Advancement

The adventure assumes milestone advancement with the following progressions:

Act I:

- Start at Level 2
- No advancement after Chapter 1
- Level 3 after completing Chapter 2
- Level 4 after completing Chapter 3
- No advancement after Chapter 4

Act II:

- Level 5 after completing Chapter 5
- Level 6 after completing Chapter 6
- Level 7 after completing Chapter 7
- Level 8 after completing Chapter 8
- Level 9 after completing Chapter 9
- Level 10 after completing Chapter 10
- Level 11 after completing Chapter 11
- Level 12 after completing Chapter 12
- Level 13 after completing Chapter 13

Act III:

- Level 14 after completing Chapter 14
- Level 15 after completing Chapter 15
- Level 16 after completing Chapter 16
- No further advancement

Alternatively, use XP from encounters. The CR spread generally supports this.

Magic Items

Should be present but not overwhelming:

- Act I:
Uncommon items, consumables
- Act II:
Rare items from major victories, enemy weapons
- Act III:
Very rare items, legendary items from the inner circle

Improvisation and Flexibility

No plan survives contact with players. Be ready to adapt:

Players may want to target a specific lieutenant first. Let them, and reorder chapters as needed. Some sequences matter (Justiciars should be last in Act II), but most don't.

Players may see through the Changeling early. Let them try to expose him, but make it difficult to prove. His betrayal gambit can instead become the party finally catching him.

Players may want to spare/redeem unexpected villains. Consider it. The Archmage is probably irredeemable, but maybe the Hezrou could be convinced? The Nycaloth definitely can be bribed. Flexibility creates memorable moments.

A player character may die. Death should be possible but not cheap. Consider how the resistance reacts. A martyr can inspire the movement. Resurrection is up to the DM's discretion.

FINAL ADVICE

Trust Your Players

They will surprise you, let them.

Embrace Complexity

The best moments come from difficult choices, not obvious ones.

Balance Hope and Despair

The regime is terrible, but resistance is powerful. Neither should dominate completely until Act III.

Make Victories Matter

Every lieutenant defeated should visibly change Orenthis. Show the impact.

Remember Why We Play

This is a game about heroes standing up to tyranny. In dark times, that fantasy matters.

Make it fun, make it meaningful, and make it worthwhile.

Regime Compendium

The Goristro resides high above the realm in his garishly gilded monument. His tyranny endures, scaffolded by sycophantic collaborators, greedy opportunists, cruel mercenaries, as well as the true believers. But this regime is a living system. An organism of legal, religious, militaristic, and bureaucratic constructs, each one reinforcing the others through greed, fear, and self-preservation.

The regime presents as monolithic, but that is a fiction. The reality is that it is held together by contracts, paranoia, rivalry, and fear. Break the right links, and the chain weakens. Turn the right lieutenant, and the structure fractures.

This compendium details the regime architects and enforcers. From the Supreme Leader and his Inner Circle, the ministers who twist law and faith into weapons, the mercenary commanders who trade loyalty for coin, down to the faceless legions who carry out acts of cruelty without hesitation.

Each entry provides character traits and locations, as well as motivations, fault lines, and strategic weaknesses.

Understanding who they are, what spurs their lust for power, and where they distrust one another is essential for your ability to guide your players towards dismantling this tyranny piece by piece, until only the twisted demon at the center remains, bound to this domain as inescapably as everyone he has destroyed.

Stat Blocks

A note on stat block sourcing:

Entries marked (Expanded) retain the source stat block (ability scores, saving throws, skills, resistances, immunities, senses). Modifications are additive only (new traits, actions, bonus actions, reactions, or legendary actions) and are layered onto the existing chassis without altering the underlying numbers.

Entries marked (Modified) diverge from the source in ways that cascade through the stat block (altered ability scores, adjusted CR, restructured action economy, or replaced core mechanics) in addition to any new additions.

Entries marked (Custom) use a published creature as a conceptual starting point only. Core stat block and mechanics have been substantially rewritten. Should not be cross-referenced against the source.

THE KENKU SPOKESPERSON

Voice of the Regime



Satirical Basis: Karoline Leavitt

Lair: Initially the Border Garrison. Relocates to the Gilded Tower's Bureau of Public Address (3rd floor) after the garrison falls. Her exact movements between locations depend on the party's choices in Chapters 3 and 4.

Personality: Recurring NPC, not a combat encounter.

She is a kenku who can only repeat what others have said, but has been trained with patience and precision to string those fragments into something that functions as conviction. She did not write the propaganda. She cannot. But she delivers it with a fluency that makes the distinction feel irrelevant to anyone listening. The regime did not need her to believe. They needed her to perform belief convincingly, and she does.

Around her neck is a collar of infernal make, a binding instrument that the Goristro installed early in her recruitment to ensure compliance. It compels her to broadcast on schedule, to stay within approved locations, and to repeat nothing that has not been cleared by the regime's messaging apparatus. Removing it is theoretically possible and would make for a satisfying symbolic victory. What the resistance has not fully considered is that the collar may no longer be doing as much work as it once did. She has worn it long enough that the boundaries it enforces and the boundaries she would choose have become difficult to distinguish, even for her.

If the party frees her from the Bureau during the Border Garrison raid, she does not join them. She does not thank them. She watches them go and then, when the regime regroups and the resistance base is raided, her voice is among the things that finds them again. Not because she was compelled to betray them. But because she made a calculation.

The party may see her as a redemption story, but she is not interested in being one.

The Minions

THE XVARTS Goristro Supporters



Satirical Basis: MAGA enthusiasts

Personality: Vicious in mobs, utter cowards once alone, loud under any circumstance. They wear the Goristro's bull-head symbol on red sashes, paint it on walls, and carry it into the neighborhoods they target. They need the symbol more than they need anything else. Without it, they are just small, angry creatures with bad teeth. With it, they are participants in something they believe is great.

Weakness: Mobs will scatter when their leader falls or when the Merregons leave.

Special: Pack Tactics, and the specific social mechanics of mob behavior. Their power is not combat power, but the power of the crowd. Which means it is real until someone refuses to treat it as real.

They were always there. That is the thing people do not like to think about. The Goristro did not bring them or create them or manufacture them out of nothing. He just activated them. Small creatures who had spent years convinced that their failures were someone else's fault, that the neighborhoods where they could no longer afford to live had been stolen from them, that the faces they did not recognize on their streets were enemies rather than neighbors. He legitimized them and gave them permission. He gave them a symbol.

They do not need orders. They need an audience. A Xvart mob will destroy a shop and then mill around waiting to be seen doing it. They take pictures of themselves outside the homes of families they have reported to the Merregons. They chant at people who cannot safely respond.

They are not so much loyal to the Goristro as they are loyal to the feeling the Goristro produces in them. The feeling that they are finally on the right side of something. When that feeling is threatened, so is their identity. Humiliation can do more damage to a Xvart mob than physical injury.

Xvart (Expanded)

Monsters of the Multiverse, pg. 267

Small Monstrosity

Chaotic Evil

CR 1/8 (XP 25)

AC 13

Initiative +2 (12)

HP 7 (2d6)

Speed 30 ft.

PB +2

		MOD	SAVE				MOD	SAVE
STR	8	-1	-1		INT	8	-1	-1
DEX	14	+2	+2		WIS	7	-2	-2
CON	10	0	0		CHA	7	-2	-2

Skills

Stealth (P) +4

Senses

Darkvision 30 ft.

Passive Perception 8

Traits

Pack Tactics

The Xvart has advantage on attack rolls against a creature if at least one of the Xvart's allies is adjacent to the creature and the ally is not incapacitated.

Raxivort's Blessing

When the Xvart reduces a creature to 0 hit points, it can move up to half its speed as a bonus action.

Mob Courage

While 3 or more allied Xvarts are within 30 feet of the Xvart and are not Frightened, the Xvart has advantage on saving throws against being Frightened.

Mob Collapse

When the Xvart's leader (designated at start of encounter, usually the loudest one) is reduced to 0 hit points, all remaining Xvarts must succeed on a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw or use their next turn to move away from the party at full speed. Xvarts that succeed on the save can continue acting normally but lose Mob Courage and Pack Tactics until a new leader is designated (requires a Xvart to spend its action doing so).

Actions

Shortsword

Melee Attack Roll: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 5 (1d6+2) piercing damage.

Sling

Ranged Attack Roll: +4 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target.

Hit: 4 (1d4+2) bludgeoning damage.

Notes

Do not start Xvarts as combat encounters. Run them as social encounters that can become combat encounters depending on how the party handles them. A mob of 8-12 Xvarts surrounding a market stall or blocking a street is not intended to be a fight. It is a test of what the party does when violence is implicit but not yet actual.

Options available to the party that do not require initiative:

- **Confident Confrontation**

A single party member who steps forward and refuses to move. DC 11 Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion).

On success, the mob begins to lose its grip (-2 Xvarts per round as individuals peel away).

On failure, the mob attacks.

- **Remove the Leader**

Targeting the loudest, most visibly armed Xvart (identifiable with DC 10 Perception) effectively can trigger the Mob Collapse even if the leader is not reduced to 0 HP.

Knocking the leader prone, silencing them, or other public embarrassments are all valid triggers.

- **Invoke a Higher Authority**

If the party has any regime documents or a plausible bluff (DC 13 Deception), the Xvarts will hesitate. They do not want to risk bringing Merregon attention to themselves. They are operating in a gray area and they know it.

- **Wait for the Merregons to Leave**

If the Merregon patrol has already moved on, the mob's confidence drains visibly. Without enforcers in sight, they are far less likely to initiate. This is not a guarantee, as a mob with a charismatic leader or cornered prey may still act, but absent a vocal provocateur, they will peel away within 10 minutes. Waiting requires DC 12 Stealth or the mob may call the Merregons back.

When Xvarts fight as a mob, treat groups of 4 as a single creature with 28 HP, AC 13, +4 to hit, dealing 2d6+2 damage. This creature has Pack Tactics if another mob unit is within 30 feet of its current target. For individual Xvart attacks (when they break out of the mob) use the standard stat block.

Rax the Loud / Devout / Anointed

Chapter 1 introduces a named Xvart gang leader, Rax. He appears three times across the campaign under different epithets.

In Chapter 1 he is **Rax the Loud**, a market district mob leader, cowardly in isolation and dangerous in numbers, the first example the party encounters of the specific dynamic that defines all Xvarts: threatening to the vulnerable, powerless against anyone who refuses to perform vulnerability for them.

In Chapter 12 he is now **Rax the Devout**, leading forty Xvarts in the Cathedral of Gold's outer nave, a painted bull-head medallion around his neck, standing on a pew and shouting before the party has taken two steps through the door. He has found a faith. The faith is the Goristro. And he is, in his own way, sincere about it.

In Chapter 17 he now is **Rax the Anointed**, in the Gilded Tower among the inner circle Xvarts who have been with the Goristro long enough to remember nothing outside of the Goristro. He is guarding the staircase between the fourth and fifth floors of the Gilded Tower under direct written command from the Goristro himself.

The DM can choose if he is or is not the same creature across all three appearances. Therefore the DM can make this explicit or leave it ambiguous through the use of the shared or honorific name Rax.

If explicit:

A party member who remembers him from Chapter 1 can identify him in Chapter 12 with DC 10 Perception:

The Xvart who was running a market mob in the campaign's first hour is now leading forty believers in a corrupted cathedral.

In Chapter 17, no check is required, by then his shouting is unmistakable:

Rax is at the top of the tower. He got here through pure enthusiasm and survival instinct and a specific kind of loyalty of someone who has nowhere else to go.

If ambiguous:

The shared name is enough. The campaign does not need to confirm it. Let the party wonder.

Either way, he (or they) has been and remains the same coward since Chapter 1. The cathedral does not change that. The tower does not change that. They just give his cowardice successively grander backdrops.

THE CULTIST FANATICS

Devoted Instruments of the New Order



Satirical Basis: MAGA true believers

Personality: Absolute conviction delivered without hesitation or examination. They do not argue. They do not negotiate. They do not doubt. They found something to believe in completely and they redirected every capacity for critical thought they ever had into defending that belief from examination. In combat they are the same, which is more dangerous.

Weakness: They are not tacticians. They are believers. The difference is exploitable: they commit fully to a target and do not adjust when circumstances change. Remove their leader or disrupt the Hierophant's presence and the certainty that drives them briefly fractures, producing the Lay Down the Faith mechanic. They are also, unlike the Merregons, capable of doubt. It costs them. But it is there.

Special: True Believer trait makes them

immune to Frightened within 30 feet of the Hierophant or inside the Cathedral. They fight to 0 HP without surrender. When the Hierophant falls, surviving Fanatics must save against the specific psychological collapse of having the certainty that replaced their fear suddenly removed. They do not become neutral. They become lost.

They were not always this. The Fanatics were, before the regime, ordinary people with ordinary religious lives: worshippers, parish volunteers, minor clergy who ran the Cathedral's community functions and believed, genuinely and without complication, in the old faith. The Hierophant did not recruit cynics. She recruited the sincere. She found people who already knew how to believe in something completely and she redirected that capacity toward the Goristro.

What makes the Fanatics dangerous is not their power, which is moderate, or their numbers, which vary. It is their conviction. A mercenary who takes a loyalty purge contract is doing a job. A Fanatic who drags a neighbor out of a prayer meeting for reciting the old liturgy is doing something they believe is right. The distinction matters in the field. Mercenaries have thresholds. The Devoted do not.

They will not negotiate. They will not flee. They will not surrender. This is not bravery. Bravery requires the presence of fear. They have replaced fear with certainty, which is more efficient and considerably more dangerous.

Cultist Fanatic (Expanded)

Monster Manual, pg. 85

Medium Humanoid (Any)

Neutral Evil

CR 2 (XP 450)

AC 13

Initiative +2 (12)

HP 44 (8d8 + 8)

Speed 30 ft.

PB +2

		MOD	SAVE				MOD	SAVE
STR	11	0	0		INT	10	0	0
DEX	14	+2	+2		WIS	14	+2	+4
CON	12	+1	+1		CHA	13	+1	+1

Skills

Deception (P) +3
Persuasion (P) +3
Religion* (E) +4

Senses

Passive Perception 12

Traits

True Believer

The Fanatic cannot be Frightened by any creature it recognizes as a heretic or enemy of the regime. In practice: the Fanatic is immune to the Frightened condition when within 30 feet of the Hierophant or when fighting in the Cathedral of Gold.

Lay Down the Faith

When a Fanatic drops to 0 HP, each other Fanatic within 30 feet who can see it must succeed on a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw or have disadvantage on attack rolls until the end of their next turn. They are not shaken by death. They are shaken by the specific death of someone they prayed beside. The distinction is precise and momentary.

Actions

Pact Blade

Melee Attack Roll: +4, reach 5 ft.
Hit: 6 (1d8 + 2) Slashing damage plus 7 (2d6) Necrotic damage.

Spellcasting

The Fanatic casts one of the following spells, using Wisdom as the spellcasting ability (spell save DC 12, +4 to hit with spell attacks):

- At Will: **light**, **thaumaturgy**
- 2/Day: **command**
- 1/Day: **hold person**

Bonus Actions

Spiritual Weapon (2/Day)

The Fanatic casts the Spiritual Weapon spell, manifesting as a golden bull-head emblem that strikes for 1d8 + 2 Force damage on a hit. Uses the same spellcasting ability as Spellcasting.

Notes

They recognize the resistance on sight. Not from intelligence briefings; from theology. In the regime's doctrine, the resistance is not a political opposition. It is a heresy. The people who refuse to say the Goristro's name in the new rites, who keep old devotional objects hidden in their homes, who still teach their children the prayers that predate the Cathedral's renovation: these are not citizens with different opinions. They are the enemy of the divine order. The Fanatics were told this by someone they trusted, in a place they considered sacred, at a moment when they were open to being told things. It took hold immediately. Their sincere belief has calcified into something harder and less examined. They do not think about what they do. They just execute.

THE MERREGONS

Border Patrol Enforcement and "Deportation" Agents



Satirical Basis: I.C.E. Agents

Personality: There is no personality. The faceless helmet is not an aesthetic choice; it is a statement. Whatever the Merregon was before its contract, it is not that anymore. It speaks only in growls and metallic rasps. It does not negotiate. It checks papers and drags the noncompliant away. And it does this all day every day without asking why.

Weakness: Bound by infernal contracts that specify their duties, their authority, and their chain of command with precise detail. Written orders always override verbal ones, so a forged document in the right format can redirect or even paralyze them entirely. Destroying the Merregon's original contract may even banish it.

Special: Regenerates 5 HP per turn (suppressed by silvered weapons), resistance to most

damage types, and total obedience to the written word of their contracts. While not opposed to lethal force, they do prioritize recapture over killing in order to reach their quotas.

They arrived with the Goristro's consolidation of power and have never left. The Rakshasa deployed them first at the borders, then in the cities, then in the markets and the schools and the neighborhoods where certain families had been living for generations. They do not choose their targets; lists are provided. They follow the lists.

Citizens have learned to read them by the sound of their boots. The formation tells you everything: a patrol of two means a checkpoint. Three means a home visit. Four means someone on the list did not open the door the first time. They do not run and they do not rush, which is somehow one of the most frightening things about them.

The infernal contracts that bind them are specific and exploitable. Merregons follow written authority above verbal authority. A confident person with the right documents can redirect them, delay them, or send them to entirely the wrong address. This tactic works until it does not.

Merregon (Expanded)

Monsters of the Multiverse, pg. 179

Medium Fiend (Devil)

Lawful Evil

CR 4 (XP 1,100)

AC 16

Initiative +2 (12)

HP 45 (6d8 + 18)

Speed 30 ft.

PB +2

		MOD	SAVE				MOD	SAVE
STR	18	+4	+4		INT	6	-2	-2
DEX	14	+2	+2		WIS	12	+1	+1
CON	17	+3	+3		CHA	8	-1	-1

Skills

Intimidation* (E) +3

Perception* (P) +3

Resistances

Cold; Bludgeoning, Piercing, and Slashing from nonmagical attacks that are not silvered

Immunities

Fire, Frightened; Poison; Poisoned

Senses

Darkvision 60 ft. (Devil's Sight)
Passive Perception 13

Traits

Contract Bound

The Merregon cannot be deceived by verbal commands alone, but it must follow written instructions absolutely. If presented with a forged document in an appropriate format and bearing a plausible official seal from a higher authority (the Rakshasa, the Imp Warlock, or other named superior), it must spend its action examining the document. On a successful DC 15 Deception check, the document is accepted as a legitimate override to the current patrol instructions and the Merregon redirects its behavior for up to 1 hour.

Banishment via contract destruction sends the Merregon to the Nine Hells, where it reforms after 1d10 years absent another binding. For the purposes of Orenthis's liberation, this is ostensibly permanent, the Merregon cannot be re-contracted without a new agreement.

Subdue Protocol

Merregons fight to restrain and incapacitate rather than kill unless a party member has used lethal force first. When fighting to subdue, the Merregon's Halberd attacks deal bludgeoning damage equal to the normal roll, and on a hit the target must succeed on a DC 14 Strength saving throw or be Grappled. This protocol does not apply to Heavy Crossbow attacks.

Regeneration

The Merregon regains 5 hit points at the start of its turn. If the Merregon takes damage from a silvered weapon, including silvered ammunition or a weapon coated in silvered oil, this trait does not trigger at the start of its next turn. The Merregon dies only if it starts its turn with 0 hit points and does not regenerate.

Devil's Sight

Magical darkness does not impede the Merregon's darkvision.

Magic Resistance

The Merregon has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Infernal Discipline Break

If the merregon takes 15 or more damage from a single attack, it loses its damage resistances until the end of its next turn.

Actions

Multi-attack

The Merregon makes two Halberd attacks, or one Halberd attack and one Heavy Crossbow attack.

Halberd

Melee Attack Roll: +6 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target.

Hit: 9 (1d10+4) slashing damage.

Heavy Crossbow

Ranged Attack Roll: +4 to hit, range 100/400 ft., one target.

Hit: 7 (1d10 + 2) piercing damage.

Notes

Merregons do not improvise. Their tactics are the same every time because the same tactics work every time: one engages while the other covers, they call for backup before they need it, they do not pursue past their assigned boundary, and they fight to subdue unless the situation changes the calculus.

When a Merregon drops to half HP, it signals for backup as a bonus action. It does not retreat. It does not panic. It continues fighting at exactly the same pace.

Merregons do not stay dead without silvered weapons. A party that fights without them will exhaust itself, not because they can't damage the creature, but because it regenerates at the start of each turn. A single silvered weapon in the party changes the fight entirely. This should be communicated early. The resistance keeps a small supply and it is one of their most protected resources.

They are most exploitable through paperwork. A party that fights Merregons head-on at low levels will lose, but a party that understands their contract constraints can redirect, delay, or paralyze them without needing a single attack roll.

If the party has destroyed or is visibly holding a Merregon's contract, that Merregon must succeed on a DC 14 Intelligence saving throw or be Incapacitated for 1 round as the binding force (the Merregon's scripted directives) is destabilized. If a save fails by 5 or more, it is immediately banished.

The resistance has learned that the Merregons are a symptom, the contracts are the disease. Every Merregon in Orenthis is bound by documents that originate with the Rakshasa's authority. Break the authority, and the contracts void. Break the contracts, and bound devils either banish or lose their directives entirely.

The Merregons and the Xvarts

The Merregons and the Xvarts are often seen together so it is easy to think of them as the same phenomenon. They are not.

The Merregons are instruments. They have no ideology, no enthusiasm, no investment in the outcome. They are bound by contract and pointed at target.

The Xvarts are participants. They chose this. They wake up in the morning and put on the sash and go looking for someone to point at. Removing their leaders disperses them, but they come back. Removing the Goristro's permission does not change what they already believe. It only changes how safe they feel about showing it.

This distinction matters for the campaign. The Merregons can be solved. The Xvarts just have to be outlasted.

The Outer Circle

THE IMP WARLOCK FIELD GENERAL Frontline Border Commander



Satirical Basis: Greg Bovino

Lair: The Border Garrison. A fortified base built for function and stripped of everything else.

Personality: Completely detached from any morality, he does not necessarily hate the prisoners he processes, but he does enjoy their suffering.

Weakness: He has never conceived of losing. His entire operational framework assumes compliance. A party that refuses to behave like prisoners breaks him tactically and psychologically.

Special: A Tiny creature in a position of enormous authority. This is not played for

laughs. The sad horror is that he is small and officious and absolutely certain of his own importance. The regime gave him the tools to act on that certainty without limit.

A tiny devil standing behind a desk that was clearly built for someone else. His voice is precise and slightly too loud for the space. He has opinions about the paperwork. Detailed, passionate opinions about the paperwork. The intake forms are his. The processing criteria are his. The quota sheets, updated weekly and distributed to every Merregon in the garrison, are entirely his.

He was a minor bureaucrat before the regime. He processed visas. He stamped permits. He was unremarkable in every measurable way except for one thing: he believed, with a completeness that most people reserve for faith, that systems work when people follow the rules, and that people who don't follow the rules deserve whatever the system does to them. The Rakshasa did not need to corrupt him. She just handed him a quota and a garrison and stepped back.

His failed warlock training from years ago was a bid for relevance that produced modest results and significant resentment. He does not fight like a soldier. He fights like someone who is furious that fighting is necessary at all, that these people will not simply lie down and comply, that they are forcing him to deviate from the schedule.

He will not flee as he has nowhere to go that is better than here, and he cannot conceive of here being taken from him. He will fight until the garrison falls, still certain that any assault on him is simply an administrative error that will be corrected.

This means that the fight is won when the party stops treating him as a serious military commander and starts treating him as what he is: a small, furious administrator who has been handed tools he should never have been given. The horror is not that he is dangerous. The horror is that he is mundane, and this mundane creature has been running this garrison for years.

Note that the CR 6 reflects the Imp in isolation. Scale Merregon support numbers according to party size. The actual encounter should be scaled to CR 7-8 for budgeting purposes.

Imp Warlock (Modified)

Monster Manual, pg. 177

Tiny Fiend (Devil)

Lawful Evil

CR 6 (XP 2,300)*

AC 15 (mage armor)

HP 78 (12d4 + 36)*

Initiative +2 (12)

Speed 20 ft.; Fly 40 ft.

PB +3*

		MOD	SAVE				MOD	SAVE
STR	6	-2	-2		INT	16*	+3	+6*
DEX	14*	+2	+2		WIS	14*	+2	+5*
CON	16*	+3	+3		CHA	14	+2	+5*

Skills

Arcana* (P) +6

Deception (P) +5

Insight (P) +5

Intimidation* (E) +8

Perception* (P) +5

Stealth (P) +5

Senses

Darkvision 120 ft. (Devil's Sight)

Passive Perception* 15

Immunities

Frightened*

Traits

Devil's Sight

Magical darkness does not impede the Imp's darkvision.

Passive Processing

The Imp is always aware of the general compliance state of creatures within 30 feet whether they are acting within expected parameters or deviating from them. He cannot read thoughts, but he knows when someone within range does something he did not sanction, which triggers Deviation Protocol (see Reactions).

Quota Mentality

The Imp is immune to the Frightened condition. He cannot be magically compelled to move away from an enemy. Effects that would push, pull, or teleport him against his will must overcome a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw first, which he makes with advantage from his Magic Resistance.

Magic Resistance

The Imp has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Actions

Multi-attack

The Imp makes two Eldritch Blast attacks, or one Eldritch Blast attack and uses Spellcasting once.

Eldritch Blast

Ranged Spell Attack: +5 to hit, range 120 ft., one target.

Hit: 11 (2d10) force damage. The Imp delivers this with the affect of someone correcting a filing error.

Spellcasting

The Imp casts one of the following spells using Charisma as the spellcasting ability (spell save DC 13, spell attack +5) requiring no material components:

- At will: **darkness**, **detect thoughts**, **mage armor** (self only, automatic), **mage hand**, **minor illusion**
- 3/day each: **charm person**, **fear**, **hold person**
- 1/day each: **dominate person**

The Imp opens with **fear** if the party enters without authorization. He uses **dominate person** on whoever appears to be giving orders, then redirects that person toward the nearest Merregon. He considers this efficient.

Sting (True Form Only)

Melee Attack Roll: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 5 (1d4+3) piercing damage plus 14 (4d6) poison damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or be Poisoned for 1 minute.

Bonus Actions

Garrison Authority

While within the Border Garrison, the Imp can issue orders to any Merregon that can hear him as a bonus action. These orders are backed by the Imp's written standing authority on file at the garrison. The Merregon immediately moves up to its speed toward the nearest non-compliant creature. This movement does not consume the Merregon's action.

Note: Merregons must adhere to the Imp because his authority is pre-authorized in writing at the garrison level. But verbal commands from any other creature would have no mechanical effect on Merregons, per their Contract Bound trait.

Processing Notation

The Imp designates one creature within 60 feet as a catalogued subject. That creature has disadvantage on Charisma checks made against any Merregon in the garrison until the end of the encounter as the Imp's notation propagates through the garrison's operational awareness. This bonus action can affect a different creature each round.

Reactions

Deviation Protocol

When a creature within 30 feet takes any action the Imp did not initiate or authorize (which is every action any party member takes) he can use his reaction to call for immediate enforcement. One Merregon within 60 feet that can hear him immediately uses its reaction to move up to half its speed toward the deviating creature. The Imp uses this every round. It is not tactical. It is reflexive.

Procedural Objection

When the Imp is hit by an attack, he can use his reaction to insist loudly that this is a violation of garrison protocol. The attacker must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or have disadvantage on their next attack roll against the Imp as they briefly, inexplicably hesitate. This reaction can only be used three times per combat. It stops working not because the Imp stops using it but because it stops being surprising.

Lair Actions

On initiative count 20 (losing ties), the Imp takes a lair action in the Border Garrison. He cannot use the same lair action two rounds in a row.

Lockdown Order

The Imp seals one section of the garrison. All doors and passages in a 30-foot radius of a point he can see are sealed until initiative count 20 of the next round. Sealed doors can be forced open with a DC 16 Strength check or destroyed (AC 16, 20 HP).

Reinforcement Requisition

The Imp submits a requisition. One Merregon (full HP) enters through the nearest available entrance at the start of the next round. This lair action cannot be used if all garrison Merregons have already been defeated. When the last Merregon falls and this action becomes unavailable, the Imp does not adjust his behavior. He simply submits another requisition to no one.

Catalogue Update

The Imp updates the garrison's operational records. Each creature in the garrison that is not a Merregon must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or have disadvantage on Stealth checks made within the garrison until the end of the encounter as their location and description are propagated to all active enforcement units.

Quota Review

The Imp announces the current shortfall. All Merregons within 60 feet that can hear him regain 10 HP as the reminder of outstanding quotas focuses their operational parameters. This lair action cannot trigger more than twice per encounter.

Regional Effects

While the Imp commands the Forward Command Post, the garrison and its surroundings carry his influence:

Processing Efficiency

Within the garrison walls, creatures have disadvantage on Charisma (Persuasion) checks to appeal to compassion or mercy. The Merregons here have heard nothing but quota language for months.

Optimized Fear

Prisoners held in the garrison for more than 24 hours have disadvantage on saving throws against being Frightened. The Imp has studied exactly how much fear maximizes compliance without triggering resistance. The number is precise. He arrived at it experimentally.

When the Imp is defeated: both effects end immediately. Merregons within the garrison must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or become Confused for 1 minute as the coordination holding the garrison's operations together dissolves.

THE MEZZOLOTH SPEAKER

Speaker of the Council



Satirical Basis: Mike Johnson

Lair: The Council Halls. A grand chamber of institutional authority that has been stripped of all relevance. Its procedural rules rewritten so many times that the original document is unrecognizable.

Personality: Spineless and anxious, he holds institutional power yet uses none of it. He is not cruel, but he enables cruelty, which is in some ways even worse.

Weakness: The only reliable fact about him is that he will easily abandon the regime to save himself. Every decision he has ever made has been a survival calculation.

Special: Teleportation and the ability to summon lesser Yugoloths, both of which he uses defensively when absolutely necessary with a visible resentment at the situation.

A Yugoloth middle-manager who inherited institutional power he did not build and does not know how to use. The Mezzoloth holds the Speakership of the Council, a position that was once meaningful but is now a performance of meaning conducted under the Goristro's supervision.

He spends most of his time trying to appease the Goristro and earn his approval while trying to maintain his position appeasing the Council. The Changeling absolutely terrifies him. He does not know exactly what the Changeling wants or when he will make his move, so he avoids him entirely. That air of uncertainty has been the background radiation of The Mezzoloth's tenure since the beginning.

He is not a true believer. He does not have the Hierophant's conviction or the Archmage's ideology. He has a position, and the position comes with a residence, and the residence is nicer than anything he had before, and every time he has had a chance to do the right thing he has looked at the residence and found a reason to wait.

Mezzoloth (Modified)

Monster Manual, pg. 211

Medium Fiend (Yugoloth)

Neutral Evil

CR 6 (XP 2,300)*

AC 18

Initiative +3 (13)

HP 75 (10d8 + 30)

Speed 40 ft.

PB +3

		MOD	SAVE				MOD	SAVE
STR	18	+4	+4		INT	7	-2	-2
DEX	11	0	0		WIS	14	+2	+2
CON	16	+3	+3		CHA	10	0	0

Skills

Insight* (P) +5

Perception (P) +5

Persuasion* (P) +3

Resistances

Cold; Fire; Lightning; Bludgeoning, Piercing, and Slashing from nonmagical attacks*

Immunities

Acid; Poison; Poisoned

Senses

Blindsight 60 ft.

Darkvision 60 ft.

Passive Perception 15

Traits

Magic Weapons

The Mezzoloth's weapon attacks are magical.

Survival Calculation

The Mezzoloth is always running the numbers. At the start of combat, and again each time he takes damage, he reassesses. When any of the following conditions are met, he must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or trigger Institutional Withdrawal (see Reactions): he has taken 30 or more damage total; all summoned Yugoloths have been defeated; a party member has successfully made a Charisma (Persuasion or Intimidation) check against him this combat; or he is reduced to half his hit point maximum.

Institutional Cover

The Mezzoloth can use his reaction to invoke procedural authority. One creature that attempts to attack him must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or waste its attack on parliamentary hesitation, believing briefly that striking him might constitute a violation of some rule they cannot immediately identify. This trait has no effect on creatures that have already seen through his authority or creatures with an Intelligence score of 6 or lower.

Magic Resistance

The Mezzoloth has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Actions

Multi-attack

The Mezzoloth makes two attacks, using Claws or Trident in any combination.

Claws

Melee Attack Roll: +7, reach 5 ft.

Hit: 9 (2d4 + 4) Slashing damage. If the target is a Large or smaller creature, it has the Grappled condition (escape DC 14) from two of four claws, and it has the Restrained condition until the grapple ends.

Trident

Melee or Ranged Attack Roll: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target.

Hit: 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage plus 10 (3d6) force damage.

Hit or Miss: The trident magically returns to the mezzoloth's claw immediately after a ranged attack.

Teleport

The Mezzoloth magically teleports up to 60 feet to an unoccupied space it can see.

Summon Yugoloth (1/Day)

The Mezzoloth attempts to summon a fellow Mezzoloth with a 50% chance of success. A summoned Mezzoloth appears in an unoccupied space within 60 feet and act on the same initiative. The summoned creature remains for 1 minute or until the Mezzoloth is incapacitated. He summons them the way a nervous person calls for backup: immediately, obviously, and with an expression that suggests he really hoped that it would not have come to this.

Spellcasting

The Mezzoloth casts one of the following spells using Wisdom as the spellcasting ability (spell save DC 13, spell attack +5) requiring no material components:

- 1/day each: **cloudkill, darkness, dispel magic**

Bonus Actions

Procedural Delay

The Mezzoloth invokes a point of order. One creature within 30 feet that can hear him must succeed on a DC 13 Intelligence saving throw or lose its reaction until the start of its next turn, tangled briefly in the implied bureaucratic complexity of his objection. This bonus action has no effect on creatures that do not speak a language the Mezzoloth knows.

Teleport (Defensive)

If the Mezzoloth has taken damage this round, he can use his bonus action to teleport up to 30 feet to an unoccupied space he can see.

Reactions

Not My Decision

When the Mezzoloth is targeted by an attack or harmful spell, he can use his reaction to insist loudly that this is above his authority level. The attacker must succeed on a DC 13 Charisma saving throw or have disadvantage on the triggering attack or spell, briefly uncertain whether they have the right target. This reaction can only be used twice per combat.

Institutional Withdrawal

When Survival Calculation triggers and the Mezzoloth fails his saving throw, he immediately takes the following actions in order:

- He uses Teleport to move to the far edge of the room, positioning himself near an exit but still within visible range
- He raises both hands in a gesture of non-aggression
- He offers the party one of the following, their choice, in exchange for safe passage:
 - The location of a Council document implicating a higher-ranking regime official
 - Access codes to a restricted area of the regime's infrastructure
 - Written testimony against the Goristro that could be used as legal evidence before a restored court.

He does not fight after he uses Institutional Withdrawal. Place him near an exit but still within visible range so that the party can access his offer without triggering a chase. He is surrendering, but not fleeing. He is done. But then again, he never really started.

THE HEZROU INVESTIGATOR

Investigator of National Loyalty



Satirical Basis: Kash Patel

Lair: The Loyalty Bureau. A run-down fortress decorated with portraits of the Hezrou standing next to the Goristro in poses of mutual admiration.

Personality: Sycophantic and intoxicated by relevance. He has never been tested but he does not know this.

Weakness: He is unable to adapt when a situation no longer matches his expectations. Those willing to exploit his vanity can outmaneuver him completely.

Special: His stench aura causes nausea in creatures that fail to resist it. His magic resistance makes him difficult to lock down. But neither of these compensates for his strategic limitations.

A toad-like demon who was given the authority over internal loyalty investigations simply because he asked for it long enough that the Goristro found it easier to say yes than to keep saying no.

The Hezrou commands the internal Merregon forces that investigate claims of disloyalty through violence and intimidation. They remove people that the Goristro personally dislikes or people who failed to compliment the Goristro recently, and rarely actual dissidents. These purges are not strategic. They are not calibrated. Yet he oversees these purges with an enthusiasm that has never been tempered by reflection. He has never questioned an order. He has never examined a motive.

He is not the most powerful creature in this compendium. He is not the most dangerous. He is, however, the most likely to have six Merregons kick down your door because someone told him you looked disloyal and he has been waiting for a chance to feel included. The regime tolerates this because the fear it generates is useful.

Hezrou (Expanded)

Monster Manual, pg. 167

Large Fiend (Demon)

Chaotic Evil

CR 8 (XP 3,900)

AC 18

Initiative +6 (16)

HP 157 (15d10 + 75)

Speed 30 ft.

PB +3

		MOD	SAVE				MOD	SAVE
STR	19	+4	+7		INT	5	-3	-3
DEX	17	+3	+3		WIS	12	+1	+4
CON	20	+5	+8		CHA	13	+1	+1

Skills

Intimidation* (P) +4

Perception* (P) +4

Resistances

Cold; Fire; Lightning; Bludgeoning, Piercing, and Slashing from nonmagical attacks*

Immunities

Poison; Poisoned

Senses

Darkvision 120 ft.

Passive Perception 14

Traits

Stench

Any creature that starts its turn within 10 feet of the Hezrou must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or be Poisoned until the start of its next turn.

Loyalty Theater

The Hezrou enters every encounter expecting to win. At the start of combat, he has advantage on his first attack roll and his first Intimidation check. This advantage disappears the moment he takes damage from a creature he underestimated (any creature that successfully used Outmaneuver against him, or any creature that hit him on the first round of combat).

Outmaneuver

Once per round, a creature can use their action to exploit the Hezrou's limited intelligence with a DC 15 Deception check (or Persuasion if taking a charm-based and/or a flattery-based approach).

If the party conducted specific planning for Outmaneuver tactics during the intelligence phase, the DC for the first attempt is reduced to 13.

On a success, choose one of the following effects until the start of the Hezrou's next turn:

- The Hezrou redirects his next attack to a valid target of the creature's choice within his reach or movement range.
- The Hezrou wastes his movement walking toward a false threat.
- The Hezrou uses his bonus action to berate a Merregon instead of taking a meaningful action.

If no Merregon is present, the Hezrou instead bellows at the nearest enemy and loses his bonus action with no other effect.

On a failure, the Hezrou becomes Enraged (see below) and has advantage on his next attack roll against that creature.

Enraged

When a creature fails an Outmaneuver attempt, or when the Hezrou is reduced to half HP, he becomes Enraged until the end of his next turn. While Enraged, he has advantage on Strength checks and attack rolls but must move toward the nearest creature that triggered his rage and cannot use Merregon Orders.

Magic Resistance

The Hezrou has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Actions

Multi-attack

The Hezrou makes one Bite attack and two Claw attacks.

Bite

Melee Attack Roll: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 15 (2d10 + 4) piercing damage. If the target is a Medium or smaller creature, it must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be Grappled (escape DC 15). While Grappled this way, the creature is Restrained. The Hezrou can use Bite against it without making an attack roll, but this automatic hit deals only the base damage die (2d10) without the Strength modifier. This represents crushing grip, not a precision strike.

Claw

Melee Attack Roll: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 11 (2d6 + 4) slashing damage.

Loyalty Charge (Recharge 5-6)

The Hezrou charges up to his full speed in a straight line. Each creature in his path must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or take 22 (4d10) bludgeoning damage and be knocked Prone. On a success, the creature takes half damage and is not knocked Prone. The Hezrou stops if he hits a wall or an object he cannot destroy in one action.

Bonus Actions

Merregon Orders

The Hezrou bellows at one Merregon within 60 feet who can see and hear him. That Merregon immediately moves up to its speed toward the nearest enemy and makes one attack. The Merregon uses its reaction for this. This bonus action cannot be used while the Hezrou is Enraged.

Intimidating Presence

The Hezrou fixes his gaze on one creature within 30 feet. That creature must succeed on a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw or be Frightened of the Hezrou until the end of their next turn. A creature that succeeds is immune to this bonus action for 24 hours.

Reactions

Sycophantic Deflection

When a creature makes an attack roll against the Hezrou, he can use his reaction before the result is known to invoke his authority and the attacker must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or make the roll with disadvantage. This reaction can only be used twice per combat and has no effect on creatures that have already seen through his authority (any creature that successfully used Outmaneuver against him).

Blame Downward

When the Hezrou takes damage of 20 or more from a single attack, he can use his reaction to point at the nearest Merregon and declare it responsible. That Merregon must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or move up to its speed toward the attacker and make one attack against them on its next turn, even if doing so is tactically suicidal. The Hezrou takes no mechanical benefit from this. He simply needs someone else to be at fault.

If no Merregon is within range, this reaction fails and is not expended.

Merregon Loyalty Detail

The Hezrou enters combat with 2-3 Merregons positioned as a forward cordon.

These Merregons have been contracted specifically through the Hezrou's delegated authority, a sub-clause within the Rakshasa's broader framework. Destroying the Hezrou's sub-contract authority (not the Rakshasa's contracts) invalidates their directives or even causes banishment. These distinctions matter as the contract language is precise by design.

The Hezrou uses Merregon Orders aggressively in the first two rounds, pushing them forward while he hangs back and uses Intimidating Presence. Once Enraged, he abandons this entirely and charges directly, leaving the Merregons to act independently.

If the Hezrou is reduced to 0 HP while Merregons remain, the sudden loss of his delegated command authority creates a gap in their contractual directives. Each remaining Merregon must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or become Confused for 1 round as their scripted orders conflict. On a success, they recognize the chain of command has broken and immediately withdraw because their contractual obligation specifically ran through the Hezrou's authority, not the regime, and that authority is now void.

The Middle Circle

THE FOMORIAN SPREADER OF MADNESS Minister of "New Truths"



Satirical Basis: RFK Jr.

Lair: The Ministry of New Truths. A reality-warping nightmare where the walls display contradictory proclamations and the floors are covered in discredited research.

Personality: Delusional, paranoid, and convinced of his own singular access to the truth. He is charismatic to the equally mad and bewildering to the rational.

Weakness: His madness makes him unpredictable. He can be distracted by feeding his delusions. A creature willing to agree with him can exploit his trust briefly.

Special: His cursed Evil Eye triggers a roll on the short-term madness table for its target. He uses it generously and without strategy. A cursed giant who has turned his affliction into a ministry. The Fomorian's Evil Eye was always a curse: a power that warped what others saw and believed, that bent perception toward grotesque distortion. Under ordinary circumstances it would make him a monster to be avoided. Under the Goristro's regime it makes him a minister.

He spreads conspiracy theories and paranoia with the genuine enthusiasm of a person sharing something precious. The citizens who come to believe him are not weak or foolish; they are exhausted, frightened, and being offered the comfort of a simple explanation by someone who believes it completely. That is the mechanism. That is always the mechanism.

He calls established facts "old truths." He calls his delusions "new truths." He has spoken extensively on the subject. The Ministry of New Truths publishes his delusions in pamphlets that are distributed throughout Orenthis. The pamphlets often cite sources that do not exist. He does not know this and would not care even if he did.

He is not evil in the way the Rakshasa is evil or the Archmage is evil. He does not take pleasure in suffering and does not pursue cruelty for its own sake. He causes suffering anyway, at scale, because he has been given institutional power and a platform and he actually believes everything he says.

Note that this encounter is intentionally high-variance. Stacking Curse of the Evil Eye (passive), Evil Eye (action), and New Truth Proclamation can cascade badly against unlucky parties, particularly if you use the short-term madness table. If your table prioritizes tactical consistency, use the fixed fallback (Frightened, move away) for Evil Eye and remove the madness table entirely. The volatility is thematic, not mandatory.

Fomorian (Modified)

Monster Manual, pg. 123

Huge Giant (Fomorian)

Chaotic Evil

CR 8 (XP 3,900)

AC 14

Initiative 0 (10)

HP 172 (15d12 + 75)*

Speed 40 ft.

PB +3

		MOD	SAVE				MOD	SAVE
STR	23	+6	+6		INT	9	-1	-1
DEX	10	0	0		WIS	6*	-2	-2
CON	20	+5	+5		CHA	14*	+2	+2

Skills

Perception (E) +4

Stealth (P) +3

Senses

Darkvision 120 ft.

Passive Perception 14

Traits

Siege Monster

The Fomorian deals double damage to objects and structures.

Curse of the Evil Eye

The Fomorian carries a permanent curse that distorts perception. Any creature that starts its turn within 30 feet of the Fomorian and can see his eye must succeed on a DC 13 Charisma saving throw or be subject to his Evil Eye (see Actions). A creature that succeeds on this saving throw is immune to this passive trigger until the start of its next turn.

Delusional Certainty

The Fomorian cannot be Charmed or Frightened. He cannot be compelled to doubt himself by any magical effect. However, his delusions can be weaponized against him: a creature that uses an action to agree with one of his New Truths through performative sincerity (DC 12 Deception check), gains his trust until the end of their next turn. While trusted, the Fomorian will not target that creature with attacks or Evil Eye, and the creature has advantage on Charisma checks against him.

Unpredictable Movement

At the start of each of the Fomorian's turns, roll a d6. On a 1, his movement this turn is halved as he stops to explain something urgently to no one in particular. On a 6, his speed increases to 50 ft. this turn as a new truth compels him forward with sudden conviction. On any other result, his speed is normal.

Actions

Multi-attack

The Fomorian makes two Greatclub attacks and uses Evil Eye once, or makes one Greatclub attack and uses Evil Eye twice.

Greatclub

Melee Attack Roll: +9 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target.

Hit: 19 (3d8 + 6) bludgeoning damage. If the target is a Medium or smaller creature, it must succeed on a DC 17 Strength saving throw or be knocked Prone.

Evil Eye

The Fomorian fixes his gaze on one creature within 60 feet that he can see. The target must succeed on a DC 13 Charisma saving throw or roll for an effect from the Short-Term Madness table (Dungeon Master's Guide, Chapter 8), which lasts for the rolled duration. Note that this table produces highly variable results. So DMs who want tighter encounter calibration can replace the table roll with a fixed effect such as: on a failed save, the creature is Frightened of the Fomorian until the end of its next turn and must use its movement to move away from him. This is less thematic but more predictable.

If a creature is already affected by a madness effect, it has disadvantage on this new saving throw.

On a natural 1 on the saving throw, the madness effect lasts for the duration of the encounter regardless of the rolled duration. On a natural 20 on the saving throw, the creature is immune to Evil Eye for 24 hours and can use their reaction to reflect the gaze: the Fomorian must make the same DC 13 Charisma saving throw or be subject to his own Evil Eye for one round.

New Truth Proclamation (Recharge 5-6)

The Fomorian bellows a New Truth loudly enough to shake the walls. Each creature within 30 feet that can hear him must succeed on a DC 13 Charisma saving throw or the proclamation temporarily overrides their grip on reality leaving them unable to take actions or reactions until the end of their next turn, moving in a random direction instead if they move at all. A creature already subject to a madness effect has disadvantage on this new saving throw.

Bonus Actions

Redirect Believer

If the Fomorian has been successfully manipulated via Delusional Certainty this turn, he can use his bonus action to point at a different creature and declare them an enemy of the New Truth. The manipulating creature must succeed on a DC 13 Charisma saving throw or lose the Fomorian's trust immediately, becoming a valid target again. This bonus action can only be used once per creature per round, and the Fomorian cannot immediately re-target a creature he just trusted.

New Truth Pamphlet

The Fomorian produces a crumpled pamphlet and thrusts it at one creature within 5 feet. That creature must succeed on a DC 13 Charisma saving throw or have disadvantage on their next Intelligence or Wisdom check as the contents briefly colonize their thinking. This bonus action can only be used once per combat.

Reactions

Vindicated

When the Fomorian takes damage from a spell, he can use his reaction to point at the caster and shout that this proves everything he has been saying. Each creature within 30 feet that can hear him must succeed on a DC 13 Charisma saving throw or have disadvantage on saving throws against Evil Eye until the end of their next turn. He considers this a research outcome.

Righteous Stumble

When the Fomorian would be knocked Prone, he can use his reaction to stumble forward instead, moving up to 10 feet in any direction without provoking opportunity attacks. If he ends this movement adjacent to a creature, that creature must succeed on a DC 17 Strength saving throw or be knocked Prone instead.

Legendary Actions

The Fomorian can take 2 legendary actions per round, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Spent legendary actions are recovered at the start of his turn.

Lurch (1 Action)

The Fomorian moves up to 15 feet toward the nearest creature. This movement does not provoke opportunity attacks.

Evil Eye (2 Actions)

The Fomorian uses Evil Eye against one creature within 60 feet.

Optional: The Believers

If you want followers present, add 1-2 Cultist Fanatics who have been converted to believe the New Truths. They are not contracted soldiers. They are not paid. They are there because they believe, and they fight with the specific ferocity of people defending something they have built their identity around. And they will throw themselves between the party and the Fomorian. Not because they have been ordered to but because in their minds the party represents the old truths come to silence the new ones.

Including believers increases encounter difficulty from Medium to Hard, but it is recommended if the party has had prior exposure to the New Truths propaganda during the campaign and should feel its human cost directly.

THE NYCALOTH WARMASTER

Commander of Military Forces



Satirical Basis: Pete Hegseth

Lair: The Studio of War. A training ground that has never seen actual combat, decorated with trophies from battles the Nycaloth did not fight and maps of campaigns he did not plan.

Personality: Loud, dismissive of weakness, and utterly convinced that confidence is a substitute for competence. He has never been wrong about anything because he has never examined anything closely.

Weakness: He serves for pomp and circumstance, not ideology. But beneath his bluster is a genuinely poor strategist who has never faced a formidable opponent who is able to adapt.

Special: Four arms, teleportation, and the ability to project an aura of false military authority that functions until someone calls his bluff directly.

A winged Yugoloth mercenary who was hired to command Orenthis's military forces and has spent his tenure confusing the appearance of command with its substance. The Nycaloth holds briefings. He issues directives. He has opinions, loudly, about everything. What he does not do is win battles he did not expect to have to fight.

He was hired because he was available and because the Goristro wanted someone who would follow orders without asking questions about their legality. On those counts the Nycaloth has delivered, but on the question of actual military competence, not so much.

The Merregions under his command are bound by contract and follow his orders with the blank reliability of creatures that have no choice. He mistakes this for loyalty. He mistakes a great many things for a great many other things. This is, ultimately, why he can be beaten.

He does not want to die for Orenthis. He was not hired to die for Orenthis. If the threat is credible enough, he will find a reason to be somewhere else.

Nycaloth (Expanded)

Monster Manual, pg. 229

Large Fiend (Yugoloth)

Neutral Evil

CR 9 (XP 5,000)

AC 18

Initiative +4 (14)

HP 152 (16d10 + 64)

Speed 40 ft.; Fly 60 ft.

PB +4

		MOD	SAVE				MOD	SAVE
STR	20	+5	+5		INT	12	+1	+1
DEX	11	0	0		WIS	10	0	0
CON	19	+4	+4		CHA	15	+2	+2

Skills

Athletics* (P) +9

Intimidation* (P) +6

Perception (P) +4

Stealth (P) +4

Resistances

Cold; Fire; Lightning; Bludgeoning, Piercing, and Slashing from nonmagical attacks

Immunities

Acid; Poison; Poisoned

Senses

Blindsight 60 ft.

Darkvision 60 ft.

Passive Perception 14

Traits

Magic Weapons

The Nycaloth's weapon attacks are magical.

Four Arms

The Nycaloth cannot make more than two Great Axe attacks as part of its Multi-attack regardless of the number of free arms.

However, the Nycaloth can grapple up to two creatures simultaneously, one with each of two arms and still make its two Great Axe attacks with its remaining free arms. This effectively allows the Nycaloth to maintain two grapples simultaneously without losing offensive actions. This is a meaningful power upgrade over the base creature.

Coward's Calculus

When the Nycaloth is reduced to half his hit point maximum, his true priorities become apparent. On his next turn he must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or use his movement and bonus action to teleport as far from the nearest enemy as possible.

On a failed save he still takes his action normally but repositions. He remains in the encounter fighting from range until reduced to one quarter HP, at which point Stand Down becomes available.

Magic Resistance

The Nycaloth has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Actions

Multi-attack

The Nycaloth makes two Great Axe attacks. He can replace one attack with one use of Teleport.

Great Axe

Melee Attack Roll: +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 18 (2d12 + 5) slashing damage. When the Nycaloth hits the same target with two or more Great Axe attacks within one round (including attacks from the Axe Strike legendary action), the target must succeed on a DC 17 Strength saving throw or be knocked Prone.

Teleport

The Nycaloth magically teleports up to 60 feet to an unoccupied space it can see. If used as part of Multi-attack, it can teleport before or after making its remaining attacks.

Spellcasting

The Nycaloth casts one of the following spells using Charisma as the spellcasting ability (spell save DC 14, spell attack +6) requiring no material components:

- At will: **darkness, detect magic, dispel magic, mage hand**
- 1/day each: **blur, dimension door, fear, mirror image**

Bonus Actions

Tactical Withdrawal

The Nycaloth teleports up to 30 feet to an unoccupied space it can see. This does not consume its Teleport action. It can use this bonus action only if it has taken damage this round.

Forward, Soldiers

The Nycaloth orders one Merregon within 60 feet who can see and hear him to immediately move up to its speed and make one attack against a target of the Nycaloth's choice. The Merregon uses its reaction for this movement and attack. This is an order, not a request. The Merregon complies.

Reactions

Deflect Blame

When the Nycaloth would be hit by an attack, he can use his reaction to order a Merregon within 5 feet to take the hit instead. The Merregon becomes the target of the attack. If no Merregon is within 5 feet, this reaction cannot be used. The Nycaloth does not appear to notice the Merregon was hit.

Stand Down (1/Combat)

When the Nycaloth is reduced below one quarter of his hit point maximum, until the start of his next turn, one creature who can see him may use its reaction to make a DC 15 Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion) check. On a success, the Nycaloth immediately disengages, orders his Merregons to stand down, and withdraws from the combat. He will cite a contractual clause, a scheduling conflict, or a prior engagement. He will not cite fear, but he will never be seen or heard from again. On a failure, he begrudgingly fights on.

Legendary Actions

The Nycaloth can take 2 legendary actions per round, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Spent legendary actions are recovered at the start of his turn.

Reposition (1 Action)

The Nycaloth uses Tactical Withdrawal without needing to have taken damage this round.

Axe Strike (2 Actions)

The Nycaloth makes one Great Axe attack.

Merregon Contingent

The Nycaloth enters combat with 4 Merregons positioned as a forward line between him and the party. He stays behind them, directing from range, for as long as possible.

These Merregons follow his orders mechanically and without hesitation. They do not have opinions about the fight. They do not have survival instincts beyond their contractual obligations. When the Nycaloth uses Deflect Blame or Forward, Soldiers, they comply immediately and without expression.

If the Nycaloth is successfully bribed or uses Stand Down, the Merregons stand down with him. Their contract runs through him. When he leaves, their obligation to this particular engagement leaves with him.

THE YAGNOLOTH DIPLOMAT **Minister of Foreign Relations**



Satirical Basis: Marco Rubio

Lair: The Diplomatic Corps. A suite of offices filled with treaties and agreements that were never honored from places that no longer return his correspondence.

Personality: Performs legitimacy with commitment. He is obsequious to superiors, duplicitous to equals, and contemptuous of everyone. He has a gift for saying nothing in the most complicated way possible.

Weakness: His performance collapses under direct pressure. What remains is a simple yugoloth that serves whoever is currently winning.

Special: Obviously, he is not actually a diplomat. He is just a yugoloth who learned that diplomacy can be a better survival strategy than fighting. And he has been coasting on reputation ever since.

The first thing to note is that he is Large. The second thing, which registers a moment later and does not leave, is the arm. His left arm is normal size for a Yugoloth, which is to say it ends in a hand that could close around a skull without difficulty. His right arm is roughly the size of a human child's. It is fully functional. It holds documents. It pours wine. It gestures during negotiations with the precise control of a limb that has spent decades compensating for the attention it draws.

He keeps both arms visible during meetings. He does not hide the small one. He has never explained it, never referenced it, and never acknowledged that anyone else has noticed it. Diplomatic protocol is, apparently, very clear on this point.

He represents the regime to the outside world, which means he spends most of his time explaining how things that happened did not actually happen and why agreements that were made were not actually binding. He is very good at this and yet at the same time has never once produced an actual result.

He does not believe in the regime or really anything with any sort of conviction. He serves because serving gives him a title, a budget, and access. Access is the only currency a Yugoloth like him needs.

When the resistance begins dismantling the power structure, he does not panic. He has been watching the winds shift for months and doing the math. What he needs is a conversation with someone credible enough to negotiate with. He will perform outrage at the suggestion that he would consider any arrangement other than total loyalty to the Goristro. He will then immediately consider every arrangement available to him.

He can be turned. He can provide intelligence on regime entanglements, name names, or provide documentation of diplomatic agreements that the resistance could certainly use. But he is still a Yugoloth. There will always be a cost. The Yagnoloth encounter is won through negotiation or through combat, but the negotiation outcome is substantially more valuable. A party that triggers Restructured Arrangement gets active intelligence that accelerates the rest of the campaign.

Note that the small arm should be present and visible from the first moment of the encounter. But do not explain it. If the party asks about it, he acknowledges it briefly and redirects. The small arm, not the large one, is the thing that makes every diplomatic exchange slightly wrong in a way that cannot be successfully articulated. Everyone in the room is pretending they have not seen it. He knows they have seen it. This has been going on for his entire career and everyone involved has decided to continue indefinitely.

Yagnoloth (Modified)

Monsters of the Multiverse, pg. 268

Large Fiend (Yugoloth)

Neutral Evil

CR 11 (XP 7,200)

AC 17

HP 147 (14d10 + 70)

Initiative +3 (13)

Speed 40 ft.

PB +4

		MOD	SAVE				MOD	SAVE
STR	19	+4	+4		INT	16	+3	+7
DEX	14	+2	+2		WIS	15	+2	+6
CON	21	+5	+9		CHA	18	+4	+8

Skills

Deception* (E) +12

Insight (P) +6

Intimidation* (P) +8

Perception (P) +6

Persuasion* (P) +12

Resistances

Cold; Fire; Lightning; Bludgeoning, Piercing, and Slashing from nonmagical attacks

Immunities

Acid; Poison; Poisoned

Senses

Blindsight 60 ft.

Darkvision 60 ft.

Passive Perception 16

Traits

Magic Weapons

The Yagnoloth's weapon attacks are magical.

Performed Legitimacy

While the Yagnoloth is in the Diplomatic Corps or any location formally designated as a diplomatic site, attack rolls against him have disadvantage until he takes a hostile action. Additionally, creatures that openly assert that his diplomatic authority is a mere performance must succeed on a DC 16 Insight check to do so convincingly. On a failure, the Yagnoloth's composure holds and he gains advantage on his next Charisma check against that creature. On a success, Performed Legitimacy ends for the remainder of the encounter.

Survival Arithmetic

The Yagnoloth is always calculating. At the start of combat, and again each time he takes 30 or more cumulative damage, he reassesses. When reduced to half his hit point maximum, he must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or trigger Restructured Arrangement (see Reactions). A failed save does not make him afraid, it makes him pragmatic.

Diplomatic Immunity

While Performed Legitimacy is active, the Yagnoloth cannot be targeted by opportunity attacks.

Magic Resistance

The Yagnoloth has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Actions

Multi-attack

The Yagnoloth makes one Massive Arm attack and one Electrifying Touch attack, or uses Leverage Extraction in place of one attack.

Massive Arm (large arm)

Melee Attack Roll: +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target.

Hit: 20 (3d10+4) bludgeoning damage.

Electrifying Touch (small arm)

Melee Attack Roll: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature.

Hit: 26 (4d10+4) lightning damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 17 Constitution saving throw or be Incapacitated until the end of its next turn.

The Yagnoloth deploys this with a visible reluctance but zero apology. He describes it as "a contingency measure."

Leverage Extraction

Melee Attack Roll: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature.

Hit: 18 (4d8) necrotic damage, and the Yagnoloth regains hit points equal to the damage dealt. The target must succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw or reveal one piece of information about themselves, their allies, or their objectives. It must be true and something that they would prefer to keep private. The revealed information is at the DM's discretion and should be something with operational significance.

This should be used sparingly and with intent. The information revealed should always be something that creates a complication or a tension for the party, not just a random fact. This is not a debriefing mechanism, it is an attempt to exploit cracks in the party.

Spellcasting

The Yagnoloth casts one of the following spells using Charisma as the spellcasting ability (spell save DC 16, spell attack +8) requiring no material components:

- At will: **darkness**, **detect thoughts**, **invisibility** (self only)
- 3/day each: **charm person**, **suggestion**
- 1/day each: **mass suggestion**

Bonus Actions

Tactical Repositioning

The Yagnoloth moves up to half its speed without provoking opportunity attacks.

Summon Yugoloth (1/Day)

The Yagnoloth attempts to summon a Mezzoloth with a 50% chance of success. A summoned Mezzoloth appears in an unoccupied space within 60 feet of the Yagnoloth. This is simply "a colleague who happened to be available."

Reactions

Not the Negotiated Outcome

When the Yagnoloth takes damage of 20 or more from a single attack, he can use his reaction to immediately cast darkness centered on himself and move up to his full speed. This movement does not provoke opportunity attacks. He does this without breaking his composure.

Restructured Arrangement

When Survival Arithmetic triggers and the Yagnoloth fails his saving throw, he immediately takes the following actions in order:

- He uses Tactical Repositioning to move to the center of the room;
- He raises both hands in a gesture of diplomatic openness;
- He states clearly that he has always admired the resistance's commitment to Orenthis and has been looking for the appropriate moment to formalize that admiration.

He then offers the party one of the following, their choice, in exchange for safe passage and non-disclosure:

- The names of three external entities currently held at bay through regime agreements, and the specific leverage being used against them
- A sealed diplomatic pouch containing correspondence between the Goristro and a foreign entity that constitutes evidence of crimes the regime has committed beyond Orenthis's borders
- His personal assessment, written, signed, and notarized, indicating which regime lieutenants have been genuinely loyal and which are not

A creature can make a DC 16 Insight check to determine whether his offer is genuine. It is. He is not brave enough to bluff when the math no longer supports it.

THE HIEROPHANT OF BLIND FAITH

High Priest of the New Order



Satirical Basis: Pam Bondi

Lair: The Cathedral of Gold. A desecrated temple where the original divine iconography has been replaced with golden idols bearing the Goristro's face.

Personality: Fanatical, self-righteous, and utterly convinced of her own righteousness. She does not believe she is serving evil. Evil is a word used by those who are on the losing side.

Weakness: Clerics and paladins carry the true divine authority that she tries to counterfeit. In their presence, the gap between genuine faith and performed devotion is mechanically real.

Special: Her divine magic is genuine. It has been twisted to dark purposes, but the power behind it is real, which makes her more dangerous than a simple fraud and more tragic than a simple villain.

A cultist who has done something far more dangerous than fake religious conviction. She has built a religion instead. The Hierophant took the existing religious infrastructure of Orenthis, its temples, its clergy, its centuries of accumulated trust, and redirected it toward worship of the Goristro as a divine figure. She did not replace the old faith. She colonized it.

The ceremonies she leads are rituals of loyalty dressed in the language of devotion. The heresies she castigates are acts of dissent dressed in the language of sin. Her congregation genuinely believes. That is what makes them far more dangerous than mercenaries: mercenaries stop when they are not being paid. True believers stop only when they are stopped.

She has no doubts. This is not strength. It is a scar closed over some past pain. Somewhere beneath the absolute certainty is a person who made a choice a long time ago and has been building an architecture of faith to fit around that choice ever since. She will fight to the last breath. She will die certain she was right.

Cultist Hierophant (Modified)

Monster Manual, pg. 85

Medium Humanoid (Any)

Lawful Evil*

CR 12 (XP 8,400)*

AC 16

Initiative +8 (18)

HP 161 (19d8 + 76)*

Speed 30 ft.

PB +4

		MOD	SAVE				MOD	SAVE
STR	14	+2	+2		INT	13	+1	+1
DEX	18	+4	+4		WIS	16	+3	+7
CON	18	+4	+4		CHA	20	+5	+9

Skills

Deception* (P) +9

Insight* (P) +7

Intimidation* (P) +9

Perception (P) +7

Persuasion (P) +9

Religion (P) +5

Resistances

Radiant; Necrotic

Immunities

Frightened; Charmed

Senses

Passive Perception 17

Traits

Dark Devotion

The Hierophant cannot be Frightened or Charmed. She is immune to any spell or effect that would alter her beliefs, compel her to act against the Goristro, or reveal her actions as evil to herself. She genuinely does not experience what she does as wrong.

False Divinity

The Hierophant's spells function as divine magic and bypass effects that specifically block arcane magic. However, her divine connection is corrupted. Spells she casts that would normally heal instead deal necrotic damage to unintended targets (see Twisted Blessing).

Exposed Faith

Characters who carry genuine divine authority (either through the Cleric or Paladin class features or through a character background, oath, or established devotion that the DM deems as sincere)

destabilize the Hierophant's false divinity.

Against such characters, the Hierophant has disadvantage on attack rolls and her spell save DC is reduced by 3 (to DC 14). When such a character succeeds on a saving throw against one of her spells, the Hierophant takes 7 (2d6) radiant damage as genuine divine power recoils against her corruption.

Note that against parties with no divine characters, consider having one resistance NPC (Sister Kara, or a freed cleric) be present in this encounter specifically to activate this mechanic. Facing the Hierophant without Exposed Faith is a significantly harder fight.

Martyr's Resolve

When the Hierophant is reduced to half her hit point maximum, she immediately recharges her most recently used spell slot of 3rd level or lower and has advantage on all saving throws until the end of her next turn.

This trait triggers once per combat.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day)

If the Hierophant fails a saving throw, she can choose to succeed instead.

Actions

Multi-attack

The Hierophant makes three attacks, using Pact Blade or Radiant Ray in any combination.

Pact Blade

Melee Attack Roll: +9, reach 5 ft.

Hit: 12 (2d6+5) slashing plus 18 (4d8) radiant damage.

Radiant Ray

Ranged Attack Roll: +9, range 120 ft.

Hit: 31 (4d12+5) radiant damage.

Twisted Blessing

The Hierophant targets one creature within 30 feet and floods them with corrupted divine energy. The target must succeed on a DC 17 Charisma saving throw or take 22 (4d10) necrotic damage and be Incapacitated until the end of their next turn as false divine light overwhelms their senses. On a success, the creature takes half damage and is not Incapacitated. If cast on a willing creature who serves the Goristro, this ability heals 22 HP instead.

Spellcasting

The Hierophant casts one of the following spells using Charisma as the spellcasting ability (spell save DC 17, spell attack +9) requiring no material components:

- At will: **guidance, light, sacred flame, thaumaturgy**
- 3/day each: **blindness/deafness, hold person, spirit guardians** (manifests as golden idols bearing the Goristro's face)
- 2/day each: **dispel magic, mass cure wounds**
- 1/day each: **divine word, flame strike, mass suggestion, symbol** (hopelessness)

Bonus Actions

Rally the Faithful

The Hierophant raises her holy symbol and calls to her congregation. One Cultist Fanatic within 60 feet who can see and hear her immediately moves up to its speed toward the nearest enemy and makes one attack.

Condemn

The Hierophant points at one creature within 60 feet and declares them a heretic. Until the start of her next turn, all creatures allied with the Hierophant have advantage on attack rolls against the condemned creature.

Reactions

Righteous Deflection

When a creature makes an attack roll against the Hierophant, she can use her reaction before the result is known to interpose her holy symbol and the attacker must succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw or take 11 (2d10) radiant damage and have disadvantage on their attack roll applied retroactively to the triggering attack (so if already rolled, roll a second d20 to create disadvantage and take the lower result).

Unshakeable

When a spell or ability would impose the Stunned condition on the Hierophant, or when an effect would bypass her Dark Devotion immunity to impose Frightened or Charmed through a non-standard mechanism, she can use her reaction to automatically succeed on the saving throw. Her faith, however corrupted, is absolute.

Legendary Actions

The Hierophant can take 2 legendary actions per round, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Spent legendary actions are recovered at the start of her turn.

Condemn (1 Action)

The Hierophant uses her Condemn bonus action without expending her bonus action.

Radiant Ray (1 Action)

The Hierophant makes one Radiant Ray attack.

Sermon (2 Actions)

The Hierophant delivers a brief, burning declaration of faith. Each creature within 30 feet that can hear her must succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw or be Frightened of her until the end of their next turn. Creatures that are immune to Frightened are instead Incapacitated until the end of their next turn as the sheer conviction behind her words overrides their defenses momentarily. True clerics and paladins automatically succeed on this saving throw and instead have advantage on their next attack roll against her.

THE JUSTICIARS OF CORRUPTED COURT The High Court of Orenthis



Satirical Basis: SCOTUS

Lair: The Supreme Hall. A marble courthouse defiled with golden idols, where the scales of justice have been weighted with coins.

Personality: Fractured and argumentative. The six corrupted heads bicker constantly about procedure while agreeing completely on outcome. The three gagged heads strain against their bindings in silence.

Weakness: The corruption is the source of the Hydra's power. Destroy the six corrupted heads and the regeneration fails. Free the three gagged heads and the court itself turns against the regime.

Special: Hydra regeneration driven by corruption (not biology). Freeing gagged heads weakens the lair and helps restore balance.

Once the sacred guardian of Orenthian law, the Nine-Headed Hydra of the High Court was the living embodiment of legal legitimacy: ancient, impartial, and bound by oaths older than the regime.

The Goristro did not destroy the court. He corrupted it. Six heads were systematically compromised through bribery, blackmail, and infernal contracts until they served the regime's interests absolutely. The three heads that refused were gagged, bound, and left in place as a symbol: the court still exists, the regime would say. It simply interprets the law correctly now.

Hydra (Custom)

Monster Manual, pg. 175

Gargantuan* Monstrosity

Lawful Evil* (corrupted from Lawful Neutral)

CR 13 (XP 10,000)*

AC 15

Initiative +4 (14)

HP See Head Pools below

Speed 40 ft.; Swim 40 ft.

PB +4*

		MOD	SAVE			MOD	SAVE
STR	20	+5	+5		INT	10*	0
DEX	12	+1	+1		WIS	10	0
CON	20	+5	+9*		CHA	7	-2

Skills

Perception* (E) +8

Immunities

Frightened; Charmed; Stunned

Senses

Darkvision 60 ft.

Passive Perception* 18

Traits

Nine Heads

The Hydra has nine heads divided into two pools: six Corrupted Heads and three Gagged Heads. Each pool has its own hit points. The Hydra cannot be killed while any Corrupted Head remains active.

The Hydra does not die when the Gagged Heads reach 0 HP; instead they are freed.

Regime Compendium

Note on Combat Targeting:

Attacks against an individual head (AC 15, 35 HP) will count against the 210 HP pool, but has the added potential to destroy that head specifically. A destroyed head is removed from play, and the Hydra can no longer use that head's Multi-attack slot and number of Reactive Heads reactions is reduced by one.

Attacks against the shared Corrupted Head Pool represent unfocused damage across the Hydra's corrupted aspect. This means the Multi-attack and Reactive Heads reactions remain at 6 until the pool reaches 0 HP, at which point all corrupted heads collapse simultaneously.

Either approach reduces from the same shared pool HP.

Corrupted Head Pool

The six Corrupted Heads share a pool of 210 HP (the Hydra's effective combat HP). When this pool reaches 0, the corruption fails, regeneration stops, and the Hydra collapses. Each Corrupted Head can be targeted individually (AC 15, 35 HP each) or the party can attack the shared pool directly.

Gagged Head Pool

The three Gagged Heads share a pool of 60 HP (20 HP each, AC 12). They are bound and do not attack. Reducing a Gagged Head to 0 HP does not destroy it; it frees it. The Gagged Heads only take damage from attacks or effects that specifically target them. They are immune to area of effect damage. They cannot be targeted by the Hydra's own attacks or lair actions.

Corrupted Regeneration

At the start of each of the Hydra's turns, if at least one Corrupted Head remains active, it regains 18 HP. This regeneration fails if the Hydra took fire damage since its last turn (irrespective of whether the fire damage was dealt to the pool or to a specific head).

If the party lacks fire damage, the DM may designate Radiant damage or the use of Holy Water as the suppression type before combat to suit the party composition.

Each Gagged Head that has been freed reduces the regeneration by 6 HP. Thus, freeing all three eliminates the regeneration entirely.

Reactive Heads

The Hydra has one reaction per active Corrupted Head per round. These reactions can be used for Opportunity Attacks or for the Hydra's Overrule ability. However, the Overrule ability can still only be used once per round. To speed play, the DM may limit the total number of reactions taken to three per round regardless of the head count.

Wakeful

When some of the Hydra's heads are asleep, others are awake meaning the Hydra cannot be surprised.

Actions

Multi-attack

The Hydra makes one attack for each active Corrupted Head, resulting in a maximum of six Bite attacks. As Corrupted Heads are destroyed, the number of attacks decreases.

Corrupted Bite

Melee Attack Roll: +9 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target.

Hit: 10 (1d10 + 5) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) necrotic damage. A creature hit must succeed on a DC 17 Constitution saving throw or have disadvantage on saving throws against the Hydra's abilities until the end of their next turn as the weight of corrupted authority presses down on them.

Bonus Actions

Procedural Delay

The Hydra selects one creature within 60 feet. That creature must succeed on a DC 16 Intelligence saving throw or be unable to take reactions until the start of its next turn as bureaucratic obstruction manifests as a physical force.

Shadow Docket

The Hydra invokes an unexplained legal ruling. One creature within 30 feet that has already been hit by a Bite attack this round must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or take an additional 14 (4d6) necrotic damage as the ruling compounds against them.

Reactions

Opportunity Bite

When a creature within 10 feet moves away from the Hydra, it can use its reaction to make one Bite attack against that creature. The Hydra gains additional reactions from Reactive Heads. However to speed play, the DM may choose to limit Reactive Heads to two or three opportunity attacks per round maximum regardless of active head count.

Overrule

When a creature within 60 feet casts a spell of 2nd level or lower, the Hydra can use its reaction to force that creature to make a DC 16 Intelligence saving throw. On a failure, the spell fails and the spell slot is expended. On a success, the spell proceeds normally. This reaction can only be used once per round.

Legendary Actions

The Hydra can take 3 legendary actions per round, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Spent legendary actions are recovered at the start of its turn.

Lunge (1 Action)

The Hydra moves up to 15 feet without provoking opportunity attacks.

Snap (2 Actions)

The Hydra makes one Bite attack.

Recess (2 Actions)

The Hydra selects one creature within 60 feet. That creature must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or legal injunctions manifest physically around them causing them to be Restrained until the end of their next turn.

Contempt of Court (3 Actions)

Each creature within 30 feet of the Hydra must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or take 22 (4d10) psychic damage and be Stunned until initiative count 20 of the next round as the full corrupted weight of the court's authority crashes down on them. On a success a creature takes half damage and is not Stunned.

Lair Actions

On initiative count 20 (losing ties), the Hydra can take one of the following lair actions while within the Supreme Hall. It cannot use the same lair action two rounds in a row. Each lair action marked with an asterisk (*) is permanently disabled when the corresponding Gagged Head is freed.

Scales of Injustice

The golden scales in the hall tip violently. Each creature that is not allied with the Hydra must succeed on a DC 16 Strength saving throw or be pushed 15 feet in a direction of the Hydra's choice and knocked Prone. On a success, the creature is pushed 5 feet and is not knocked Prone.

Golden Idols

The golden idols lining the hall pulse with corrupted divine energy. Each creature within 30 feet that is not allied with the Hydra must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or be Frightened of the Hydra until initiative count 20 of the next round.

Cite Precedent

The Hydra cites corrupted precedent against one creature within 60 feet. That creature must succeed on a DC 16 Intelligence saving throw or be unable to benefit from advantage on any roll until initiative count 20 of the next round. Existing advantage is stripped; new advantage cannot be gained.

Marble Barrier

A section of courthouse floor erupts upward in a 5-foot-wide, 10-foot-tall wall of marble up to 20 feet long in a location the Hydra can see. The wall lasts until initiative count 20 of the next round. It provides three-quarters cover and counts as difficult terrain to climb or move through.

Inadmissible

The Hydra selects one creature within 60 feet. That creature cannot regain hit points until initiative count 20 of the next round as the court rules their recovery inadmissible.

Regional Effects

While the Justiciars remain corrupted and occupy the Supreme Hall, the following effects alter the city:

The Record is Sealed

Divination spells cast within 1 mile of the Supreme Hall that seek information about the regime's crimes, the Goristro's guilt, or the corruption of the court return no information. The magic finds no result.

The Ruling Stands

All Merregon contracts and regime legal instruments within 10 miles of the Supreme Hall are considered valid and enforceable by supernatural compulsion. Merregons within this range have advantage on saving throws against effects that would compel them to break their contracts.

Exhausting Effect

Creatures within 1 mile of the Supreme Hall that attempt to publicly resist the regime must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw each hour or gain one level of exhaustion from the psychic weight of institutional authority pressing against their defiance.

Once the court is restored, all three regional effects end permanently. Additionally, all Merregon contracts within 10 miles are immediately declared void by the restored court and all Merregons within range must succeed on a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw or immediately cease hostilities, bound by the same legal authority that previously compelled their service.

The Inner Circle

THE CHANGELING WARLOCK Second-in-Command of Orenthis



Satirical Basis: JD Vance

Lair: Anywhere and everywhere.

Personality: He is empty, adaptable, ambitious, patient, and utterly amoral.

Weakness: He has no core identity and can be manipulated if the party discovers what drives him.

Special: There is no true form. He has worn too many faces for too long to remember which one was first.

A shapeshifter consumed by hollow ambition. The Changeling is the most dangerous member of the regime not because of raw power, but because of utter ruthlessness and a complete absence of principle. He mirrors whoever he

speaks to while providing endless empty promises.

Throughout his service he has accumulated additional power by absorbing dark pacts, stealing magical secrets, and making his own infernal deals independent of the Goristro. He has been playing a long game: positioning himself as indispensable to the resistance, and waiting for the Goristro to weaken so he can step into the vacuum at the opportune moment.

When he reveals himself, he does not do so with anger, but with patience. He has been waiting for this moment longer than the party has been around.

Warlock of the Fiend (Modified)

Monsters of the Multiverse, pg. 255

Medium Humanoid (Shapeshifter)

Neutral Evil

CR 14 (XP 11,500)*

AC 13 (16 with **mage armor**)

Initiative +3 (13)

HP 143 (22d8 + 44)*

Speed 30 ft.

PB +4*

		MOD	SAVE				MOD	SAVE
STR	10	0	0		INT	14*	+2	+2
DEX	16	+3	+3		WIS	12	+1	+5
CON	15	+2	+2		CHA	20*	+5	+9

Skills

Arcana (P) +6

Deception (E) +13

Insight (P) +5

Perception (P) +5

Persuasion (E) +13

Resistances

Psychic

Immunities

Charmed

Senses

Darkvision 60 ft.

Passive Perception 15

Traits

Dark One's Own Luck

When the Changeling makes an ability check or saving throw, he can add a d10 to the roll after the roll is made but before any effects occur.

Recharges after a Short or Long Rest

Hollow Mirror

The Changeling has advantage on Deception and Persuasion checks against any creature that has previously received his assistance. This includes any party member who accepted his help.

Magic Resistance

The Changeling has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day)

If the Changeling fails a saving throw, he can choose to succeed instead.

Actions

Multi-attack

The Changeling makes two Pact Blade attacks and casts one at-will (action) spell, or uses Assume Identity in place of one attack.

Pact Blade (Charisma)

Melee Attack Roll: +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 8 (1d6 + 5) slashing damage plus 14 (4d6) psychic damage.

Assume Identity

The Changeling takes on the appearance of a creature the target knows and trusts (a party member, an ally, or a loved one). One creature within 30 feet must succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw or be Charmed until the end of their next turn. While the Charmed condition is active, the creature is not compelled to role-play the relationship, a player who sees through the deception in-character may state they are suppressing normal behavior (no check required). The mechanical prohibition on attacking is binding regardless.

Greenfire

Green flame explodes in a 10-foot-radius sphere centered on a point within 120 feet. Each creature in the area must make a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw, taking 22 (4d10) fire damage and 16 (3d10) necrotic damage on a failed save, or half on a success.

Spellcasting

The Changeling casts one of the following spells using Charisma as the spellcasting ability (spell save DC 17, spell attack +9) requiring no material components:

- At will: **alter self**, **mage armor**, **mage hand**, **minor illusion**, **misty step** (bonus action), **prestidigitation**
- 3/day each: **suggestion**, **mirror image**, **hypnotic pattern**
- 1/day each: **dominate person**, **banishment**, **plane shift** (self only)

Bonus Actions

Shapeshift

The Changeling alters his physical appearance to look like any Medium humanoid he has observed. His statistics remain the same in any form. Equipment he carries does not change. He reverts to his default appearance (a nondescript, forgettable face that belongs to no one) if he dies. A creature that interacts with him can attempt DC 18 Insight to detect that something is subtly wrong; on a success, they sense the performance but cannot identify the performer.

Vanish

The Changeling takes the Hide action, even in plain sight, immediately after using Assume Identity successfully. He becomes Invisible until the start of his next turn or until he attacks.

Reactions

Countershape

When a creature attempts to grapple or restrain the Changeling, he can use his reaction to shift form and automatically escape, moving up to 15 feet without provoking opportunity attacks.

Fiendish Rebuke (3/Day)

In response to being damaged by a visible creature within 60 feet, the Changeling forces that creature to make a DC 17 Constitution saving throw, taking 33 (6d10) necrotic damage on a failed save, or half on a success.

Legendary Actions

The Changeling can take 3 legendary actions per round, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time, and only at the end of another creature's turn. Spent legendary actions are recovered at the start of his turn.

Shift (1 Action)

The Changeling uses Shapeshift and moves up to half his speed without provoking opportunity attacks.

Whisper (1 Action)

One creature within 60 feet that can hear the Changeling must succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw or use its reaction to move up to its speed toward or away from a target of the Changeling's choice.

Pact Strike (2 Actions)

The Changeling makes one Pact Blade attack.

Unravel (3 Actions)

The Changeling targets one creature within 30 feet that is Charmed, Frightened, or currently under one of his spells. That creature must succeed on a DC 17 Charisma saving throw or become Confused (as the **confusion** spell) until the end of its next turn.

THE RAKSHASA ILLUSIONIST Governor of Border Security



Satirical Basis: Kristi Noem

Lair: The Border Fortress. A sprawling complex of walls, cages, and processing yards designed not only to contain people but to break them. The cruelty is the point.

Personality: Unmatched cruelty delivered with a smile. She delights in suffering and has spent decades refining the performance of legitimacy that conceals it.

Weakness: Vulnerable to piercing weapons wielded by blessed creatures; bound by ancient curses that predate the regime and will outlast it.

Special: She has heard every argument, every plea, every threat. None of them have ever worked.

A horse-headed fiend of lies and cruelty who has been waiting for this moment for longer than anyone in Orenthis has been alive. The Rakshasa infiltrated Orenthis society long before the Goristro's rise, cultivating relationships, accumulating favors, and positioning herself as an indispensable administrator. When the regime came to power she did not need to be recruited. She was already there.

She rules the borderlands with the particular savagery of someone who has been given institutional permission to be exactly who she always was. The separation of families, the detention quotas, the processing criteria developed in collaboration with the Archmage: all of it flows through her office with her signature on it. She does not merely follow orders. She escalates them.

She will not be surprised. She will not be frightened. She will be, until the very end, composed.

Rakshasa (Modified)

Monster Manual, pg. 253

Medium Fiend

Lawful Evil

CR 15 (XP 13,000)*

AC 17

Initiative +8 (18)

HP 221 (26d8 + 104)

Speed 40 ft.

PB +5

		MOD	SAVE			MOD	SAVE
STR	14	+2	+2		INT	13	+1
DEX	17	+3	+3		WIS	16	+3
CON	18	+4	+4		CHA	20	+5

Skills

Deception (P) +10

Insight (P) +8

Intimidation* (P) +10

Perception (P) +8

Vulnerabilities

Piercing damage from weapons wielded by creatures under the effect of **bless**.

Immunities

Charmed; Frightened; Bludgeoning, Piercing, and Slashing from nonmagical attacks;

Senses

Truesight 60 ft.

Passive Perception 18

Traits

Facade of Legitimacy

While in her humanoid disguise, the Rakshasa has advantage on all Charisma checks.

Creatures that see through her disguise (via **true sight** or similar) must succeed on a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw or be Frightened of her until the end of their next turn.

Cruel Efficiency

When the Rakshasa reduces a creature to 0 hit points, she regains 10 hit points and all creatures within 30 feet who can see her must succeed on a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw or be Frightened of her until the end of their next turn.

Greater Magic Resistance

The Rakshasa automatically succeeds on saving throws against spells and other magical effects, and the attack rolls of spells automatically miss it. Without the Rakshasa's permission, no spell can observe the Rakshasa remotely or detect its thoughts, creature type, or alignment.

Note: This trait does not affect weapon attacks, including weapon attacks made by creatures who are under **bless**. Because **bless** is cast on party members, and is not cast at the Rakshasa, it is not blocked.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day)

If the Rakshasa fails a saving throw, she can choose to succeed instead.

Actions

Multi-attack

The Rakshasa makes two Claw attacks and uses Spellcasting once, or makes three Claw attacks.

Claw

Melee Attack Roll: +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 12 (2d6 + 5) slashing damage plus 16 (3d10) psychic damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw or be Cursed. While Cursed this way, the creature has disadvantage on attack

rolls against the Rakshasa. The curse lasts until removed by **remove curse** or similar magic.

Spellcasting

The Rakshasa casts one of the following spells using Charisma as the spellcasting ability (spell save DC 18, spell attack +10) requiring no material components:

- At will: **detect magic, detect thoughts, disguise self, mage hand, minor illusion**
- 3/day each: **charm person, dominate person, suggestion**
- 1/day each: **fly, invisibility, major image, plane shift**

Bonus Actions

Processed

The Rakshasa designates one creature she can see within 60 feet as a "processed subject." That creature has disadvantage on saving throws against the Rakshasa's spells and abilities until the start of her next turn.

Reactions

Bureaucratic Shield

When the Rakshasa would be hit by an attack, she can use her reaction to interpose a Merregon or other creature under her command within 5 feet of her. That creature becomes the target of the attack instead. If no such creature is available, this reaction cannot be used.

Legendary Actions

The Rakshasa can take 3 legendary actions per round, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time, and only at the end of another creature's turn. Spent legendary actions are recovered at the start of her turn.

Reposition (1 Action)

The Rakshasa moves up to half her speed without provoking opportunity attacks.

Claw (2 Actions)

The Rakshasa makes one Claw attack.

Detain (2 Actions)

The Rakshasa targets one creature within 60 feet. That creature must succeed on a DC 18 Charisma saving throw or be Restrained until the end of their next turn as spectral chains of bureaucratic authority snap into place around them.

Cruel Example (3 Actions)

The Rakshasa selects one creature within 5 feet that is at 0 hit points and makes a Claw attack against it automatically (no roll needed). Every conscious creature within 60 feet who can see this must succeed on a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw or be Frightened of the Rakshasa for 1 minute. A Frightened creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on a success.

Lair Actions

On initiative count 20 (losing ties), the Rakshasa can take one of the following lair actions while within the Border Fortress. She cannot use the same lair action two rounds in a row.

Lock Down

Iron portcullises and reinforced doors slam shut throughout the fortress. Each doorway and passage within 60 feet of the Rakshasa is sealed until initiative count 20 of the next round. Sealed doors can be forced open with a DC 20 Strength check (one action) or destroyed (AC 19, 30 HP).

The Cages Rattle

The screams of former prisoners echo through the fortress walls. Each creature that is not a fiend or under the Rakshasa's command must succeed on a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw or take 18 (4d8) psychic damage and have disadvantage on their next attack roll or ability check as the weight of what happened here presses down on them.

Merregon Response

The Rakshasa calls for enforcement. One Merregon (full HP) enters the combat from the nearest available entrance at the start of the next round. This lair action cannot be used if all garrison Merregons have already been defeated.

The Yard

The ground within a 20-foot-square area the Rakshasa can see becomes difficult terrain as spectral cage bars rise from the floor. Any creature that starts its turn in this area must succeed on a DC 18 Strength saving throw or be Restrained until the start of its next turn.

Regional Effects

While the Rakshasa governs the Border Fortress and its surrounding region, the following effects alter the borderlands:

Papers Please

Within 5 miles of the fortress, all travel feels watched. Creatures without official documentation (real or forged) have disadvantage on Charisma checks made to pass through checkpoints or interact with regime-aligned NPCs.

Separated

Families and bonded companions traveling within 5 miles of the fortress feel a persistent unease when separated by more than 30 feet. Creatures more than 30 feet from any creature they have the Charmed condition toward must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw each hour or gain one level of exhaustion from the psychic weight of enforced separation.

THE ARCHMAGE ARCHITECT Minister of Policy



Satirical Basis: Stephen Miller

Lair: The Heritage Institute. A tower filled with twisted revisionist history, where the shelves hold books that have been rewritten and maps with borders that never existed.

Personality: Cold, resentful, ideologically rigid, and utterly convinced of his own indispensability.

Weakness: Mortal and arrogant. He has never been in a fight he could not control, and he does not know how to lose.

Special: His research is magically persuasive. He does not merely argue that certain people deserve suffering. He makes you believe it against your will.

A mortal wizard corrupted by promises of power and sustained by ideology so rigid it has calcified into something resembling faith. The Archmage provides the intellectual justification for everything the regime does. The detention quotas, the classification systems, the "processing" criteria, all of it flows from his vision in precise memoranda that make atrocity sound like administration.

Project Provenance is his masterwork: a systematic program of magical experimentation on selected prisoners, designed to produce weapons, servants, and proof of his theories about the hierarchy of minds. He has been running it for three years. He considers it his most important contribution to Orenthis.

Archmage (Modified)

Monster Manual, pg. 199

Medium Humanoid (Wizard)

Lawful Evil*

CR 16 (XP 15,000)*

AC 17 (**mage armor**)

Initiative +2 (12)

HP 214 (33d8 + 66)*

Speed 30 ft.

PB +5

		MOD	SAVE			MOD	SAVE
STR	10	0	0		INT	22*	+6
DEX	14	+2	+2		WIS	15	+2
CON	14*	+2	+2		CHA	16	+3

Skills

Arcana (E) +16

Deception* (P) +8

History (P) +11

Perception (P) +7

Immunities

Psychic; Charmed

Senses

Passive Perception 17

Traits

Revised History

The Archmage has advantage on all Intelligence and Charisma checks made to convince creatures of false information. Creatures that fail a saving throw against his Rewrite ability have disadvantage on checks made to recall accurate information about the regime, its crimes, or the Archmage himself for 24 hours.

Institutional Knowledge

The Archmage cannot be surprised. He has modeled this encounter. At the start of combat, he knows the highest spell slot level available to each spellcasting creature within 60 feet of him.

Magic Resistance

The Archmage has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day)

If the Archmage fails a saving throw, he can choose to succeed instead.

Actions

Multi-attack

The Archmage makes three Arcane Burst attacks, or replaces one attack with Rewrite.

Arcane Burst

Melee Spell Attack: +11 to hit, reach 5 ft., Ranged Spell Attack: +11 to hit, range 150 ft. one target.

Hit: 32 (5d10 + 5) force damage.

Rewrite

The Archmage targets one creature he can see within 60 feet and floods its mind with magically falsified certainty. The target must succeed on a DC 19 Intelligence saving throw or become subject to one of the following effects of the Archmage's choice until the end of their next turn:

- **Doubt:** The creature cannot repeat the same type of action it took on its previous turn: If it used the Attack action, it cannot take the Attack action this turn. If it cast a spell, it cannot cast a spell this turn. If it used Dash, Dodge, Disengage, Help, Hide, Ready, or Use an Object, it cannot take that same action again this turn.
- **Compliance:** The creature is Charmed by the Archmage until the end of its next turn

and cannot target him with attacks or harmful abilities.

- **Revision:** The creature forgets one fact the Archmage chooses, limited to information established during the current encounter (a trap location scouted, a weakness identified, a name learned, etc.). The Archmage cannot remove class features, spell knowledge, or any information that the creature knew before entering this encounter. This memory returns after a long rest.

On a successful save, the creature takes 22 (4d10) psychic damage and is not subject to the effect. Recharges after a Short or Long Rest.

Spellcasting

The Archmage casts one of the following spells using Intelligence as the spellcasting ability (spell save DC 19, spell attack +11) requiring no material components:

- At will: **detect magic, detect thoughts, disguise self, invisibility, light, mage armor** (automatic; included in AC), **mage hand, prestidigitation**
- 2/day each: **fly, lightning bolt** (level 7), **misty step, wall of force**
- 1/day each: **cone of cold** (level 9), **mind blank** (auto-cast before combat), **scrying, teleport**

Bonus Actions

Methodical Retreat

When a creature moves within 5 feet of the Archmage, he can use his bonus action to move up to 15 feet away without provoking opportunity attacks. He cannot do this if he is Grappled or Restrained.

Reactions

Intellectual Contempt

When a creature within 60 feet succeeds on a saving throw against one of the Archmage's spells or abilities, he can use his reaction to force that creature to re-roll the saving throw, keeping the lower result. He can use this reaction once per creature per encounter.

Protective Magic (3/Day)

The Archmage casts **counterspell** or **shield** in response to the triggering spell or attack, using Intelligence as his spellcasting ability.

Legendary Actions

The Archmage can take 3 legendary actions per round, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time, and only at the end of another creature's turn. Spent legendary actions are recovered at the start of his turn.

Reposition (1 Action)

The Archmage moves up to half his speed without provoking opportunity attacks.

Arcane Burst (2 Actions)

The Archmage makes one Arcane Burst attack.

Suppress (2 Actions)

One creature within 60 feet that is concentrating on a spell must succeed on a DC 19 Constitution saving throw or lose concentration immediately.

Policy Memo (3 Actions)

The Archmage selects up to three creatures he can see within 60 feet. Each must succeed on a DC 19 Intelligence saving throw or take 16 (3d10) psychic damage and have disadvantage on all saving throws against the Archmage's abilities until the end of their next turn. On a success, a creature takes half damage and is not affected by the disadvantage.

Lair Actions

On initiative count 20 (losing ties), the Archmage can take one of the following lair actions while within the Heritage Institute. He cannot use the same lair action two rounds in a row.

Provenance Protocol

The Archmage activates a Project Provenance surveillance node within the Institute. One creature within 60 feet must succeed on a DC 19 Wisdom saving throw or have their true identity, origin, and known resistance contacts surface in the Institute's records until the end of the encounter. While this record is active, that creature has disadvantage on Deception checks against regime-aligned creatures and the Archmage has advantage on attack rolls against them. A creature can spend their action to physically destroy the record node (AC 12, 15 HP) to end this effect

Revised Record

The Archmage selects one creature within 60 feet. That creature must succeed on a DC 18 Intelligence saving throw or lose access to one of the following until initiative count 20 of the next round:

- One prepared spell of their highest available slot level
- Channel Divinity, Wild Shape, or Bardic Inspiration (if applicable)
- One use of a limited class resource: Action Surge, Ki points (lose 3), Lay on Hands (lose 15 HP from the pool), Sneak Attack (until end of next turn), or Rage (if not currently raging)

The Archmage cannot target cantrips, racial traits, or passive features.

Archive Rewrites

The walls of the Heritage Institute pulse with magical revisionism. Each creature that is not under the Archmage's command must succeed on a DC 19 Intelligence saving throw or become uncertain of one fact they know to be true about the regime, its crimes, or the resistance. This uncertainty imposes disadvantage on their next skill check or saving throw related to that knowledge. On a success, the creature is immune to this lair action for 24 hours.

Tomes of Certainty

Books, scrolls, and documents fly from the shelves in a 15-foot-radius sphere centered on a point the Archmage can see within 60 feet. Each creature in the area must succeed on a DC 19 Dexterity saving throw or take 22 (4d10) bludgeoning damage and be Blinded until initiative count 20 of the next round as pages plaster themselves across their face. On a success, the creature takes half damage and is not Blinded.

Locked Conclusion

The Archmage selects one creature within 60 feet that is currently concentrating on a spell. The ambient magic of the Institute reinforces that concentration unnaturally, locking it in place. Until initiative count 20 of the next round, that creature cannot end their concentration willingly and must maintain the spell regardless of its effects.

Institutional Memory

The Heritage Institute surfaces a memory the Archmage has extracted from a party member. That party member must succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw or be Stunned until initiative count 20 of the next round as a painful or shameful memory is replayed in vivid, magically enhanced detail. On a success, the creature takes 16 (3d10) psychic damage instead.

Regional Effects

While the Archmage occupies the Heritage Institute and its surrounding district, the following effects alter the area:

Rewritten Streets

Within 1 mile of the Institute, signage, plaques, and public inscriptions subtly shift to reflect the regime's approved history. Creatures that attempt to navigate by landmarks or recall local history have disadvantage on Intelligence checks to do so, as the physical environment contradicts their memories.

The Weight of Certainty

Creatures within 1 mile of the Institute that attempt to persuade, deceive, or argue against regime ideology find the words harder to form. Charisma checks made to undermine regime narratives or convince regime-aligned NPCs of the truth have disadvantage while in this area.

Catalogued

The Archmage's surveillance network extends throughout the district. Creatures that spend more than 1 hour within 1 mile of the Institute have a 25% chance of being noted in the Heritage Institute's records. If noted, regime-aligned NPCs in the area are subtly more suspicious of them (disadvantage on Charisma checks with such NPCs until they leave the area).

False Clarity

Divination spells cast within 1 mile of the Institute return subtly incorrect information, skewed toward the regime's preferred narrative. The DM provides accurate information with one false detail substituted, without indicating which detail is false.

The Darklord

THE GORISTRO DEMON OF DISASTER Supreme Leader of Orenthis



Satirical Basis: Donald Trump

Lair: The Gilded Tower. A grotesque monument covered in tarnished gold.

Personality: Narcissistic, bombastic, prone to violent rages.

Weakness: His regime is held together by fear and greed, not loyalty.

Special: He is erratic and utterly unpredictable.

A massive demon of destructive chaos, the Goristro did not rise to power through cunning or competence. He seized control of Orenthis through a combination of violence, demagoguery, infernal contracts, and sheer

volume. His promises were louder than his opponents' arguments, his rages more spectacular than their plans, and his willingness to burn institutions that would not bend to him more absolute than anyone believed possible until it was too late. Every structure he touched became a monument to himself.

The regime he runs is not held together by ideology or loyalty. It is held together by fear, greed, and the calculation that serving him is less dangerous than opposing him. His lieutenants despise him privately and flatter him publicly. His Merregons follow orders because their contracts compel them. His citizens comply because the alternative has been made vivid enough.

He is not intelligent. He does not need to be. He is enormous and he is violent.

"Nobody knows more about greatness than me. Nobody. I've been told that by very smart people, the smartest, and they all said: nobody."

The Darklord's Curse

The Goristro's torment is the pursuit of legitimacy he can never hold. He seeks the Sigil of Dominion: a symbolic object, rite, or recognition that would confirm his rule as rightful rather than merely absolute. The exact form shifts: an ancient crown, an oath sworn by the last surviving noble house, a divine mark, a treaty signed by a free city that no longer exists. He is always close. Informants produce leads. Expeditions return with artifacts. Ceremonies reach their final words. Then something fails. The crown shatters at the moment of coronation. The oath-giver dies mid-sentence. The artifact is proven a forgery by evidence he cannot refute. The domain does not simply withhold legitimacy from him. It manufactures hope and then destroys it, on a cycle he cannot break and has long since stopped believing in, but cannot stop chasing. On some level, he knows that the game is rigged. He continues anyway.

The Mists do not preserve the resistance out of sympathy for its members or hope for the domain's liberation. They preserve it because the Goristro's punishment requires an enemy. A tyrant with nothing left to crush is no longer suffering. He has won, and Ravenloft does not permit that. When a resistance cell is destroyed, another quietly coalesces from survivors, refugees, or the newly desperate. When a leader falls, someone steps into the role who should not have had to. The Mists do not guide these people or protect them. They simply ensure the conditions for their existence persist. The resistance bleeds. It loses. It fractures and reforms. But it never fully collapses, because the domain needs it running. The Goristro does not know this. He believes, each time, that he is finally close to ending it.

That belief is part of the machinery.

Goristro (Expanded)

Monster Manual, pg. 150

Huge Fiend (Demon)

Chaotic Evil

CR 18 (XP 20,000)*

AC 19

Initiative +6 (16)

HP 310 (23d12 + 161)

Speed 50 ft.

PB +6

		MOD	SAVE				MOD	SAVE
STR	25	+7	+13		INT	6	-2	-2
DEX	11	0	+6		WIS	13	+1	+7
CON	25	+7	+13		CHA	14	+2	+2

Skills

Perception (P) +7

Survival (P) +7

Resistances

Cold; Fire; Lightning

Immunities

Poison; Poisoned

Senses

Darkvision 120 ft.

Passive Perception 17

Traits

Siege Monster

The Goristro deals double damage to objects and structures.

Unstoppable (Passive Trait)

While the Goristro is above half his hit point maximum, he automatically succeeds on saving throws against the Prone condition and cannot be knocked Prone.

The Unstoppable passive protection no longer applies once the Goristro drops below half his hit point maximum. Below that threshold, resisting Prone costs his reaction rather than being automatic.

Magic Resistance

The Goristro has Advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day)

If the Goristro fails a saving throw, he can choose to succeed instead.

Actions

Multi-attack

The Goristro makes one Brutal Gore attack and two Slam attacks.

Brutal Gore

Melee Attack Roll: +13, reach 10 ft.

Hit: 40 (6d10 + 7) Piercing damage.

If the target is a Huge or smaller creature, it is pushed up to 20 feet straight away from the goristro and has the Prone condition.

Slam

Melee Attack Roll: +13, reach 10 ft.

Hit: 29 (4d10 + 7) Bludgeoning damage.

Bound to the Domain

The Goristro cannot leave Orenthis. If forced beyond its borders, the Mists deposit it back within the capital fortress within hours.

Mist Rebirth

If the Goristro is slain, his body dissolves into black mist. Within four years, the Goristro reforms in the seat of power, furious and more demented than before.

The Mist Rebirth is inevitable. The domain's curse does not permit permanent destruction. Under normal circumstances he reforms within

four years. However, if the party has addressed the domain's curse mechanics before the Goristro's final defeat (Act III, Chapter 18, Scene 5), the conditions of his return change. The reformed Goristro returns to a domain that has demonstrated genuine self-governance, which brings him great personal torment.

Bonus Actions

Charge

The Goristro moves up to half its Speed straight toward an enemy it can see.

Reactions

Rageful Retaliation

When the Goristro takes damage from a melee attack, he can use his reaction to immediately make one Slam attack against the attacker.

Unstoppable (Reaction)

When the Goristro is below half his hit point maximum and would be knocked Prone, he can use his reaction to succeed on the triggering saving throw.

The Unstoppable passive protection no longer applies once the Goristro drops below half his hit point maximum. Below that threshold, resisting Prone costs his reaction rather than being automatic.

Legendary Actions

The Goristro can take 3 legendary actions per round, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time, and only at the end of another creature's turn. Spent legendary actions are recovered at the start of his turn.

Surge (1 Action)

The Goristro moves up to half his speed. This movement does not provoke opportunity attacks.

Slam (2 Actions)

The Goristro makes one Slam attack.

Seismic Charge (2 Actions)

The Goristro drives a fist or hoof into the ground. Each creature within 15 feet must succeed on a DC 21 Strength saving throw or be knocked Prone and pushed 10 feet away from him.

Trample (3 Actions)

The Goristro moves up to his full speed in a straight line. Each creature in his path must succeed on a DC 21 Dexterity saving throw or take 22 (4d10) bludgeoning damage and be knocked Prone. The Goristro can move through Large or smaller creatures during this movement.

Lair Actions

On initiative count 20 (losing ties), the Goristro can take one of the following lair actions. He cannot use the same lair action two rounds in a row.

Golden Deluge

Molten gold pours from the ceiling in a 10-foot-radius cylinder, 20 feet high, centered on a point the Goristro can see. Each creature in the area must succeed on a DC 21 Dexterity saving throw or take 22 (4d10) fire damage and be restrained until the end of their next turn as the gold hardens. On a success, the creature takes half damage and is not restrained.

Crumbling Grandeur

A section of the tower's gilded facade collapses. The Goristro chooses a 20-foot-square area within the lair. That area becomes difficult terrain until cleared. Each creature in the area when it collapses must succeed on a DC 21 Strength saving throw or take 18 (4d8) bludgeoning damage and be knocked Prone.

The Tower Speaks

The Goristro's voice, magically amplified through the tower's walls, booms through every chamber simultaneously. Each creature that is not a fiend or under the Goristro's command must succeed on a DC 21 Wisdom saving throw or be Frightened of the Goristro until initiative count 20 of the next round. A creature that succeeds on this saving throw is immune to The Tower Speaks for 24 hours.

Gilded Throne

The floor beneath one creature the Goristro can see erupts in golden spikes. That creature must succeed on a DC 21 Dexterity saving throw or take 27 (6d8) piercing damage and be restrained until they use an action to free themselves (DC 17 Strength check). On a success, the creature takes half damage and is not restrained.

Walls Close In

The tower's architecture shifts, narrowing corridors and collapsing exits. Each doorway and passage in the lair shrinks to 5 feet wide until initiative count 20 of the next round. Large or larger creatures must squeeze to move through any opening, and the entire lair becomes difficult terrain for creatures with a speed of 40 feet or more.

Regional Effects

While the Goristro lives and occupies the Gilded Tower, the following effects alter the surrounding region:

Tarnished Ground

Within 1 mile of the tower, gold and silver coins, jewelry, and ornaments slowly corrode and blacken. Magical items of common rarity within this range temporarily lose their properties while in the area.

Demagogue's Echo

Creatures within 1 mile of the tower that fail a Charisma saving throw (DC 16, once per day on waking) find themselves inexplicably inclined to defend the Goristro's reputation in conversation, even if they despise him. This is magical compulsion, but it does not feel like it.

Fear Made Manifest

Creatures that are Frightened while within the tower's walls cannot benefit from the Help action or from effects that grant advantage on saving throws against the Frightened condition.

Optional Epilogue

THE ARCANALOTH MASTER OF CONTRACTS Chief Dealmaker and Profiteer



Satirical Basis: Jared Kushner

Lair: The Contract Halls. A labyrinthine structure where the walls themselves are made of floor-to-ceiling infernal contracts: every deal the Arcanaloth has ever brokered, every secret he has ever purchased. The architecture shifts when he needs it to and the exits are never where you remember them.

Personality: Calculated, transactional, and genuinely unbothered by which side wins. He backed the Goristro the way an investor backs a commodity: not out of belief but out of self-positioning. When the resistance begins dismantling the regime, he does not panic. He starts drafting new contracts. His only ideology is the perpetuation of his own indispensability,

and he has been doing this long enough to be very, very good at it.

Weakness: Utterly mercenary. He will negotiate with anyone who can credibly offer him something he does not already have. Ironically, one thing he does not have is an understanding of why people fight for things that cannot be monetized.

Special: He has read every contract in the Goristro's coalition. He knows where every body is buried because he drafted the clause that put it there.

The party does not even know he exists until the Goristro falls.

That is by design. The Arcanaloth has spent the entire campaign in the structural layer beneath the visible regime, the place where the contracts live, where the debt promises and infernal binding clauses and succession arrangements are filed in triplicate and sealed with wax that does not cool. He did not attend the Goristro's rallies. He did not appear in the Kenku's broadcasts. He was never on any list the resistance compiled, because the resistance was looking for power and he was busy being infrastructure.

When the Goristro is defeated and the resistance celebrates and the people of Orenthis begin to believe it is over, the Arcanaloth steps forward. He is not angry, nor is he threatening. He was never the Goristro's servant. He was the Goristro's contractor. The distinction, he pleasantly explains, is everything.

He produces a document.

The document explains, in precise and legally airtight language, that the infernal contracts binding the Merregions, the garrison network, the detention quotas, the Rakshasa's territorial authority, and approximately forty other operational elements of the regime do not terminate upon the Goristro's defeat. They terminate upon specific conditions that have not been met. He is prepared to discuss renegotiation, and of course, he has a sliding fee schedule.

He probably could have been stopped at any point in the campaign if the party had known to look for him. The Project Renewal documents do mention him obliquely. A transfer manifest lists a payment for a "Dealmaker's Facility" and expenses as "per the standard brokerage terms." But for the most part, he was undisclosed.

Arcanaloth (Expanded)

Monster Manual, pg. 19

Medium Fiend (Yugoloth)

Neutral Evil

CR 15 (XP 13,000)*

AC 17

Initiative +5 (15)

HP 175 (27d8 + 54)

Speed 30 ft.; Fly 30ft. (hover)

PB +4

		MOD	SAVE			MOD	SAVE
STR	17	+3	+3		INT	+5	+9
DEX	12	+1	+5		WIS	+3	+7
CON	14	+2	+6		CHA	+3	+3

Skills

Arcana (P) +9

Deception (E) +11

Insight (P) +7

Perception (P) +7

Resistances

Cold, Fire, Lightning; Bludgeoning, Piercing, and Slashing from nonmagical attacks

Immunities

Acid, Poison; Charmed; Poisoned

Senses

Truesight 120 ft.

Passive Perception 17

Traits

The Original Copies

The Arcanaloth holds the only original copies of every infernal contract currently active in Orenthis. Duplicates exist but are unenforceable without the original. If the Arcanaloth is killed, all infernal contracts he brokered immediately become void. Every

bound Merregon in Orenthis is simultaneously released. Every infernal debt is canceled. He knows this. He uses it as leverage.

"Kill me if you like. But consider what happens when you do..."

Contract Immunity

The Arcanaloth cannot be compelled, bound, charmed, or controlled by any contract or magical compulsion that he did not personally draft or explicitly consent to. This includes **geas**, **dominate person**, **command**, and similar effects. He wrote the boilerplate. He knows every loophole.

Contractual Resilience

While within the Contract Halls, the Arcanaloth has resistance to all damage types except radiant, reflecting the accumulated weight of infernal law reinforcing his position.

Magic Resistance

The Arcanaloth has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Legendary Resistance (3/day)

If the Arcanaloth fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Actions

Multi-attack

The Arcanaloth makes two Claw attacks, or one Claw attack and casts one at-will spell.

Claw

Melee Attack Roll: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 8 (2d4+3) slashing damage. The target must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or be Cursed. While Cursed, the target cannot regain hit points. The Curse lasts until removed by **remove curse** or until the Arcanaloth dismisses it (no action required).

Spellcasting

The Arcanaloth casts one of the following spells using Intelligence as the spellcasting ability (spell save DC 17, spell attack +9) requiring no material components:

- At will: **alter self**, **detect magic**, **detect thoughts**, **invisibility**, **magic missile**
- 3/day each: **charm person**, **counterspell**, **dispel magic**, **fly**, **suggestion**
- 1/day each: **finger of death**, **heat metal**, **hypnotic pattern**, **magic circle**, **wall of force**

Contract Offer (Recharge 5-6)

The Arcanaloath presents a binding contract to one creature within 60 feet that can read. The target must succeed on a DC 17 Intelligence saving throw or become compelled to read the document (using its action). If the target reads the full document (takes 1 minute outside of combat, or triggers automatically in combat due to magical compulsion), it must make a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, the target is bound by the contract's terms for 24 hours as though under the effect of **geas**. The Arcanaloath determines the terms. They are always technically reasonable. They are never actually reasonable.

The target can refuse to read the document without a saving throw, but doing so is not instinctive: the document appears relevant and important, and refusing requires recognizing the compulsion for what it is (DC 14 Insight).

Bonus Actions

Teleport

The Arcanaloath magically teleports up to 60 feet to an unoccupied space it can see.

Amend the Terms

The Arcanaloath modifies one active contract effect currently affecting a creature within 60 feet, either intensifying it (the affected creature makes its next saving throw against the effect at disadvantage) or releasing it entirely (the effect ends). He uses the latter as a show of good faith. He uses the former when negotiations break down.

Reactions

Fine Print

When the Arcanaloath is targeted by a spell, as a reaction he may identify the spell and its effects before it resolves (no action required). If the spell requires a saving throw, he rolls with advantage. If the spell is 3rd level or lower, he may choose to allow it to fail automatically as though he had succeeded.

Counteroffer

When a creature within 60 feet succeeds on a saving throw against one of the Arcanaloath's spells or abilities, the Arcanaloath can use its reaction to present an immediate alternative: the creature can choose to fail the saving throw in exchange for a negotiated benefit (the Arcanaloath names the benefit; it is always

something the creature actually wants). This is not compulsion. The creature genuinely chooses. The Arcanaloath genuinely provides. He just gets something in return.

Escape Clause

When the Arcanaloath is reduced to 0 hit points for the first time in an encounter, he can use his reaction to instead drop to 1 hit point and teleport up to 120 feet to an unoccupied space. All active contract effects he maintains continue normally. This reaction can only trigger once per encounter.

Legendary Actions

The Arcanaloath can take 3 Legendary Actions per round, choosing from the options below. Only one Legendary Action can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Spent Legendary Actions are regained at the start of each turn.

Additional Clause (1 action)

The Arcanaloath teleports up to 30 feet.

Binding Language (1 action)

One creature within 60 feet must succeed on a DC 17 Intelligence saving throw or be unable to speak freely until the start of its next turn. Affected creatures can still take actions and cast spells with only somatic or material components but cannot use verbal components, speak aloud, or use abilities that require speech.

Amendment (2 actions)

The Arcanaloath casts one at-will spell without using a spell slot.

Force Majeure (2 actions)

The Arcanaloath targets one creature within 60 feet that is currently affected by any contract, charm, compulsion, or concentration effect. That creature must succeed on a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw or the effect's duration resets to its original length and its save DC increases by 2 for the remainder of the encounter.

Termination Clause (3 actions)

The Arcanaloath invokes a buried clause in a contract the target has previously agreed to, whether knowingly or not. The target must succeed on a DC 18 Charisma saving throw or become Stunned until the end of its next turn as the binding magic temporarily overwrites its autonomy. The Arcanaloath can only use this

action against a creature that has, at any point in the campaign, accepted his help, used one of his documents, or agreed to any of his terms, including ones brokered through intermediaries.

Bowman (the Changeling's civilian disguise) has accepted his terms. Therefore so did anyone who ever used any forged documents provided by Bowman.

Lair Actions

On initiative count 20 (losing ties), the Arcanaloath takes a lair action in the Contract Halls. He cannot use the same lair action two rounds in a row.

Shifting Architecture

The hall rearranges itself. All doors and exits move to new locations. Creatures that are not the Arcanaloath must succeed on a DC 16 Intelligence saving throw or become Disoriented: they cannot take the Dash action and have disadvantage on Dexterity saving throws until the start of their next turn. Creatures with Truesight are unaffected.

Living Contracts

The walls animate briefly, paper and parchment tendrils lashing outward. Each creature within 10 feet of a wall must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw or take 14 (4d6) slashing damage and be Restrained until the start of its next turn, as contract language wraps around its limbs.

Binding Clause

One creature the Arcanaloath can see must succeed on a DC 18 Intelligence saving throw or be unable to cast spells of 3rd level or higher until the start of its next turn. The Arcanaloath cannot target the same creature with this action two rounds in a row.

Sealed Records

The Arcanaloath produces evidence from his files. One creature in the room must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or suffer the psychological weight of every contract they have ever broken, promise they have failed to keep, or compromise they have made under duress. On a failed save, the creature takes 18 (4d8) psychic damage and has disadvantage on its next attack roll or saving throw.

The Hard Copies

The Arcanaloath briefly manifests the complete library of contracts as a physical presence in the room. All creatures within 30 feet must succeed on a DC 17 Charisma saving throw or be Frightened of the Arcanaloath until the end of their next turn. Creatures that succeed are immune to this lair action for 24 hours.

Regional Effects

The area surrounding the Contract Halls warps under the Arcanaloath's influence:

Terms and Conditions

Within 1 mile of the Contract Halls, any spoken agreement, verbal promise, or stated intention becomes semi-binding. If a creature breaks a statement of intent made within this area (saying they will do something and then not doing it), they take 3 (1d6) psychic damage. The Arcanaloath is immune.

Everything is Negotiable

Within the Contract Halls themselves, creatures have disadvantage on Charisma (Intimidation) checks. Threats do not land here the way they do elsewhere. He has heard better threats. He has clauses for them.

The Rate Schedule

Creatures that have accepted any favor, assistance, or information from the Arcanaloath (directly or through intermediaries such as the Changeling) feel a faint sense of obligation while within the Contract Halls, an intuition that they owe something and have not paid it yet. This has no mechanical effect unless the Arcanaloath uses The Termination Clause, in which case those creatures make the saving throw at disadvantage.

When the Arcanaloath is defeated: all three effects end. Every infernal contract he brokered becomes void simultaneously. The walls of the Contract Halls dissolve into paper and settle like snow. If the party is still inside, they have 10 minutes before the structure collapses entirely.

Resistance NPC Compendium

MIRA ASHVALE Commander of the Resistance



Role: Resistance leader, strategic command, mission briefings

An elf who has lived long enough to remember what Orenthis looked like before. That is not a comfort. It is a specific kind of torment that shorter-lived races are spared: the ability to hold the before and the after in the same memory, to know with precision what was taken and from whom and when. She watched the institutions erode not in a sudden collapse but in a long sequence of small concessions, each one defensible in isolation, each one a little worse than the last. By the time most people understood what was happening, Mira had already been watching for decades.

She does not speak about this often. The resistance does not need her grief; it needs her knowledge, and she has that in abundance. She

knows which loyalties in the old order were genuine and which were performance. She knows where the bodies are buried, sometimes literally. She knows that regimes like this one do not fall because people stop believing in them. They fall because the people who were never true believers finally stop pretending.

She leads without charisma and without warmth. She leads because she is competent and because she has been here longest and because she has earned the right to be listened to. If the party earns her respect she will not tell them. They will know because she stops explaining her reasoning and starts giving them the harder assignments.

Warrior Veteran (Expanded)

Monster Manual, pg. 320

Medium Humanoid (Elf)

Lawful Good

AC 17

Initiative +3 (13)

HP 65 (10d8 + 20)

Speed 30 ft.

PB +2

		MOD	SAVE			MOD	SAVE
STR	16	+3	+3		INT	10	0
DEX	13	+1	+1		WIS	11	0
CON	14	+2	+2		CHA	10	0

Skills

Athletics (P) +5

Perception (P) +2

Senses

Darkvision 60 ft.

Passive Perception 12

Traits

Fey Ancestry

Mira has advantage on saving throws against being Charmed, and magic cannot put her to sleep.

Long Memory

Mira has advantage on History checks related to Orenthis, its institutions, its officials, and the period before the regime. She can identify regime propaganda, forged documents, and altered records on a DC 12 Intelligence (History) check where others would have no chance at all.

Seen This Before

Mira cannot be surprised. She has watched this happen once already in slow motion over decades. Nothing the regime does catches her off guard.

Actions

Multi-attack

Mira makes two longsword attacks or two shortbow attacks.

Longsword

Melee Attack Roll: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 7 (1d8+3) slashing damage.

Shortbow

Ranged Attack Roll: +3 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target.

Hit: 4 (1d6+1) piercing damage.

Notes

Mira's stat block exists for emergencies. She is not a party member and should not fight alongside them in standard encounters. Her Veteran stat block reflects genuine combat capability built over a long life, but her value to the campaign is strategic, not martial. If her stat block is being used, something has gone wrong and she is buying the party time to fix it. In that context, she fights with the economy of someone who has done this before and does not intend to die today.

TAM QUICKFINGERS

Scout and Intelligence Asset



Role: Reconnaissance, street-level intelligence gathering, courier

Nobody notices Tam. This is no accident, it is a skill developed over years of moving through occupied streets carrying information that could get him killed. He has the gnome's gift for appearing to belong wherever he is, and he has sharpened that gift into something of an art form. Regime checkpoints wave him through and Merregon patrols look right past him. He has calmly walked out of the Border Garrison twice before with regime documents tucked into a loaf of bread.

He is young for a gnome, and the resistance worries about this more than he does. Tam does not have Mira's long memory or Henrik's institutional knowledge, but what he does have is an almost supernatural instinct for when a situation is about to collapse and an equally reliable instinct for the fastest route to somewhere else. He has never been caught

which he attributes to skill. Mira attributes it to luck. The honest answer is probably somewhere in between.

He finds this all so very interesting, and he likes everyone to know that he finds it interesting. And that the interesting part is not the danger, but solving the puzzle of moving through a city that does not want you moving through it, and doing so without a trace. This makes him cheerful in a way that is occasionally unsettling.

Commoner (Modified)

Monster Manual, pg. 77

Small Humanoid (Gnome)

Neutral Good

AC 10

Initiative +2 (12)

HP 4 (1d8)

Speed 30 ft.

PB +2

		MOD	SAVE			MOD	SAVE
STR	8*	-1	-1		INT	14*	+2
DEX	14*	+2	+2		WIS	12*	+1
CON	10	0	0		CHA	12*	+1

Skills

Perception (P) +3

Sleight of Hand (P) +4

Stealth (E) +6

Senses

Darkvision 60 ft.

Passive Perception 13

Traits

Gnome Cunning

Tam has advantage on Charisma, Wisdom, and Intelligence saving throws against magic. This has saved him in several past situations which he can only describe as "complicated."

Exit Awareness

Tam always knows the fastest route out of any location he has spent at least 10 minutes in. He can communicate this route to the party as a bonus action, granting them advantage on their first Dexterity saving throw or Stealth check made while following his directions to escape.

Slippery Asset

Tam has Evasion. When he is subjected to an effect that allows him to make a Dexterity saving throw to take only half damage, he instead takes no damage if he succeeds on the saving throw, and only half damage if he fails. Additionally, as long as an ally is within 5 feet of him, Tam cannot be the target of ranged attacks.

Unremarkable

Creatures that have not previously encountered Tam in a suspicious context have disadvantage on Perception checks to notice him in a crowd, at a checkpoint, or moving through a patrol zone. Once a creature has seen Tam in a clearly suspicious context (fleeing, near a crime scene, or identified in a wanted notice), this trait has no effect against that creature.

Actions

Dagger

Melee Attack Roll: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft.

Ranged Attack Roll: +4 to hit, range 20/60 ft. one target.

Hit: 4 (1d4+2) piercing damage.

Notes

Tam is the party's best source of street-level intelligence and their most reliable option for courier work and reconnaissance. He should not be in combat, but if he is, use Exit Awareness to get him out of it as quickly as possible. His survival is a top priority.

Outside of combat, Exit Awareness should be used selectively. Reserve it for scenes where escape is genuinely uncertain. If the party rogue or ranger is driving an escape, let them lead. Tam's advantage should apply only to the first check when following his route, not every roll.

His cheerfulness under pressure is a character note worth playing. He is not performing bravery, he genuinely finds this all more interesting than frightening, which can be either reassuring or deeply weird depending on the moment.

ELARA STONEMANTLE

Shopkeeper, Marcus's Wife



Role: Early resistance contact, cautionary tale, civilian stakes

Elara ran a small shop on the edge of the market district for fourteen years. She was not political. She paid her taxes, she did not ask questions about the new regime's procurement requirements, she told herself that keeping the shop open was a form of stability and that stability was a form of good. She was wrong about this, and the regime eventually made that clear in the specific, bureaucratic way the regime makes things clear: a notice of irregular inventory, a visit from two Merregons, a manifest with her family name on it filed somewhere she cannot access.

She did not come to the resistance out of ideology. She came because her family's name is in a document and she does not know what the document means and Mira was the only person who would tell her the truth about what it probably means. That honesty cost Mira

nothing and meant everything to Elara. She has been useful ever since, in the specific way that someone with fourteen years of market district relationships and a face nobody associates with trouble can be useful.

Her dwarven stubbornness is what kept the shop open through three rounds of esoteric compliance requirements and two visits that were clearly intended to discourage her. And it is also the thing that makes her dangerous now, in a quiet way.

Whether she stays useful depends entirely on the party. She is not trained, not hardened, and not capable of absorbing the kind of losses that the others have already absorbed. If the party is careful with her, she will be there at the end of Act II with better information than anyone expected. If the party is not careful with her, she will be a name on a very bad manifest, and Marcus will become something that the party has to decide what to do with.

Commoner (Modified)

Monster Manual, pg. 77

Medium Humanoid (Dwarf)

Neutral Good

AC 10

Initiative +1 (11)

HP 4 (1d8)

Speed 30 ft.

PB +2

		MOD	SAVE				MOD	SAVE
STR	10	0	+0		INT	12*	+1	+1
DEX	12*	+1	+1		WIS	12*	+1	+1
CON	12*	+1	+1		CHA	14*	+2	+2

Skills

Insight (P) +3

Persuasion (P) +4

Senses

Darkvision 60 ft.

Passive Perception 11

Traits

Dwarven Resilience

Elara has advantage on saving throws against poison and resistance to poison damage.

Stonecunning

When Elara makes an Intelligence (History) check related to the origin of stonework or construction (including the layout of buildings, hidden compartments, and structural weaknesses) she is considered proficient and adds double her proficiency bonus. This has come up more than once in resistance planning and will come up again.

Market District

Elara has fourteen years of relationships in the market district. Once per session, she can provide the party with one piece of street-level intelligence (a patrol schedule, a supplier who moves goods past checkpoints, a name) that would otherwise require a DC 15 Investigation check to obtain. This trait is unavailable if Elara is frightened, injured, or has reason to believe the party is not looking out for her family.

Civilian Instinct

Elara has advantage on Wisdom (Insight) checks to determine whether a person is genuinely trustworthy or performing trustworthiness. She has spent fourteen years reading customers. She is rarely wrong about this and frequently ignored.

Everything to Lose

When Elara is in a scene where Marcus is visibly threatened, she automatically fails saving throws against the Frightened condition and cannot use Market District Networks until the threat is resolved.

Actions

Improvised Weapon

Melee Attack Roll: +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 2 (1d4) bludgeoning damage. She is not going to do this unless there is no other option.

Notes

Elara is a stakes NPC. Her primary mechanical function is Market District Networks, which gives the party a reliable intelligence shortcut if they treat her well. Her primary narrative function is to make the cost of carelessness visible and personal. The party should like her before they have to make decisions that affect her safety. If Elara is lost, remove Market District Networks from the campaign permanently and do not replace it. Let the gap be felt.

MARCUS STONEMANTLE

Blacksmith, Elara's Husband



Role: Civilian protection objective, potential asset if Elara survives

Marcus is not complicated. He loves his wife, he is frightened for his family, and he is built like the anvil he has worked beside for thirty years. Dwarven blacksmiths do not go soft. He has been working hot metal since his apprenticeship and the work has left its marks: the hands, the forearms, the particular way he stands in a room like he is assessing its load-bearing capacity.

He is not resistance material and he knows it. He came with Elara because the alternative was letting her go alone, and that was never a real alternative. He follows her lead in everything that involves talking, planning, or deciding. He does not follow her lead in everything that involves someone putting a hand on her, and the resistance has had to have a quiet conversation with him about operational security twice already.

He is a dwarf in an impossible situation doing his best with the tools he has. If Elara survives to the end of Act II, Marcus will have learned enough from proximity to be genuinely useful: moving supplies, maintaining equipment, providing a forge that runs hot at all hours. If Elara does not survive, Marcus becomes a different kind of problem. Not an enemy, but consumed by a grief that has nowhere to go. Dwarven grief may not be loud, but that is not the same thing as being small.

Commoner (Modified)

Monster Manual, pg. 77

Medium Humanoid (Dwarf)

Neutral Good

AC 12*

Initiative 0 (10)

HP 13 (2d8 + 4)

Speed 30 ft.

PB +2

		MOD	SAVE			MOD	SAVE
STR	17*	+3	+3		INT	10	0
DEX	10	0	0		WIS	10	0
CON	14*	+2	+2		CHA	10	0

Skills

Athletics (P) +5

Senses

Darkvision 60 ft.

Passive Perception 10

Traits

Dwarven Resilience

Marcus has advantage on saving throws against poison and resistance to poison damage.

Protective Instinct

When a creature within 5 feet of Marcus that he considers under his protection is targeted by an attack, he can use his reaction to impose disadvantage on that attack roll. If the attack hits despite disadvantage, Marcus takes half the damage instead, with the target taking the other half. This trait cannot be suppressed by fear, charm, or instruction. It is not a decision he makes. It is what he does.

Forge-Hardened

Marcus has resistance to fire damage and advantage on Constitution saving throws against exhaustion from physical labor. Thirty years at a forge will do that.

Untrained Combatant

Marcus is proficient with his work hammer through thirty years of daily use, but has no formal combat training. He cannot benefit from flanking, cannot use reactions offensively, and has disadvantage on attack rolls against any creature that took the Dodge action on its last turn

Actions

Hammer

Melee Attack Roll: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 7 (1d8+3) bludgeoning damage. This is a work hammer. It was not designed for this. It is nonetheless effective.

Shove

Marcus shoves one creature within 5 feet. The target must succeed on a DC 13 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Notes

Marcus's stat block reflects a physically capable civilian with a dwarf's constitution, not a trained combatant. Protective Instinct makes him genuinely dangerous in the specific situation he is built for and nearly useless in any other tactical context. If Elara is lost, Marcus does not leave the campaign. He stays. He helps. But he does not talk about it. That should be allowed to sit and fester without resolution.

JORAN MORROW

Baker



Role: Logistics, safe house maintenance, morale, cautionary presence

Joran volunteered because it was the right thing to do. He would have done this even if Orna's bakery had not been forced to close. And he will tell you this if you ask. He will also tell you this even if you do not ask. He is not naïve, he understands what the regime is and what it does but he only came to that understanding recently through outrage rather than experience.

He is good at the things he is good at. The safe house runs better with him around. People are fed. The hidden compartment under the flour sacks was his idea and it is an excellent idea. He shows up early, stays late, and does not complain about the work. These are not small things and other resistance members know that, which is why nobody has told him directly that he should not be anywhere near an actual operation.

Resistance NPCs

The problem is that Joran wants to be near an actual operation. He wants to help in a way that feels like helping, not just baking, even though his baking is crucial and prevents operations from going wrong. He is working up the courage to ask Mira for a field assignment. Mira is working up a way to say no that does not break him in ways that he does not deserve.

Commoner (Modified)

Monster Manual, pg. 77

Medium Humanoid (Human)

Neutral Good

AC 10

Initiative 0 (10)

HP 4 (1d8)

Speed 30 ft.

PB +2

		MOD	SAVE				MOD	SAVE
STR	12*	+1	+1		INT	10	0	0
DEX	10	0	0		WIS	10	0	0
CON	12*	+1	+1		CHA	12*	+1	+1

Skills

Insight (P) +2

Persuasion (P) +3

Senses

Passive Perception 10

Traits

Steady Hands

Joran has advantage on Dexterity checks involving careful manual work: concealing objects, preparing documents for transport, maintaining equipment, and anything else that rewards patience and precision over speed. This is not a combat trait and should never come up in combat.

Eager

When Joran uses the Help action, the assisted creature gains advantage on its check as normal, but also gains a +1 bonus to the result from the specific quality of Joran's encouragement. This bonus does not apply in combat.

Genuine Warmth

Creatures that interact with Joran for more than a few minutes and are capable of being affected by sincerity must succeed on a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw or find themselves inclined to explain more than they intended. This is not magic. It is just the effect of talking to someone who is actually listening. Regime informants and creatures with Intelligence 6 or lower are immune.

Actions

Rolling Pin (Club)

Melee Attack Roll: +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 3 (1d4+1) bludgeoning damage. Joran does not want to use this. He brought it because it was the heaviest thing near the door.

Notes

Joran is a morale NPC and a logistics asset. His Genuine Warmth trait is most useful in social encounters where the party needs information from a reluctant source. His Steady Hands trait should come up in planning and preparation scenes. He should not be in field encounters. If he is in a field encounter, the party has either made a serious mistake or the DM is deliberately raising the stakes by putting someone fragile in a dangerous place. His Rolling Pin exists to underscore just how out of his depth he is, not to contribute damage. If Joran does land a hit in combat, play it for what it is. A moment where he is absolutely terrified yet it worked anyway.

HENRIK GRAYWALL **Former Garrison Guard**



Role: Security training, garrison intelligence, document forgery consultation

A half-orc who worked in the garrison for eleven years does not walk away from that lightly. Henrik built his career inside an institution that gave him structure, clear expectations, and a place to put the discipline that had nowhere else to go. He was good at the work. He was reliable, thorough, and exactly the kind of soldier a garrison relies on without ever promoting. He understood his position and did not complain about it. He told himself the work was neutral. He told himself long enough that he stopped noticing he was telling himself.

His crack came quietly, on a night he does not discuss in detail, involving a family he was ordered to process and a manifest he was told to deliver. He delivered it. He has not forgiven himself for that.

He came to the resistance with a debt he is trying to repay to people who do not know they are owed. He also came with actionable knowledge: garrison rotation schedules, Merregon behavioral patterns, the particular bureaucratic language that can make a forged document convincing. He teaches what he knows without drama and without redemption arc. He is not looking to be saved. He is looking to be useful. He is a half-orc who made poor choices in the past, but is making different ones now.

Commoner (Modified)

Monster Manual, pg. 77

Medium Humanoid (Half-Orc)

Neutral

AC 10

Initiative 0 (10)

HP 9 (2d8)*

Speed 30 ft.

PB +2

		MOD	SAVE			MOD	SAVE
STR	12*	+1	+1		INT	10	0
DEX	10	0	0		WIS	10	0
CON	12*	+1	+1		CHA	10	0

Skills

Insight (P) +2

Perception (P) +2

Senses

Darkvision 60 ft.

Passive Perception 12

Traits

Garrison Knowledge

Henrik has advantage on Intelligence checks related to Merregon behavior, garrison patrol patterns, regime document formats, and security infrastructure. When the party is planning an infiltration of a regime-controlled facility, Henrik can provide specific details that reduce the DC of relevant checks by 2.

Note: Henrik's Garrison Knowledge does not stack with Lyra's Cartographic Memory.

Institutional Memory

Henrik can identify a forged document's weaknesses automatically if the document was produced during his service period. For documents created after he left, he makes a DC 12 Intelligence check; on a failure, he still identifies whether the format has likely changed, giving another character advantage on their own check.

Relentless Endurance (1/Day)

When Henrik is reduced to 0 hit points but not killed outright, he can drop to 1 hit point instead. He has survived things before by refusing to stop.

Actions

Club

Melee Attack Roll: +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 3 (1d4+1) bludgeoning damage.

Notes

Henrik's physical conditioning has lapsed since leaving the garrison. Relentless Endurance is the last residue of that service. He is a knowledge asset more than a combatant. His value lies in Garrison Knowledge and Institutional Memory, which should come up regularly in planning scenes. He does not volunteer information, but he does answer a direct question with a direct answer and then wait for the next one. The half-orc detail is worth noting in how the regime treated him, useful, reliable, but never quite trusted with anything that mattered. That detail did not go unnoticed by him.

LYRA SORNYN

Cartographer



Role: Map creation, spatial intelligence, operational planning support

Lyra's previous employer was the regime. This is not a secret. She volunteers that information early and in the way that people volunteer uncomfortable truths when they have decided that the alternative is worse. She drew garrison layouts, road assessments, and resource distribution maps for the occupying administration for eight months before she understood what the maps were being used for. She stopped. She took copies of everything that she had made and she walked out and did not go back.

The regime had hired her because tieflings who want legitimate work generally take whatever they can find. She was grateful for the work. That gratitude curdled when she realized what the work was for, and what replaced it was something cleaner and considerably colder. Normally, she does not forgive easily, and she

does not forgive the regime at all. There is a fury that lives in the quality of her work. Every map she makes for the resistance must be better than anything she made for the regime every time.

Most of the resistance members were skeptical. Mira was not. Mira looked at the copies Lyra brought and saw six months of reconnaissance compressed into a stack of parchment, and made her decision.

Commoner (Modified)

Monster Manual, pg. 77

Medium Humanoid (Tiefling)

Neutral Good

AC 11

Initiative +1 (11)

HP 4 (1d8)

Speed 30 ft.

PB +2

		MOD	SAVE				MOD	SAVE
STR	8*	-1	-1		INT	16*	+3	+3
DEX	12*	+1	+1		WIS	14*	+2	+2
CON	10	0	0		CHA	12*	+1	+1

Skills

History (E) +7

Investigation (P) +5

Perception (P) +4

Senses

Darkvision 60 ft.

Passive Perception 14

Traits

Hellish Resistance

Lyra has resistance to fire damage.

Infernal Legacy

Lyra knows the **thaumaturgy** cantrip. She uses it occasionally but without comment.

Cartographic Memory

When a party member provides Lyra with a detailed verbal or written description of a location they have personally visited, Lyra can produce an accurate tactical map within one hour. The map grants the party advantage on Intelligence checks made to plan operations in

that location and reduces the DC of Stealth checks made during infiltration by 2. The map is only as accurate as the description and gaps in the testimony produce gaps in the map, but Lyra will point out exactly where those gaps are.

Note: Lyra's Cartographic Memory does not stack with Henrik's Garrison Knowledge.

Pattern Recognition (1/Day)

When the party is reviewing intelligence or planning an operation, Lyra can identify one detail in the available information that the party has overlooked. The DM should use this to surface a clue, a risk, or an opportunity that has not been acted on. This is not magic, but rather the habit of someone who has spent years finding what maps can reveal that their makers did not necessarily intend.

Actions

Improvised Weapon

Melee Attack Roll: +1 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 1 (1d4-1) bludgeoning damage.

Notes

Lyra is a planning asset. Cartographic Memory should be a regular part of operation preparation. Pattern Recognition is a DM tool for surfacing information the party has encountered but not connected. Use it when the party is stuck, not when they are moving. The tiefling detail can be played in how the regime treated her: useful but never quite trusted with the context for what she was making. She noticed that too late and will not be making that same mistake again.

FENWICK COTTER **Locksmith**



Role: Lock and trap expertise, training asset, infiltration support

Fenwick has a simple theory about locks: every lock contains assumptions from its maker. Assumptions about who will try to open it, how they will try, and with what level of patience. Finding those assumptions is often the key. He has been applying that theory professionally for twenty years. First as an apprentice locksmith, then as a master, and then as a person whose skills attracted a specific kind of clientele.

His breaking point came from a job in Oren. A private intermediary hired him to assess and rekey a section of the Contract Halls during what he was told was a routine facilities transition. He did the work properly, as he always does. He did not understand what the building was or what his work had secured until he was already outside it. He was not employed by the regime. He was used by

someone who knew enough not to tell him the full picture. He takes that distinction seriously, and he takes the violation of it personally in the way that artists take it personally when their work is leveraged by something they would never have agreed to.

He teaches willingly and well. He talks while he works, which some people find helpful and others find maddening. He does not adjust his commentary based on which reaction he is getting.

Commoner (Modified)

Monster Manual, pg. 77

Small Humanoid (Halfling)

Neutral

AC 11

Initiative +1 (11)

HP 4 (1d8)

Speed 30 ft.

PB +2

		MOD	SAVE			MOD	SAVE
STR	8*	-1	-1		INT	14*	+2
DEX	16*	+3	+3		WIS	13*	+1
CON	10	0	0		CHA	11*	0

Skills

Investigation (P) +4

Perception (P) +3

Sleight of Hand (E) +7

Senses

Passive Perception 13

Traits

Master Locksmith

Fenwick has advantage on Dexterity checks made to pick locks or disarm traps. When assisting a party member with these checks, he grants advantage and an additional +3 bonus rather than the standard Help action bonus. When working without time pressure, he automatically succeeds on any lock or trap DC of 20 or lower.

Read the Mechanism

Fenwick can examine a locked door, chest, or trapped mechanism for one minute and identify the following:

- the approximate quality of the lock (DC range)
- whether it has been recently used
- whether it has been tampered with
- whether a trap is present

While he cannot identify magical traps, he can tell when something about the mechanism does not make sense in a way that might suggest magic.

Teaching

A party member who spends a downtime activity training with Fenwick gains proficiency with Thieves' Tools if they do not already have it, or expertise if they do. This reflects genuine instruction.

Actions

Dagger

Melee Attack Roll: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft.

Ranged Attack Roll: +5 to hit, range 20/60 ft., one target.

Hit: 5 (1d4+3) piercing damage. He carries this because the clientele changed and he adjusted accordingly.

Notes

Fenwick exists to make infiltration encounters feel rewarding rather than cumbersome. He should be in the field on specific operations where his Master Locksmith skills will be useful, and out of field encounters where they are not. Bring him on missions where the party expects locked doors and let him demonstrate why he is worth protecting.

Read the Mechanism is a tool for providing information without bypassing player agency: he tells them what the lock suggests, they decide what to do with that.

SISTER KARA

Herbalist



Role: Healing, antitoxin supply, medical triage, moral center

Sister Kara was a healer before the resistance and will be a healer after. If there is an after. But she does not have divine magic. Instead, she has over thirty years of accumulated knowledge of which plants can heal under what conditions, a calm that people in pain find reassuring, and a very practical understanding of the difference between wounds that will kill someone today versus wounds that will kill eventually if left untreated.

She believes that her Tabaxi curiosity is the reason her knowledge is as broad as it is. She followed the plants. The plants led her through places most healers never go, which means she has seen things most healers have not, which means very little surprises her in an emergency triage. What does surprise her is the cruelty deployed systematically against people who have no recourse. She finds this interesting in

the way that a complex problem is interesting: something that must be understood completely before it can be solved.

The Cathedral of Gold's corruption of religious infrastructures bothers her in a way that is specific and personal. She trained under clerics whose healing work was genuine and whose faith was genuine, and she watched the regime contort both toward its own purposes. She considers this a theft and discusses it with a precision and a controlled anger that may surprise people who have only seen her calm.

She is the resistance's moral center in the way that quiet people who do necessary things without requiring recognition often become the moral center of groups. Nobody appointed her to this role. It rose up around her.

Commoner (Modified)

Monster Manual, pg. 77

Medium Humanoid (Tabaxi)

Neutral Good

AC 12

Initiative +2 (12)

HP 5 (1d8 + 1)

Speed 30 ft.; Climb 20 ft.

PB +2

		MOD	SAVE				MOD	SAVE
STR	9*	-1	-1		INT	14*	+2	+2
DEX	14*	+2	+2		WIS	16*	+3	+3
CON	12*	+1	+1		CHA	13*	+1	+1

Skills

Medicine (E) +7

Nature (P) +4

Perception (P) +5

Stealth (P) +4

Senses

Darkvision 60 ft.

Passive Perception 15

Traits

Feline Agility

When Sister Kara moves on her turn, she can double her speed until the end of the turn. She cannot use this trait again until she moves 0 feet on one of her turns.

Cat's Claws

Sister Kara has a climbing speed of 20 feet and her unarmed strikes deal 1d4 slashing damage. She does not use them for this.

Herbalist's Expertise

Sister Kara can produce one of the following items per long rest using available materials, requiring one hour of preparation:

- a healing poultice (restores 2d4+2 HP when applied, action to use)
- an antitoxin (as per standard item)
- a calming draught (removes the Frightened condition and grants advantage on the next Wisdom saving throw, action to use)

In a well-supplied safe house, she can produce one of each per long rest.

Triage

As a bonus action, Sister Kara can stabilize a dying creature within 5 feet without a Medicine check. She does not need to roll. She has done this enough times that it is no longer a question of whether she can but whether she has time.

Thirty Years of Experience

Sister Kara has advantage on Wisdom (Medicine) checks to diagnose illness, identify poison, or assess injury.

Steady Presence (1/Short Rest)

Creatures that receive healing from Sister Kara can immediately make a new saving throw against any ongoing fear or charm effect with advantage. This is not magic. It is the effect of being in the presence of someone who is not afraid and is not pretending.

Actions

Staff

Melee Attack Roll: +1 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 2 (1d6-1) bludgeoning damage. She carries a walking staff because the roads she travels are long. She is now aware that it can be used for other things.

Notes

Sister Kara is the resistance's medical infrastructure. Herbalist's Expertise should be tracked between sessions. Triage is most meaningful in scenes where stabilizing a fallen NPC matters narratively. Feline Agility is worth playing in medical emergency moments as she can cross a room faster than expected and can already begin treating a fallen ally before anyone noticed her move. Steady Presence is most useful in the quiet aftermath of significant loss. She should be kept at the safe house in all but the most specific circumstances. If she dies, the resistance loses its only dedicated medical capability and the party should feel that absence in every subsequent long rest.

BOWMAN (THE CHANGELING)



Everything Bowman presents as himself is a performance, and it is a very good one. He appears when the party needs him, offers exactly what they require, asks questions that sound like friendly concern, and leaves without demanding anything that feels like a real cost. He has done this before. Not with this resistance, not in this city, but the shape of it: find people who are trying to do something real, make yourself useful early, become indispensable before they know to wonder why, and position yourself for whatever comes next. He has genuine warmth for the people he works with, which is the most dangerous thing about him. It is not a lie that he wants the resistance to succeed. It is simply that his definition of success and theirs are not the same, and he has not needed to explain the difference yet.

Spy (Modified)

Monster Manual, pg. 295

Medium Humanoid (Changeling)

Neutral

AC 14 (Studded Leather)

Initiative +4 (14)

HP 27 (6d8)

Speed 30 ft.

PB +2

		MOD	SAVE				MOD	SAVE
STR	10	0	0		INT	12	+1	+1
DEX	15	+2	+2		WIS	14	+2	+2
CON	10	0	0		CHA	18	+4	+4

Skills

Deception* (E) +8

Investigation (P) +3

Perception (E) +6

Persuasion* (E) +8

Stealth (E) +6

Senses

Passive Perception 16

Traits

Cunning Action

On each of his turns, Bowman can use a bonus action to take the Dash, Disengage, or Hide action.

Sneak Attack (1/ Turn)

Bowman deals an extra 7 (2d6) damage when he hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally that is not incapacitated.

Actions

Shortsword

Melee Attack Roll: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 5 (1d6+2) piercing damage.

Hand Crossbow

Ranged Attack Roll: +4 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target.

Hit: 5 (1d6+2) piercing damage.

Spellcasting

Bowman casts one of the following spells using Charisma as the spellcasting ability (spell save DC 14, spell attack +6) requiring no material components:

- At will (action): **alter self**, **mage armor**, **mage hand**, **minor illusion**, **prestidigitation**
- At will (bonus action): **misty step**

Notes

Bowman will not fight in scenes the party participates in unless cornered with no escape option, in which case he uses **misty step** (bonus action teleport of 30 feet) to create distance. He does not want a fight with the party. A fight with the party is, from his perspective, a mission failure.

This stat block represents Bowman's civilian cover identity. It exists primarily for reference if needed in the betrayal encounter at the end of Act II. Once Bowman reveals himself as the Changeling Vice-Lord at the end of Act II, his stat block and full capabilities as the Changeling Vice-Lord (as detailed in the Regime Compendium Inner Circle section) should be used.

The two stat blocks represent different phases of the same creature.

Act I The Awakening



"They came for our neighbors, and we said nothing. Now they come for us."

Act I introduces the corrupted state of Orenthis and brings the adventurers together. The party witnesses firsthand the regime's impact on everyday life: Merregon patrols dragging families from their homes, Xvart mobs emboldened to attack the vulnerable, the Kenku's voice echoing propaganda from magical loudspeakers.

By the end of Act I, the resistance is no longer an idea. It is an organization with a home, a community, and a purpose. The party has proven that the regime can be hurt. And somewhere in a stack of garrison documents, if anyone looked carefully enough, there are two words that do not yet mean anything: **Project Provenance**.

Tone

Act I should feel oppressive but not hopeless. The regime's power seems overwhelming, but cracks are already showing. NPCs should express fear mixed with desperate hope. Small victories matter here because nothing feels guaranteed.

Objectives

- Introduce the regime's cruelty and the scope of corruption
- Bring the party together through shared loss or common cause
- Connect the party with the resistance movement
- Establish the major antagonists and their roles
- Give the party their first victories to build hope

Key Events

- Witnessing the regime's brutality firsthand
- The party's first act of defiance
- The wagon ambush: the resistance proves it can act
- Infiltrating the border garrison and confronting the Imp Warlock
- Rescuing prisoners and the Kenku
- Establishing a permanent base for the resistance
- Defending that base when the regime finds it

Merregon Lethality

To ensure the campaign is not a death march from the start, Merregons in Act I always use the Subdue Protocol for the first two rounds of any engagement. During these rounds, their damage is non-lethal. If the party responds with lethal magic or silvered weapons, the Merregons switch to lethal force immediately. This gives the party a window to realize they are outmatched and choose to flee or negotiate.

The Changeling's First Arc

Bowman appears three times in Act I, each appearance building the same pattern: he arrives with convenient but still accurate intelligence, asks reasonable questions, and leaves before he can be examined too closely. By the end of Act I the party should trust him without being able to say exactly why. The seeds of false trust are planted carefully and early.

NPCs may express unease about him. The Kenku, if freed, will surface fragments of overheard conversations at moments of her own choosing. What she offers is not warning. It is positioning. The party should not be able to tell the difference.

Lieutenants Introduced

- The Imp Warlock (Field Commander of Border Operations)
Defeated (Chapter 3)
- The Rakshasa (Border Commander)
Named, not yet encountered
- The Yagnoloth (Minister of Foreign Relations)
Named, not yet encountered
- The Mezzoloth (Speaker of the Council)
Named, not yet encountered
- The Hezrou (Investigator)
Named, not yet encountered

Party Growth

Act I covers Levels 2 through 4. By the end of Act I, the party should:

- Understand the scope of the threat and the regime's operational structure
- Have allies, a safe base, and a functioning resistance community
- Know the names of the outer circle lieutenants
- Have achieved meaningful victories (wagon ambush, garrison raid, base defense)
- Be committed to the resistance cause

without illusions about the cost

- Have a working but unexamined trust in the Changeling
 - Have noticed, or missed, two words in a garrison document that do not fit the pattern
-

Chapter 1 The New Order



"The streets that once rang with laughter now echo only with marching boots and borrowed words."

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 introduces the players to a kingdom under the heel of tyranny. The Goristro's regime has transformed daily life into a nightmare of fear, propaganda, and wanton cruelty.

Merregon patrols seize citizens in broad daylight while the Kenku's voice justifies every "enforcement action" over magical loudspeakers. Xvart mobs, emboldened by the regime, harass anyone deemed "undesirable."

This chapter establishes the campaign's baseline: what daily oppression looks like, how fear keeps people compliant, and why resistance, while dangerous, is necessary. By the end, the characters will have witnessed the regime's brutality, made a meaningful first choice, and found the first sign of organized resistance.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Scene 1: Arrival in Shadow

The party enters a district under regime control: broadcasts, banners, and patrol rhythms. They learn the "rules" and witness power up close.

Scene 1 should feel oppressive and observant as players learn the rules of the regime.

Scene 2: The Raid

A family is taken. Xvarts vandalize and provoke. The party can intervene, extract someone, gather evidence, or track the wagon. Scene 2 should feel chaotic and morally uncomfortable during the first exposure to real consequences.

Scene 3: A Helpful Stranger

The Changeling (under a false identity) performs a quiet act of mercy and offers selective help.

Scene 3 should feel cautious and uncertain: has the party found an ally or manipulator?

Scene 4: The First Choice

A small act of resistance is about to be crushed. The party chooses: warn, sabotage, fight, or walk away.

Scene 4 should feel tense but empowering with the party's first deliberate act of resistance.

Scene 5: A Glimmer of Hope

The party is contacted and offered a place in the resistance.

Scene 5 should feel hopeful but fragile through a connection to something larger than themselves.

Crowd Chaos

A sudden stampede, wagon overturn, or market fire creates a plausible escape.

An Ally Intervention

This could be a concerned citizen or a resistance member creating a distraction. Not to win the fight, only to create an exit.

Using these repeatedly teaches the table that Orenthis is dangerous, but the campaign is not a death march.

RUNNING THE CHAPTER

Designed for: 2nd-level characters

Sessions: 2-3

Advancement: None

This chapter is narrative-forward with selective, survivable conflict. The party should not be forced into a stand-up fight with multiple Merregions. When violence happens, it should be brief, objective-driven, and escape-friendly.

The primary goals are:

- Establish the regime's oppression through scenes of cruelty and propaganda
- Introduce the major antagonist forces (Merregions, Xvarts, and the Kenku's broadcasts)
- Bring the party together through shared danger, loss, or conscience
- Plant resistance hooks without requiring suicidal heroics
- Show defiance is possible through small, concrete victories

Guidance

If the party picks a fight they cannot win, do not punish them with a TPK. Instead, use one of these outcomes:

Subdue and Detain

Merregions can fight to incapacitate. A party member being captured can serve as a hook into Chapter 2.

SCENE 1:

ARRIVAL IN SHADOW

The party enters a district under regime control for the first time. This scene establishes the atmosphere of occupation: broadcasts, banners, and patrol rhythms. It should give players time to observe and explore before the first confrontation.

Read or paraphrase the following:

You stand in the streets of Oren, the sprawling capital of Orenthis. Or rather what Oren has become. The streets before you are transformed. Where once laughter and music filled the air, now there is only the mechanical march of armored boots and the crackle of magical loudspeakers.

A voice echoes from crystalline speakers mounted on every corner: "Citizens of Orenthis, give thanks for the protection of our glorious leader. Report suspicious activity to your local enforcement station. Compliance ensures safety. Resistance ensures consequence."

The people move quickly, eyes down, conversations whispered. Golden banners bearing a bull's head flutter from every building. In the distance, you see a patrol of dark-armored figures: faceless, emotionless, methodical, marching in perfect formation.

This is not the Orenthis you knew, or the one you had heard of. This is something new. Something wrong.

Features of the Area

Magical Loudspeakers

Crystal devices mounted at intersections broadcast the Kenku's messages on endless loop. The broadcasts include:

- Praise for the Goristro's "restoration" of Orenthis
- Instructions to report "agitators and traitors"
- Justifications for enforcement actions
- Lists of restricted activities
- Curfew announcements

A DC 12 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals these are **magic mouth** spells bound to crystal amplifiers. Destroying one would stop broadcasts locally but would draw immediate

attention. If the party attempts destruction, a large Merregon patrol arrives in 1d4 minutes and the party must flee. If the party is seen, wanted posters appear the next day (+1 Heat).

Propaganda Posters

Every wall bears posters showing:

- The Goristro as a heroic figure "protecting" Orenthis
- Happy citizens "grateful" for the new order
- Warnings about the "threat" posed by various groups
- Instructions for reporting suspicious neighbors

Golden Banners

The Goristro's symbol (a bull's head) flies from every building. Citizens who refuse to display one risk investigation.

Merregon Patrols

Groups of 2-4 faceless devils march predictable routes. Citizens scatter when they approach. They occasionally stop to question someone, check papers, or drag someone away.

Atmosphere of Fear

Citizens hurry about their business, avoid eye contact, and speak in whispers. Neighborhoods that were once vibrant now feel like tombs.

Exploration: Talking to Citizens

Most are too frightened to speak openly. A DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) check in a private setting might get someone to whisper:

- "Keep your head down and you'll be fine."
- "They took the Carvers three days ago. No one's seen them since."
- "That Kenku... something's wrong with her."
- "There are people organizing, but I can't... I shouldn't say more."

Exploration: Observing Patrols

A DC 11 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals:

- Merregons rarely speak; they mostly grunt and point
- Merregons carry lists of names and addresses
- Citizens with certain markings on their doors are targeted
- Xvarts sometimes follow the patrols, emboldened by their presence

Exploration: The Kenku's Broadcasts

Her stilted, parroting speech should feel unsettling, not comedic. Use her voice to build tension during preparation, show the propaganda machine in action, and foreshadow consequences. A DC 13 Wisdom (Insight) check while listening carefully reveals:

- The same phrases repeat constantly; she can only mimic
- Messages often contradict each other
- Occasionally there are odd pauses or a peculiar emphasis

Be mindful that the information disseminated by the Kenku broadcasts needs to be balanced. If she surfaces information about the Changeling Vice-Lord too pointedly, Bowman's arc can break early. But if she surfaces nothing useful, her manipulative intelligence vanishes from play. Consider broadcasting accurate but ambiguous fragments:

- A description of a resistance supplier that could describe multiple merchants
- A reference to 'the baker's street' that fits multiple districts
- A count of suspected resistance members that is plausibly wrong
- *"Remain where you are."* (clearly not directed to anyone in particular)
- *"This area is under observation."* (intentionally unclear if directed at the party or not)

None of these are actionable, however all of them should be unsettling.

The Encounter

During exploration, the party witnesses a Merregon patrol stopping a citizen.

Use 2 Merregons for parties of 3-4 characters, 3 for parties of 5, or 4 if you want to emphasize overwhelming odds and require creative solutions over direct combat.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The patrol halts. One of the faceless figures points at an elderly halfling man. A metallic rasp emanates from beneath its helmet: "Papers."

The halfling fumbles with trembling hands, producing a worn document.

The Merregon examines it.

"Osso Brightpenny, cobbler."

The Merregon crushes it in its gauntlet. "Expired... Detention."

As Osso begins to protest, another Merregon grabs him by the arm. The old man's cries for help go unanswered as people hurry past, eyes averted.

At just 2nd level, the party cannot fight 2-4 CR 4 Merregons and survive. This is intentional. It establishes the regime's power and the need for cleverness over direct confrontation.

What the Party Can Do

Stand By Quietly

Osso is dragged to a temporary holding area.

- The party learns where detainees are staged before transport
- The party can plan a rescue later
- Witnessing without acting plants guilt and motivation

Intervene Peacefully

The Merregons demand the party's papers as well.

- A DC 15 Charisma (Deception or Persuasion) check might convince them the party has authority to vouch for him
- On a failure, the Merregons attempt to detain the party spokesperson
- On a critical failure (5 or lower), this becomes a chase or combat-to-capture hook

Attack

Run only 1-2 Merregons to avoid a TPK. Have the Merregons fight to subdue, not kill. After 2 rounds, a horn-call goes up for reinforcements (2 more arrive in 1d4 rounds).

- A tactical retreat becomes necessary
- NPCs or the environment can help provide escape routes

After this encounter, citizens begin to react to the party.

If the party intervened, witnesses view them with either hope or fear of association, and the Kenku's next broadcast may mention "agitators interfering with enforcement."

If the party stood by, Osso Brightpenny is taken. That is not a neutral outcome. Before the patrol turns the corner, he looks back at the crowd, and at the party specifically. He does not say anything. He does not have to. Two

citizens nearby noticed that the party did nothing. One of them is Elara Stonemantle, who will remember this. If she appears in Scene 2 and the party failed to act here, her willingness to trust them starts at a deficit: increase the DC of any Persuasion check involving her by 2 until the party earns it back through action.

The regime does not reward passivity. It just postpones consequences.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

Have Elara witness the party's hesitation and approach them afterward to give a passive outcome a narrative consequence.

Making it Harder

Emphasize the confined street layout; escape routes are present but not obvious, and require a DC 13 Perception check to spot quickly.

Increasing Role Play

Osso has dropped something during the arrest (a note about a resistance meeting, a list of other targeted families) that rewards parties who investigate afterward.

Treasure and Rewards

No direct rewards in this scene. If the party investigates the aftermath of the detention:

- Osso's dropped note, if found, seeds the resistance hook early

Development and Dial Impact

This scene is designed to be exposition through exploration, unless the party attempts to destroy a loudspeaker

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Party destroys a loudspeaker			
Wanted posters appear the next day	0	+1	0

SCENE 2: THE RAID

This scene can occur naturally during exploration or can be triggered when the party investigates a specific address, perhaps from information gathered in Scene 1.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The Kenku's voice crackles from a nearby speaker: "Enforcement action in progress at 47 Millstone Lane. Citizens are advised to clear the area. Compliance ensures safety."

Ahead, a modest home stands with its door smashed open. A Merregon patrol, four faceless devils, drags a struggling family into the street. A woman clutches two small children, screaming. A man tries to pull free and is clubbed to the ground.

Behind the Merregons, a pack of small, rat-like creatures in ragged red caps shriek with laughter, smashing windows and painting crude symbols on the walls. One of them shouts: "Undesirables! Traitors! This is what happens to traitors!"

The crowd watches in silence. No one moves to help.

Features of the Area

The Home

A two-story building, now ransacked. Inside:

- Overturned furniture and broken possessions
- Torn propaganda posters used as "evidence" of disloyalty
- A hidden compartment under the floorboards (DC 14 Investigation) containing resistance pamphlets and a list of names
- Children's toys are strewn about

The Merregon Patrol

4 Merregons drag the Stonemantle family (Elara, her husband Marcus, and their two children) toward a detention wagon at the end of the street.

The Xvart Mob

12 Xvarts led by Rax the Loud. They vandalize the home and menace bystanders but scatter when confronted.

The Detention Wagon

A reinforced cart with barred windows, already holding 4-5 prisoners. Two additional Merregons guard the wagon from 200 feet away at the far end of the street. They will not leave their post unless combat noise has been sustained for at least 3 full rounds AND is clearly audible at that distance. Area spells, horn blasts, or shouted exchanges qualify, a single melee exchange does not. This gives the party a window to intervene, extract, or disengage before the full force bears down. If the party is operating quietly and quickly, the wagon guards may never become relevant. If the party is making noise and taking time, they absolutely will. Make this distinction clear in your pacing.

The Crowd

20-30 citizens watch from doorways and windows. If the party acts decisively, 1d4 citizens may assist with distractions (Help action, thrown debris, shouting warnings). They will not fight to the death.

The Encounter

Merregons

- Methodically move detainees toward the wagon
- If attacked, 2 defend while 2 continue moving prisoners
- They will attempt to subdue unless a character uses lethal force
- If seriously threatened, they call reinforcements (arrive in 1d4 rounds)

Xvarts

- Scatter immediately if Rax is threatened
- Fight only if they outnumber opponents 3-to-1
- Use ranged attacks from cover; flee if the party advances towards them

The Family

- Marcus tries to fight but is untrained (AC 10, 8 HP; if he drops to 0 HP he falls unconscious but is automatically stable)
- Elara will not leave the children
- The children are terrified and slow (treat as difficult terrain if carried; encourage smart movement)

The Changeling's Intervention

Use this only if the party is genuinely moments from a TPK or capture with no visible exit. It is a safety valve, not a default resolution. If the party found their own path through, even a messy or costly one, let it stand. Their solution is worth more than a clean rescue.

If the valve is needed, read or paraphrase the following:

"Stop! I'll handle this." A man in fine clothing strides forward, showing a sealed writ. "These citizens are under administrative review. Release them to my custody immediately."

The Merregons examine the document, grunt, and release the family. The official ushers everyone into a nearby alley.

"Quickly now. They'll realize that writ is forged in about five minutes. I'm Bowman. Don't ask for more than that. You need to get these people somewhere safe, and you need to be nowhere near here. Go. Now."

Before the party can press him, he vanishes into the crowd.

If the party handled this scene without Bowman, do not introduce him here at all. Move his first appearance to Scene 3 intact. A party that earned their own exit in Scene 2 should not have that undercut by an NPC they did not need.

What the Party Can Do

Direct Confrontation (Very Difficult)

Four Merregons can be a deadly encounter for a 2nd level party. If the party chooses this anyway, telegraph consequences clearly and push the subdue/capture/escape path. Xvarts flee quickly, reducing chaos, but Merregons remain lethal.

Negotiate (Difficult)

DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion or Deception) to convince the Merregons to release the family. The DC is reduced to 12 if the party can present:

- Forged documents
- A claim of official authority backed by confident role play
- A plausible legal technicality

Failure triggers detention attempts, which can be used to introduce the Changeling or launch an escape chase.

Distraction and Extraction (Moderate)

Create a distraction (fire, staged brawl, collapsing stall) and succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity (Stealth) group check to approach unseen. Primary win condition: get the family or the children out before the Merregons regroup.

Save Some, But Not All (Easy)

Rescue the children while the parents are taken. Convince Elara to flee while Marcus is captured. A partial victory that creates meaningful consequences and future missions.

Track the Wagon (Very Easy)

Let the raid happen, but learn the route and destination. This produces hard intel for Chapter 2: schedules, checkpoints, and staging yards.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

Rax flees at the first sign of party engagement, removing the Xvart mob entirely and reducing chaos.

Making it Harder

Two additional Xvarts block the nearest alley exit, forcing the party to find another escape route.

Increasing Role Play

The hidden compartment contains a personal letter from a resistance member to Elara by name, giving the party a reason to seek her out even if they failed to save her.

Treasure and Rewards

In the Hidden Compartment

- Resistance pamphlets
- A list of 8 names (others targeted for detention)
- A scribbled message: "Meeting at the Three Bells, midnight.
Password: Starling."

From Grateful NPCs

- If the party saves the family, Elara gives them a potion of healing
- Marcus offers equipment repairs if he survives and remains free

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Party saves the family Elara becomes a contact in Scene 5 Next broadcast condemns "violent extremists"	+1	+1	0
Family is taken (due to either a failure or party inaction) The empty house becomes a symbol The party gains the wagon route as a consolation lead	-1	0	0

SCENE 3:

A HELPFUL STRANGER

This scene occurs after the party has witnessed the regime's cruelty but before they make their first meaningful choice. It introduces the Changeling's false persona as a sympathetic figure, or reinforces it if he already intervened in Scene 2.

Read or paraphrase the following:

A commotion erupts in a side street ahead. A Merregon patrol, three faceless devils in dark armor, has cornered an elderly gnome woman against a stone wall. One raises its heavy crossbow, the bolt glinting in the lamplight.

"Wait!" A well-dressed human in fine but understated clothing rushes forward from the crowd, one hand raised peacefully, the other producing an official-looking document sealed with red wax.

"This citizen is on the administrative exception list. She's exempt from tonight's enforcement under Municipal Code 47, subsection 12."

The Merregons pause. One snatches the document, examining it with mechanical precision. After a long moment, it grunts and thrusts the paper back. The patrol marches away, boots echoing on cobblestones.

The man helps the gnome to her feet with genuine gentleness, whispers something that makes her nod tearfully, and watches until she disappears safely around a corner.

Only then does he notice you watching. His expression shifts: surprise, then calculation, then a warm, disarming smile. He approaches with both hands visible, raised in a gesture of peace.

"Easy now. I'm one of the people trying to help. Or at least, that's what I tell myself when I look in the mirror." He glances around, ensuring you're not overheard. "Name's Bowman. You're new to this whole 'resisting tyranny' business, aren't you? I can tell by the way you're looking at me. Like you can't decide if I'm legitimate or if I'm about to sprout a tail."

Features of the Area

Side Street

A side street off a main thoroughfare. Close enough to crowds for plausible deniability, far enough for a quiet conversation.

- A nearby tavern with outdoor seating (witnesses, but at a distance)
- An alley offering quick escape routes
- A patrol route the Changeling knows well enough to time his intervention

The Encounter

Interaction with the Changeling

The Changeling is charming and projects careful competence. He reads the party quickly and adapts.

His opening gambit is questions, not offers:

- "You're not from this district, are you? I'd remember faces like yours."
- "How long have you been in the city? Since the... changes?"
- "Have the patrols bothered you yet? No? Consider yourselves fortunate."

He is gathering intelligence while appearing friendly. Note what the party volunteers about themselves.

What He Claims

- "I'm a clerk in the municipal archives. Boring work, endless paperwork, but it has advantages."
- "I have access to forms, seals, routing schedules. Things that can help people slip through cracks."
- "I'm not a hero. I just... I can't stand by and watch. Not anymore."
- "If they catch me, I'm dead. Or worse. So I'd appreciate discretion."

What He Offers

- Patrol Schedule: "Merregons follow precise routes. I can tell you which streets to avoid and when." (Accurate; grants advantage on checks to avoid patrols for 1d4 days)
- Forged Transit Paper: "This will get one person through a checkpoint, once. Use it wisely." (Single-use; DC 14 Investigation to detect the forgery)
- Warning About Detention Wagons: "They stage prisoners at the old customs house before moving them to the border garrison. If you're looking for someone..." (Accurate)

What He Asks

- *"Don't describe me to others. I have to be careful who I trust."*
- *"If you use the information I've given you, be smart about it. Reckless heroics get people killed."*
- *"If you hear of others resisting, people organizing... I'd like to know. We could help each other."*

The last request is the most important. He is covertly trying to identify resistance members.

His True Objectives

Intelligence Gathering: Identify potential resistance members, assess the party's capabilities and moral limits, determine if they are useful tools or potential threats, and learn what motivates them.

Building Cover: Establish himself as a resistance ally early, demonstrate genuine utility (his information is real), and make himself seem vulnerable and trustworthy.

Long-Term Positioning: Plant himself as a recurring contact, create dependency on his information, and make his eventual betrayal more devastating.

Insight Checks

- DC 8: He's genuinely nervous and checks for watchers frequently. This isn't an act.
- DC 12: His story hangs together well. Almost too well. Like he's told it before.
- DC 15: His body language is practiced. The humble, helpful bureaucrat persona is a performance.
- DC 18: He has said nothing verifiable about himself. Every "personal" detail is generic enough to apply to dozens of people.
- DC 20: When he thinks you're not looking, his expression goes completely neutral. Not stressed, not kind. Just blank. It's unsettling.

If Confronted

If a player calls him out on a passive or active Insight beat of DC 15 or higher, he doesn't panic:

"You're perceptive. Good. That'll keep you alive." He meets their eyes steadily.
"Yes, I'm careful. Yes, I've practiced this. Do you know what happens to people who resist carelessly? They disappear. I've seen it. So yes, I'm cautious, calculated, and I don't trust easily. If that bothers you, walk away. But if you want to survive long

enough to make a difference, you'll understand why I am the way I am."

It's a good answer. Hard to argue with. And entirely beside the point.

The Document

If the party examines it (DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation)):

- The seal is authentic municipal wax
- The handwriting is bureaucratic and formal
- The legal citation is real, but the gnome's name was added recently (the ink is slightly different)

This is a masterful forgery. The Changeling carries a dozen blanks and fills them in as needed.

Ending the Encounter

After 5-10 minutes of conversation, the Changeling becomes nervous (real or performative):

"I've been in one place too long. Patterns get noticed." He glances toward the patrol route. "Be safe. Be smart. And if you need to reach me..." He pauses. "Actually, no. Better if you don't know how. If we're meant to cross paths again, we will."

If the Party Pursues Him

The Changeling makes a Stealth check (+8 modifier) with advantage. To follow him, the party must succeed on three group checks:

- Beat his Stealth with Perception (DC typically 18-22)
- DC 13 group Stealth to tail without being noticed
- DC 12 Acrobatics or Athletics to navigate the crowds

If they succeed, they see him enter a municipal building and vanish. They learn nothing new except that his cover story appears to check out, which makes him more credible.

The Rescued Gnome

If players pursue her later, she genuinely knows nothing except:

- The man has helped her twice before
- She doesn't know his real name
- He never asks for payment

What the Party Can Do

Accept His Help

Take the patrol schedule and the forged transit paper. He notes their faces, capabilities, and goals. No mechanical downside yet.

Decline His Help

He backs off gracefully: "I understand. Trust is earned." He still "accidentally" helps them in future scenes. His pattern of helpful-but-suspicious behavior continues.

Attack or Detain Him

He uses **misty step** to escape immediately. He leaves behind nothing but more questions. He reappears later under a different face.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

If the party is already suspicious of everyone, have the rescued gnome make brief eye contact with them before leaving, suggesting she trusts him, which softens the party's wariness.

Making it Harder

A Merregon patrol passes during the conversation, forcing everyone to act natural under scrutiny (DC 12 Deception or Charisma saving throw to avoid drawing attention).

Increasing Role Play

Let the party ask him questions for as long as they like. Every answer he gives is technically true, carefully incomplete, and designed to make him appear trustworthy. Reward players who notice the pattern.

Treasure and Rewards

From the Changeling (if accepted)

- Forged transit paper: allows one person to pass one checkpoint without question (DC 16 Investigation for an expert to detect the forgery)
 - Patrol schedule: grants advantage on Stealth checks to avoid Merregon patrols for 1d4 days
-

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Party accepts his help He has noted their faces, capabilities, and goals	0	0	0
Party refuses his help He remains intrigued; will reappear in future scenes regardless	0	0	0
Party attacks or detains him He escapes, knows their capabilities	0	+1	0

SCENE 4:

THE FIRST CHOICE

This is the chapter's climax: the moment when the party decides who they are. This scene occurs after the party has witnessed regime power (Scene 1), experienced regime cruelty (Scene 2), and met the Changeling (Scene 3).

The party learns about a small act of resistance happening tonight, passed through whispered conversation.

Read or paraphrase the following:

Word reaches you quietly, passed from whispered conversation to whispered conversation: Tonight, at midnight, a small group plans to destroy the Kenku's loudspeaker in Market Square. One small act of defiance in the name of the people whom the regime took today.

You also learn the regime knows about it. A Merregon patrol will be waiting. The resisters don't know it's a trap.

You could warn them. You could help them. You could ignore it and stay safe.

The choice is yours.

Features of the Area

Market Square

Market Square at midnight: empty stalls, hanging lanterns, crates, tarps, multiple alley exits. The nearest patrol is close enough that mistakes matter.

The Loudspeaker

AC 13, 25 HP, immunity to poison and psychic damage.

Currently broadcasting: *"Curfew in effect. Unauthorized citizens will be detained. Compliance ensures safety."*

The Resisters

5 civilians (Commoners) led by Joran.

The Encounter

The Ambush

2 Merregons are hidden near the loudspeaker. 2 more Merregons arrive as reinforcements in Round 3 if the alarm is raised.

Round 1 and 2

Merregons attempt to subdue resisters first. Party engagement pulls pressure off the civilians.

Round 3

Reinforcements arrive (2 Merregons). If the party has not yet achieved their objective, emphasize escape.

Victory Conditions

- Destroy the loudspeaker and escape
- Save at least half the resisters
- Avoid capture

Complete Success: achieve all three.

Partial Success: achieve one or two. Use the environment actively: topple stalls, cut tarps, start a lantern fire, slam gates.

Escape Condition: DC 12 group Stealth to disappear, or a chase into the alleys.

What the Party Can Do

If the party saved the Stonemantle family or intervened in Scene 1, Joran mentions this when the party arrives:

"Mira told me what you did earlier. That's why I'm here."

If the party did nothing in both prior scenes, Joran does not know them and is quietly, visibly surprised they showed up at all.

Neither is meant as reward or punishment.

Warn and Abort

DC 10 Persuasion to convince the resisters.

Everyone escapes; the loudspeaker remains.

This earns trust but creates no public victory.

Even without a public victory, the resistance remembers who chose to act before it was safe.

Mira shares one extra operational detail in Chapter 2 that she would otherwise have held back.

Create a Better Plan

DC 13 Perception to spot the ambush, DC 14 Deception or Performance to draw Merregons away, DC 13 group Stealth to destroy the loudspeaker and vanish.

Do Nothing

Resisters are captured. The next day's broadcast announces "traitors detained." This is a legitimate choice; it shapes how the resistance views them.

Betray the Resisters

A dark path. Consequences arrive fast.

Spring the Trap

Combat starts with 2 Merregons. The goal is to break the speaker and escape, not defeat them all.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

- Only 1 Merregon initially
- Only 1 reinforcement arrives in Round 3
- Resisters have 6 HP each
- A sympathetic crowd provides opportunistic distractions

Making it Harder

- 3 Merregons initially
- Xvart spectators arrive to jeer and throw stones
- The loudspeaker has 40 HP

Increasing Role Play

- An NPC is injured and must be carried, forcing party triage decisions
- The Changeling appears to offer "help" that creates a future obligation

Treasure and Rewards

From a Successful Encounter

- Potion of healing from grateful resisters
- A symbol of defiance (narrative token)
- The DM may award Heroic Inspiration

From the Loudspeaker

- A crystal amplifier shard (a component for later sabotage)
 - A clue marking it as part of a larger network (future hook)
-

Development and Dial Impact

If the party chooses to stand by, they earn no public Hope or Heat, but Mira notices those who chose action over inaction. Grant one point of private trust, redeemable as a single future favor at DM discretion

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Party helps (either fights or sabotages) Word spreads Citizens grow slightly braver Resistance reaches out	+1	+1	0
Party warns but doesn't fight Trust grows slower The regime remains less aware	0	0	0
Resisters are captured Public humiliation broadcast the next day Urgency for Chapter 2 rescue thread	-1	0	0
Party betrays the resisters Short-term gain but long-term isolation from any resistance contact	-1	0	0

Even without a public victory, word spreads quietly among those watching. The party has proven they are willing to act. That matters.

SCENE 5:

A GLIMMER OF HOPE

This scene concludes the chapter as the party learns they are not alone. The party is contacted quietly and directed to a specific location: a tavern basement, an abandoned warehouse, a hidden shrine room, or a private home under cover of darkness.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The room is small, lit by a single hooded lantern. Around a battered table sit six people: young and old, human and not. They look tired, frightened, but determined.

A middle-aged woman with kind eyes and calloused hands stands as you enter. "Thank you for coming. I know you don't know us, and we don't know you well. But we know what you did."

She gestures to the others. "We are not heroes. We're a baker, a teacher, a mother, a smith, a sailor, and a priest. We are the people who remember what Orenthis was and refuse to accept what it's become. We are the resistance."

The actual invitation to join the resistance should only be extended once the party has done at least one of the following:

- Saved a named civilian,
- Destroyed or disrupted the loudspeaker,
- Been explicitly vouched for by Joran, Elara, or Marcus.

And even so, Mira does not make this offer because she trusts them fully. She makes it because in Orenthis, willing bodies are rare, and even hesitation is more useful than compliance.

Mira extends her hand. She does not make this approach lightly.

"And if you'll have us, we're your allies. Will you join us?"

Features of the Area

The Safe House

A cramped, low-lit room chosen for discretion. One entrance, one exit. No windows. The people inside have taken a risk simply by being here.

The Resistance Members

- **Mira:** Pragmatic, tough leader
- **Joran:** Idealistic, brave, inexperienced
- **Tam:** Knowledge of smuggling routes and secret passages
- **Elara:** Present if saved in Scene 2; otherwise use another NPC
- **Marcus:** Present if saved in Scene 2; otherwise another NPC

The Encounter

What the Resistance Knows

About the regime:

- The Goristro seized power through force backed by "law"
- Merregions are bound by contracts; legal magic, not loyalty
- Citizens are divided by fear, faith, opportunism, and exhaustion
- A Rakshasa runs border operations
- An Archmage launders cruelty into doctrine and policy
- The Vice-Lord is everywhere and nowhere

About their plans:

- A growing network of resistance cells
- A need for safe houses and visible wins
- A need to free prisoners being moved through the border garrison

What the Resistance Offers

- Limited safe houses
- Basic supplies and healing support
- Patrol pattern intel
- Contacts across the district
- A cause

What the Resistance Needs

Mira addresses the party:

"We can't pay you. We can't promise you safety. What we can offer is this: a chance to fight for what's right. A chance to show Orenthis that tyranny doesn't go unopposed."

"We have people being moved through the border garrison. Families. The disappeared. We're planning a rescue but we need capable hands. People like you."

"Will you stand with us?"

What the Party Can Do

Join

They are given a small pin (a broken chain) and told the rotating password: "Starling" (if they do not already have it). They receive the opening brief for Chapter 2.

Hesitate

They are told where to leave a sign if they choose to return. They are not pressured; trust is earned.

Decline

The door remains open, but the resistance stops taking risks for them.

Note: If the party does decline, the resistance does not chase them. Chapter 2's wagon ambush can be stumbled upon, but it should feel like circumstance pulling reluctant witnesses into a war they tried to avoid, not a gentle redirect toward the intended story. The cost of declining should be felt: the party arrives without the planning advantage, without Tam's intelligence, and without the trust that makes NPCs risk themselves for strangers. They can still succeed. But they will earn it from zero.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

If the party is reluctant, have Elara (if present) speak directly to them about what it felt like to be the one who needed saving.

Making it Harder

A patrol passes close to the safe house during the meeting, forcing everyone to go silent for a tense minute and underscoring the stakes of simply being in this room.

Increasing Role Play

Let the party ask the resistance members questions. Each NPC has a reason they joined and a reason they're afraid. Mira will answer honestly. Joran will answer enthusiastically and slightly naively. Tam will answer carefully, watching for anything that feels wrong.

Treasure and Rewards

From Joining

- A broken chain pin (resistance token; may have future narrative use)
 - The password "Starling" and instructions for rotating it
 - Access to limited safe houses and resistance contacts
-

Development and Dial Impact

There are no tangible dial impacts from this scene, only narrative effects.

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

What the Party Should Know

- Orenthis is under tyrannical rule and daily life reflects it
- The regime is powerful, organized, and will respond to open defiance
- A "helpful" official named Bowman exists whose true agenda is unclear
- Small acts of resistance are possible and have real consequences
- An organized resistance exists and has extended an invitation
- The next goal is clear: rescue prisoners from the border garrison

Character Advancement

None. The party begins the campaign at 2nd level, so Chapter 1 grants no advancement.

Downtime (Optional)

If the party wants a brief pause before Chapter 2, they can spend time on the following:

- **Training:** Learn a language or tool proficiency from a resistance member
- **Crafting:** Gather materials for a basic piece of equipment with Mira's help
- **Building Relationships:** Spend time with Elara, Joran, or Tam to unlock a personal hook in Chapter 2

Future Hooks

- **The Changeling's False Alliance:** he reappears in Act II during key moments, each time offering useful but incomplete information, positioning himself as increasingly indispensable
- **Personal Stakes:** Osso Brightpenny (the halfling from Scene 1), the Stonemantle family, the resisters from Scene 4; who the party saved or failed to save will resurface
- **The Loudspeaker Network:** the crystal amplifier shard is a component in something larger

Lead-in to the Next Chapter

If the party has joined the resistance, Mira concludes the meeting with a new map on the table.

Read or paraphrase the following:

Mira unfolds a rough map on the table. "Then let me tell you about the border garrison. And about the people we're going to bring home."

Considerations

If the party declined to join the resistance in Scene 5 but left contact information, Chapter 2 can begin with an urgent message: a prisoner the party has personal reason to care about is on the next transfer wagon. The resistance reaches out one more time.

If the party has no interest in the resistance whatsoever, the wagon ambush in Chapter 2 can be stumbled upon rather than planned, pulling reluctant heroes into the story through circumstance rather than commitment.

Chapter 2 First Blood



"They took our neighbors in darkness. We bring them back in fire."

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 2 transforms the party from witnesses to actors. After joining the resistance in Chapter 1, they now face their first organized mission: intercept a Merregon detention wagon and free the prisoners before they disappear into the regime's apparatus forever.

It is designed to feel dangerous but achievable. The party has allies now, a plan, and a clear objective. Success here proves resistance is possible and builds momentum for Act I's remaining chapters. Failure teaches hard lessons about the cost of defiance and the regime's reach.

The Kenku's voice haunts the operation, broadcasting warnings that make every citizen a potential informant. The Changeling may provide crucial intelligence: accurate and useful, but suspiciously well-timed. The regime's response will depend entirely on how visible the party's actions become.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Scene 1: Plan the Impossible

The resistance briefs the party on the mission, provides intelligence, and helps them prepare. Scene 1 should feel strategic and empowering, planning should build confidence.

Scene 2: Gather the Pieces

The party gathers additional intelligence, acquires equipment, and potentially meets the Changeling for crucial information. Scene 2 should feel tense but manageable as the party's preparation pays off.

Scene 3: Interception

The rescue operation itself. Ambush the wagon, fight the guards, free the prisoners. Scene 3 should feel dangerous and chaotic with real combat stakes.

Scene 4: Quick Escape

Getting everyone to safety while the regime mobilizes a response. Scene 4 should feel desperate and urgent as the party must escape or be caught.

Scene 5: The Aftermath

Dealing with consequences, celebrating survivors, and learning what comes next. Scene 5 should feel bittersweet, a victory, but recognize the full weight of the cost.

RUNNING THE CHAPTER

Designed for: 2nd-level characters

Sessions: 2-3

Advancement: Reach 3rd level at end

This chapter balances preparation (gathering intel, making plans) with execution (the rescue itself) and aftermath (dealing with consequences, celebrating victory, mourning losses).

The primary goals are:

- Execute the party's first organized resistance operation
- Introduce tactical planning and consequence management
- Demonstrate that victories are possible but never clean
- Establish the Changeling's pattern of "helpful" interventions
- Show how the regime responds to open defiance
- Deepen relationships with the NPCs

Guidance

Victory Should Feel Earned

The rescue is difficult but not impossible. Smart planning, good rolls, and bold choices should lead to success. But success should feel hard-won, not guaranteed.

Failure Should Not End the Campaign

If the rescue goes badly, prisoners might escape anyway (with casualties), the party might be captured (leading to a prison break), or the resistance might extract them at cost. Failure creates complications, not game-overs.

Choices Should Matter

Consider how loud the party is, who they trust, and what they prioritize. All of these affect Heat, Hope, and Grip. The regime's response in Chapter 3 should reflect the party's approach here.

SCENE 1:

PLAN THE IMPOSSIBLE

This scene occurs 1-2 days after the party joined the resistance. They are summoned to a safe house for the mission briefing.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The safe house is a cramped cellar beneath a cooper's shop. The air smells of wood shavings and lamp oil. Around a table covered in rough maps and scribbled notes, the resistance leadership waits.

Mira spreads a hand-drawn map across the table. "Every three days, a detention wagon leaves the Oren garrison at dawn. 'Prisoners' are taken to the border garrison for 'processing.'" Her jaw tightens. "We don't know for certain what happens after that, but we know no one comes back."

She taps the map. "Tomorrow's wagon holds six people. Good people. People with families. People that we can rescue."

Tam, the gnome scout, adds nervously: "Two Merregons will guard the wagon. Standard patrol. They follow Merchant's Road east for three miles before cutting north through the Thornwood Forest. That's our chance. Once they reach the border garrison..." He trails off.

Mira looks at each of you in turn. "This is dangerous. If we fail, those people die. If we're seen, the regime will crack down even harder. And if we're caught..." She doesn't finish the thought.

"But if we succeed, we prove that resistance is possible. We show Orenthis that the Goristro's power isn't absolute. And we bring six good people home."

"The time is now because [choose one:]

- this wagon run carries a prisoner we have been tracking for weeks.*
- your arrival now gives us the extra force that this plan requires.*

She slides a piece of charcoal across the table. "So. How do we do it?"

Features of the Area

The Map

A hand-drawn map of the wagon route:

- City garrison (starting point, heavily fortified, 20+ Merregons)
- Merchant's Road (main thoroughfare, patrols, witnesses)
- Thornwood Forest (3-mile stretch, cover, isolation)
- Border garrison (endpoint, 15+ Merregons plus the Imp Warlock)

Intelligence from Tam

Tam can provide the following if asked:

- **Wagon Schedule:** leaves at dawn, arrives at border garrison by noon
- **Guard Composition:** 2 Merregons, one drives, one walks alongside
- **Prisoner Condition:** shackled, gagged, unarmed
- **Wagon Construction:** reinforced wood, barred windows, locked rear door (DC 15 Thieves' Tools to pick)
- **Thornwood Timing:** the wagon enters the forest about 90 minutes after departure, exits 45 minutes later
- **Patrol Backup:** no scheduled patrols in Thornwood, but city garrison reinforcements arrive within 30 minutes if alerted

However Tam does not know:

- Whether the Merregons have communication devices
- Exact prisoner identities (he has seen the wagon but cannot get close)
- Whether the Imp Warlock could be aboard (he has not seen him on prior runs)

Resistance Resources

Mira can offer limited support:

- **Personnel:** Joran volunteers without being asked. He cannot be talked out of it without a DC 14 Persuasion check and a genuinely compelling argument. He watched the party fight last night and has decided they are people worth following into something real. If the party accepts him, he is a distraction risk with a 4 HP ceiling. But he knows the eastern market district better than anyone, and during Scene 4's escape he can provide advantage on the first Dexterity saving throw or Stealth check as he navigates routes Merregons have never needed to learn. His presence is not mechanically wrong. It is mechanically

costly in combat and mechanically useful in escape. Whether that tradeoff is worth it is the party's call, and both answers are valid. Two additional Commoners can handle distractions or evacuation staging but will not enter combat.

- **Equipment:** one silvered shortsword ("Henrik confirmed Merregons regenerate unless damaged by silver. We have one. Protect whoever carries it"), basic weapons, 50 feet of rope, 2 healing potions, 1 hunting trap, 1 smoke grenade (heavily obscured 20-foot radius for 1 minute)
- **Safe House:** a hunter's cabin inside Thornwood Forest, 1 mile south of the road (marked on map)
- **Escape Route:** Tam knows smuggler paths through the forest back to the city

Note: Silver suppresses a Merregon's regeneration for their next turn only. A Merregon that takes no silvered damage on a subsequent turn will begin regenerating again. Mira's briefing on the shortsword can either include this nuance or leave it for the party to discover mid-combat.

The Encounter

This scene has no direct encounter. It is a planning session. Let the party discuss and drive the conversation. Mira and Tam respond to questions and react to proposals, but the plan belongs to the party.

Possible Approaches

Ambush: Use terrain for cover, disable the wagon (attack wheels or axle), fight or distract the Merregons, free the prisoners, and flee.

Infiltration: Sneak up during a rest stop, pick locks while Merregons are distracted, extract prisoners without combat. Higher DCs but results in lower Heat.

Deception: Forge orders to reroute the wagon or impersonate officials to "requisition" the prisoners. Requires excellent Deception, forged documents, and may require the Changeling's help.

Distraction: Stage an incident on the road ahead, draw Merregons away to investigate, and free the prisoners from the abandoned wagon. Requires good timing.

Mira's Final Advice

"Whatever you choose, remember: the goal is saving prisoners, not killing devils. Dead Merregons means investigations, reprisals, and crackdowns. If you can win without fighting, do it. If you must fight, end it fast and leave no witnesses."

What the Party Can Do

Plan Thoroughly

If the party asks smart questions and creates contingencies, the operation goes smoother. Grant advantage on initiative or the first round of combat in Scene 3.

Rush or Dismiss the Plan

Complications arise in Scene 3: an unexpected patrol, a broken lock, or a prisoner who panics. Apply disadvantage on one early check.

Bring Joran

He proves eager but clumsy. He provides Help actions but rolls at disadvantage and has AC 10, HP 4. His presence adds heart but also risk.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

Allow the party to ask Tam follow-up questions freely and have him reveal the weak rear-left wheel unprompted, giving them an obvious mechanical advantage going in.

Making it Harder

Tam mentions that the wagon schedule changed once before without warning. The party cannot be certain the timing holds, removing the guarantee of a time window.

Increasing Role Play

Have Mira push back on reckless plans firmly but without dismissing them. She has lost people before. Her caution is not timidity; it is grief. Let that come through.

Treasure and Rewards

There are no direct rewards in this scene. The planning session itself is the reward: better preparation leads to mechanical advantages in Scene 3.

Development and Dial Impact

No dial changes from this scene. Outcomes here carry forward as narrative advantages or disadvantages in Scene 3.

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Thorough planning Advantage on initiative or first combat round in Scene 3	0	0	0
Rushed or skipped planning One unexpected complication triggers in Scene 3	0	0	0
Joran included over objections He provides Help actions but rolls at disadvantage throughout	0	0	0

SCENE 2:

GATHER THE PIECES

Between planning and execution, the party has 12-18 hours to prepare. This scene covers final preparations, last-minute intelligence gathering, and a potential encounter with the Changeling.

Each preparation activity takes roughly 2 hours. The party must choose wisely before dawn.

Features of the Area

The City Before Dawn

The streets are quieter at night but more dangerous. Patrols are fewer but more suspicious of anyone still moving. The Kenku's broadcasts mark the hours like a clock no one asked for.

The Safe House

Still the cellar beneath the cooper's shop. Mira is awake. Tam is already gone to his observation post. Joran is trying very hard not to look nervous.

The Encounter

The Changeling's Intervention

Bowman does not appear here automatically. He appears if the party has already made contact with him in Chapter 1 AND has since spent time somewhere he could plausibly have tracked them (a public safe house contact, a resistance-linked merchant, or a location Tam mentioned openly). If the party has been careful about operational security, Bowman does not know where to find them and does not show up.

If he does not appear, the mission proceeds without his support information. The party will have less precise intelligence, which makes Scene 3 slightly harder but also more earned. Tam's observations and the party's own reconnaissance from Scene 2 should be sufficient for a capable group.

If he does appear, his arrival should feel like one of two things: either a small, useful coincidence that the party is starting to notice happens too often, or a deliberate move by someone who has been watching. Let the party decide which. But do not nudge them.

Read or paraphrase the following:

A quiet knock on the safe house door. Mira tenses, hand on her blade. Tam peers through the curtain and whispers: "It's that clerk... Bowman." The well-dressed official from earlier enters, carrying a leather satchel. He nods politely. "I heard through 'mutual acquaintances' that you're planning something bold tomorrow." He produces a folded document and sets it on the table. "This is the official wagon manifest. Routes, timing, guard assignments. I copied it from the archive." He steps back. "Obviously, you didn't get this from me."

What He Provides

Bowman provides a package that is suspiciously complete:

- Exact departure time (6:17 AM)
- Personnel confirmation (only 2 Merregons assigned)
- Guard names
- Wagon condition: rear left wheel requires maintenance
- Thornwood entry time (7:43 AM)
- The Kenku's dawn guard detail

The weak wheel is the most tactically valuable detail. It is also the kind of detail that requires either exceptional access or someone who has been inside the garrison recently. A sympathetic municipal archivist does not get this information from public records.

What He Asks in Return

Read or paraphrase the following:

"If this works, if you pull this off, people will talk. When they do, I'd like to know what they're saying. Information keeps us all alive."

He is asking the party to report back on resistance chatter. It sounds reasonable. It is also intelligence gathering for his own purposes.

Insight Checks

- DC 10: He is taking a real risk bringing this here.
- DC 14: He seems genuinely invested in the mission succeeding.
- DC 17: His questions are slightly too specific, as if he is building a profile.
- DC 20: The party notices that his intelligence package includes no gaps, no uncertainty, no "I couldn't confirm this

part." Real informants always have limits. He does not appear to have any. Leave this unresolved. Do not flag it. Let the party notice it or not.

If the party refuses his help or distrusts him, he is calm and gracious:

"I understand. Trust is precious these days." He leaves the document anyway. "Use it or don't. Just be careful out there."

Overnight Watch

If the party takes a long rest at the safe house, the Kenku's broadcasts mark the passage of the night:

- Evening (8 PM):
"Citizens are reminded: curfew begins at sunset. Those with legitimate travel needs must carry authorization papers. Compliance ensures safety."
- Late Night (11 PM):
"Increased enforcement actions have been authorized in the eastern districts. Agitators and sympathizers will be identified and detained. Report suspicious activity immediately."
- Dawn (5 AM):
"Security alert: unauthorized gatherings detected. Merregon patrols have been reinforced. Citizens should remain indoors. Resistance to lawful enforcement is treason."

The broadcasts grow more urgent, more aggressive. The regime is nervous.

What the Party Can Do

Scout the Route

Investigation or Survival DC 12.

- Risk: 20% chance of a patrol of 2 Xvarts
- Success: find ideal ambush points and terrain advantages; grants advantage on Stealth or initiative during the ambush

Gather Local Intel

Investigation DC 11.

- Risk: only 10% chance the rumor is useful
- Success: learn timing details or recent incidents from other travelers

Acquire Additional Equipment

Persuasion DC 13 or 50 gp.

- Risk: suspicious purchases reported on a failed DC 15 Deception check (Heat +1)
- Success: gain a crowbar, smoke grenade, or hunting trap

Research Merregon Weaknesses

Arcana or Religion DC 14.

- Risk: none
- Success: learn that Merregons regenerate unless damaged by silvered weapons; learn they are bound by contracts and may follow literal orders

Rest and Prepare Spells

Standard long or short rest.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

Tam returns early with confirmation that the wagon is running on schedule and mentions the wheel wobble he noticed on a prior run, giving the party the weak wheel detail even without the Changeling's manifest.

Making it Harder

One preparation activity triggers a complication: a merchant tips off a Xvart informant, adding a tail the party must lose before dawn or risk compromising the ambush site.

Increasing Role Play

Give each resistance NPC something to do the night before. Mira sharpens a blade she rarely uses. Joran bakes, because it is the only thing that calms him. Tam does not come back until just before dawn. These small details make the night feel real.

Treasure and Rewards

From Resistance Supplies

- 2 potions of healing
- Basic weapons (if needed)
- 50 feet of rope

From the Changeling (if accepted)

- The wagon manifest (narrative advantage throughout Scene 3)
- A forged "emergency requisition" form (usable with a Deception bluff at a checkpoint)

From Shopping (if done)

- Smoke grenade (50 gp)
- Hunting trap (5 gp)
- Healer's kit (5 gp)
- Crowbar (2 gp; grants advantage on forcing the wagon door)

Development and Dial Impact

Minimal dial changes in this scene. Outcomes carry forward as advantages or disadvantages into Scene 3.

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Thorough preparation Mira expresses confidence Narrative advantage entering Scene 3	0	0	0
Rushed or skipped preparation Mira warns against overconfidence Narrative disadvantage entering Scene 3	0	0	0
Changeling's help accepted He notes the party's reliance on him Mechanical advantages in Scene 3	0	0	0
Changeling's help refused No mechanical effect He remains intrigued	0	0	0
Suspicious purchase reported Xvart informant tips off a local patrol	0	+1	0

SCENE 3:

INTERCEPTION

As dawn breaks, the party moves into position. This is the ambush, the fight, and the rescue.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The Thornwood Forest is quiet in the pre-dawn chill. Mist clings to the ground, muffling sound. Birds haven't started singing yet. Through the trees, you can just make out Merchant's Road: a ribbon of packed earth winding east.

Tam checks his pocket watch. "Seven forty-one. They should be here in two minutes, give or take." He's sweating despite the cold.

In the distance, you hear it: the creak of wooden wheels, the steady clop of hooves, the rhythmic march of armored boots. The wagon is coming.

Features of the Area

The Ambush Site

- Dense forest on both sides of a 20-foot-wide road
- Heavy undergrowth (difficult terrain for Stealth, but good cover)
- Large trees (potential for climbing or dropping attacks)
- 60 feet of road visibility in each direction before curves
- Morning mist (lightly obscured; disadvantage on Perception checks beyond 30 feet)

The Wagon

- Large, reinforced wooden cart
- Two horses (calm, but can be startled)
- Barred windows on sides
- Locked rear door (DC 15 Thieves' Tools, AC 15, 20 HP)
- Weak rear-left wheel (AC 10, 10 HP; breaking it immobilizes the wagon)

The Guards

2 Merregons (standard MM stat block)

- One drives the wagon; one walks alongside scanning the forest
- Both carry heavy crossbows and longswords
- Devil's Sight (can see in magical darkness)
- Regeneration 5 (unless hit by silvered weapons)

- Their tactics are methodical and coordinated; one engages threats while the other calls for backup; prioritize recapturing prisoners over killing party members; fight to subdue unless directly threatened with lethal force; if one drops to half HP it attempts to flee and alert the garrison

The Prisoners

6 people inside, shackled and gagged

- Frightened, injured, desperate
- Include any recognizable NPCs from Chapter 1

The Encounter

Regardless of prep quality, every approach to this encounter should make at least one viable entry point, one concrete risk, and one extraction route visible to the party before initiative rolls. Poor reconnaissance increases cost; it does not remove options.

The party may be eligible to earn a surprise round, which grants them one free round of actions before initiative.

Initiative and Surprise

- If the party scouted and positioned carefully: DC 12 group Stealth check to earn a surprise round
- If the party rushed or made noise: no surprise; Merregons roll Perception checks with advantage
- If the party used the Changeling's manifest: Party rolls Stealth checks with advantage

Running the Combat

This is a Deadly encounter by math (two CR 4 Merregons against a 2nd-level party), but the circumstances strongly favor the party. Emphasize the following:

Action Economy: A party of 4-5 plus Joran significantly outnumber the guards. The math becomes more favorable the faster the party acts.

Environmental Advantages: The forest provides cover and concealment. The wagon is both a barrier and an objective. The horses can be startled with a DC 10 Animal Handling check or any loud noise.

Objective-Based Victory: The party does not need to kill the Merregons. Freeing the prisoners and escaping counts as a win. Disabling the wagon, creating distractions, and fleeing are all valid tactics.

Merregon Regeneration: Merregons regenerate 5 HP per turn and are extremely difficult to kill without silvered weapons. If the party is fighting to the death, telegraph this clearly. Clever parties will disable, distract, or flee instead.

Encounter Swing: Two Merregons is a Deadly encounter on paper, but the party's action economy, surprise potential, and objective-based victory path make this more survivable than the math suggests. If the party disables the wheel and focuses on the door rather than the Merregons, they can complete the primary objective with minimal direct combat. If they choose to fight both Merregons to completion, that is harder and is meant to be. The scene is not designed to force a specific approach. It is designed to reward the one that costs the party the least.

An Example Combat

Surprise Round (if earned): Party acts first. Recommended targets: the wagon wheel, the rear door lock, and any chokepoint obstacles.

Round 1: The driver Merregon continues driving and readies an action to abandon the wagon if attacked. The guard Merregon moves toward the biggest threat and attacks or grapples. The party executes their plan.

Round 2: If the wagon was disabled, the driver joins combat. If prisoners are being freed, both Merregons prioritize recapture. If the party is winning decisively, one Merregon attempts to flee and alert the garrison (DC 13 Perception if anyone notices).

Round 3 / 4: Terrain effects resolve. Freed prisoners stumble out, confused and injured. Joran (if present) tries to help but blocks line of effect. Horses may bolt if not calmed.

Round 5: A distant horn blast signals that the garrison has noticed the wagon has not checked in on schedule. This is not reinforcements arriving, it is a countdown clock starting.

Reinforcements (2 Merregons and 4 Xvarts): Reinforcements reach the scene at Round 10. If the regime's Grip is Unified (+3 or higher), they arrive at Round 9. If the Grip is Fractured (-3 or lower), they arrive at Round 11. Use the distant horn blast at Round 5 to telegraph this incoming threat.

If the party is clearly winning and can finish quickly, the reinforcement window is comfortable. If the party is struggling, the horn should prompt a hard choice: finish the objective or get out with what you have. Both are valid exits.

Variables

If Joran Is Present

He provides Help actions enthusiastically. He has AC 10, HP 4, and panics if hit. If he drops to 0 HP, resistance morale takes a hit in Scene 5.

If the Alarm Is Raised

Reinforcements (2 more Merregons plus 4 Xvarts) arrive in 6 rounds. This should push the party toward fleeing rather than finishing the fight. The ensuing escape in Scene 4 becomes more intense.

If a Merregon Flees

A fleeing Merregon is a real threat but not an immediate campaign-ender. If one escapes, do not apply Heat +2 automatically. Instead, apply Heat +1 and hold the second point in reserve: it triggers at the start of Chapter 3 only if the party was identified by name, face, or distinctive feature during this engagement. An anonymous wagon ambush by unknown assailants is a significant incident; a named resistance cell with faces is a manhunt. The regime treats these differently, and so should the campaign's pacing.

If the Party Uses Obvious Magic

Any spell that is visible or audible (Thunderwave, Fireball, etc.) triggers a 20% chance per spell that a nearby patrol investigates.

Victory Conditions

Complete Success

All 6 prisoners freed, Merregons defeated or evaded, no alarm raised, clean escape.

Partial Success

3-5 prisoners freed, one Merregon escaped to report, escape complicated but achieved.

Pyrrhic Victory

1-2 prisoners freed, one or more party members down, alarm raised, escape under heavy pursuit.

Failure

Prisoners not freed or recaptured, party members captured, total alarm raised. Handled in Scene 4 as a prison break scenario.

What the Party Can Do

Disable the Wagon First

Targeting the weak rear-left wheel (AC 10, 10 HP) immobilizes the wagon immediately and forces the driver Merregon to abandon his post, reducing pressure on the party for 1 round.

Distract and Extract

The rear door lock (DC 15 Thieves' Tools) or the door itself (AC 15, 20 HP) can be addressed while other party members hold the Merregons' attention. Splitting objectives is the intended approach.

Free the Prisoners During Combat

Stage a loud incident (spook the horses, collapse a tree limb, ignite a smoke grenade) to draw the Merregons out of position, then move on the wagon during the confusion.

Flee with Partial Success

If the party is taking casualties, fleeing with 3-4 prisoners and the information they have gathered is a legitimate outcome. Mira does not judge them for surviving.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

- The wagon wheel breaks on its own during approach, stalling the wagon before combat begins
- Joran creates a crucial distraction that grants the party a free surprise round
- The horses bolt, causing chaos that occupies one Merregon for 2 rounds

Making it Harder

- A third Merregon was riding inside the wagon (discovered when the door opens)
- Xvart scouts were nearby and join after Round 2 (nuisance, not lethal, but they make noise)
- The alarm is raised faster than expected (reinforcements arrive in 4 rounds instead of 6)

Increasing Role Play

- One of the prisoners recognizes the party from a Kenku broadcast and is terrified of them initially (DC 12 Persuasion to convince them you are not the "extremists" the regime described)
- Joran freezes for one full round when the fighting starts; he has never seen real violence before

Treasure and Rewards

From the Wagon

- Prisoners' confiscated belongings (minor valuables, sentimental items)
- Merregon equipment (heavy crossbow, longsword; common, not silvered)
- Official detention paperwork (evidence of the regime's corruption)

Development and Dial Impact

No dial changes yet. Dials move based on final outcome in Scene 5.

SCENE 4:

QUICK ESCAPE

The prisoners are free. Now comes the hard part.

Read or paraphrase the following (may need to adjust based on Scene 3 outcome):

The wagon sits silent, rear door hanging open. Six people stumble out, blinking in the morning light, hands still raw from shackles. One of them recognizes you: Osso Brightpenny, the halfling from Market Square, the one you saw dragged away days ago. His eyes fill with tears. "You... you came for us?"

Tam hisses urgently: "Celebrate later! We need to move. The garrison will know something's wrong within the hour. Maybe sooner if those devils got word out."

The rescued prisoners are injured, exhausted, terrified. Some can barely walk. And you're still three miles from safety.

Features of the Area

The Thornwood Forest

Dense enough to slow pursuit, but not dense enough to hide indefinitely. The trees are your cover. The road is your enemy.

The Pursuit Force (if alarm was raised)

2 fresh Merregons and 4 Xvart scouts. They have been tracking the party with advantage and are 10 minutes behind and closing fast.

The Encounter

If the Merregons are in pursuit, this will not lead to a combat. Instead, use a skill challenge format and encourage creative solutions.

Run the prisoners abstractly. At most tables, tracking six individual prisoners through a chase scene will kill momentum. Unless your group enjoys that granularity, abstract the prisoner group as a single unit: Speed 20 ft., requires one party member's movement action each round to keep moving at pace, and counts as a failed skill challenge check if abandoned or lost. This keeps the scene feeling like an escape rather than a logistics puzzle without removing the stakes.

As the party moves, choose one or more timers:

- A horn signal has gone up
- A second patrol is twelve minutes out by Merregon marching pace
- Three Xvart witnesses are approaching along the garrison road

This ensures the clock is not abstract.

Goal: 6 successes before 3 failures.

Skill Check Examples:

- Carry injured prisoners: Athletics DC 13
- Clear obstacles: Athletics DC 13
- Find shortcuts: Survival DC 12
- Cover tracks: Survival DC 12
- Create false trails: Deception DC 14
- Stabilize injured so they can move faster: Medicine DC 13
- Move quietly to avoid detection: Stealth DC 14
- Navigate difficult terrain without speed penalty: Acrobatics DC 13
- Use environmental factors (stream to hide scent, brambles to slow pursuers): Nature DC 12

Automatic Success Examples:

- Smoke grenade: deploy to break line of sight (consumes item)
- Hunting trap: set to ensnare and slow pursuers (consumes item)
- Sacrifice equipment: jettison gear to reduce encumbrance
- A "Heroic Stand": one character stays behind to delay pursuit (see below)

Heroic Stand

If a party member volunteers to delay pursuit, run a tense, brief combat. The objective is survive and escape, not win.

- 1 Merregon engages the volunteer
- The second Merregon and the Xvarts continue pursuing the main group
- The volunteer fights for 3 rounds, then attempts escape (DC 13 Athletics or Acrobatics)

Success: the volunteer rejoins the party at the cabin, battered but alive.

Failure: captured (creates a rescue hook for Chapter 3).

Death: possible, but offer dramatic sacrifice options first (blow a horn to draw all pursuers, collapse a bridge, etc.).

Consequences:

- 6+ Successes: clean escape, pursuers lose the trail

- 4-5 Successes: escape achieved, but pursuers know the general direction (Heat +1)
- 2-3 Successes: narrow escape; 1d6 damage to 1d4 party members
- 0-1 Successes: pursuers catch up; combat or capture (Scene 5 becomes a prison break)

What the Party Can Do

The party must now choose their next step carefully, but quickly. Present all three options clearly and let the party decide.

Plan A (Tam's Plan)

Take Refuge in the Hunter's Cabin:

1 mile south through the Thornwood forest. Hidden and defensible, with a supply cache. The party can rest, treat wounds, and smuggle people back via underground routes. Safe but slow.

Plan B (Mira's Backup Plan)

Direct Return to the City:

The city is 5 miles west. The party must stay off main roads. Faster reunification with families but higher patrol risk and harder going with injured prisoners. Some families may no longer be safe (the regime punishes families of escapees).

Plan C (A Desperate Measure)

Split Up:

Send the freed prisoners with Tam and Joran to the cabin while the party draws pursuers away. Risky separation, but enables a heroic rearguard sequence.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

Remove the pursuit entirely if the ambush in Scene 3 went cleanly and no alarm was raised. The escape becomes a tense but uneventful march. Give it weight through exhausted silence rather than mechanical pressure.

Making it Harder

The Xvart scouts have trained dogs (use Mastiff stat block). Covering tracks no longer grants automatic advantages without first neutralizing the scouts.

Increasing Role Play

One of the prisoners refuses to move. He is convinced this is a trick, that the regime is testing him. DC 12 Persuasion to convince him

to trust you, or he has to be physically carried (counts as a failed skill check in the challenge).

Treasure and Rewards

No new treasure in this scene. The rewards are narrative: the prisoners are safe, Tam is indebted, and the resistance now has proof that the operation worked.

Read or paraphrase the following (if escape succeeds):

The rescued prisoners huddle together, some crying, some silent, all trembling.

Joran (if present and alive) grins despite his exhaustion. "We did it. We actually did it."

You can see the sun rising. Morning is here. And the regime will be looking for you.

Development and Dial Impact

No dial changes yet. Dials move based on final outcome in Scene 5.

SCENE 5:

THE AFTERMATH

This scene covers the immediate consequences of the rescue and sets up future chapters.

Read or paraphrase the following:

A distant loudspeaker crackles. The Kenku's voice echoes. Not naming the party, but describing the incident.

People in the streets begin to move. Not toward you, but not really away from you either.

Upon returning to the safe house, the cramped cellar erupts in cautious celebration. Mira claps you on the shoulder, a rare smile on her weathered face. "You did it. You actually pulled it off."

The rescued prisoners are reunited with families. The halfling's wife sobs as she holds him. The human woman's daughter can't stop hugging her. The elven man just sits, staring at his hands, like he can't believe he's free.

But Mira's smile fades quickly. "The regime is furious. They're calling you terrorists. Patrols have doubled. Checkpoints everywhere. This is going to get harder before it gets easier."

She pours rough wine into battered cups. "But you proved it's possible. You gave people hope. And that was worth the risk."

Features of the Area

The Safe House

The same cellar, now packed beyond its intended capacity. Freed prisoners, their families, and resistance members all share the space. It feels different now: less like a hiding place, more like something worth protecting.

The Kenku's Broadcasts

If the party listens:

- Immediate Response (9 AM):
"Security alert: a detention transport was attacked by violent extremists in the Thornwood region. Six dangerous criminals have escaped. Citizens with information should report immediately. A reward is offered for their capture."
- Afternoon (3 PM):
"The terrorists responsible for today's attack on

law enforcement are believed to be operating in the eastern districts. Enhanced patrols are in effect. Cooperate with enforcement personnel. Compliance ensures safety.

If the party was clearly identified:

"Wanted for terrorism and murder: [descriptions of party members]. Approach with caution. Report sightings immediately."

- Evening (6 PM):
"Thanks to the vigilance of our security forces, the situation is under control. The criminals will be found and justice will be served. The Goristro's protection is absolute."

The victims are now "criminals." The heroes are "extremists." The propaganda machine is already rewriting the day.

The Encounter

Treating the Wounded

The prisoners are in bad shape:

- 2-3 are injured (1d4 HP each, stable but weak)
- 1 has broken ribs (disadvantage on physical checks until healed)
- All are dehydrated, exhausted, and traumatized

The party can help with Medicine checks (DC 12), healing magic, a healer's kit, or rest and rations.

Learning Their Stories

The party can talk to the freed prisoners:

- The halfling: *"They took me because my papers were expired. That was it. No crime, no trial. Just... expired papers."*
- The human woman: *"I spoke against the regime in my shop. Someone reported me. They came that night."*
- The elven man: *"I'm a teacher. I refused to use the new history textbooks. The ones that call the Goristro a 'liberator.'"*

All of them share the same ending:

"They were taking us to the border garrison. They said we'd be 'processed.'"

No one knows what that means, but none of them believed they would come back.

The Changeling's Follow-Up

If the party accepted his help, Bowman appears briefly.

Read or paraphrase the following:

A quiet knock. Bowman enters, looking genuinely pleased. "I heard it worked. I'm glad." He seems to mean it, or at least seems to.

"The regime is scrambling. They don't know who you are yet, but they're looking. Be careful." He pauses. "If you need more help... well. You know where to find me."

He then asks, casually, about the rescue: How many saved? Any complications? Who else was involved?

The questions feel like friendly concern. But they are also operational intelligence gathering. On a DC 14 Insight check, the party notices he is asking very specific questions for someone who just wants to help.

Changeling Management

The Changeling should always feel helpful (his information is real), suspicious (too convenient, too useful), and untouchable (no proof of wrongdoing). Do not overplay his presence. Let the party's paranoia build on its own.

If the party investigates:

- He works in the municipal archives (true)
- No one knows much about him (true)
- He is "just a sympathetic clerk" (false, but unprovable)

It is worth noting that by this point, Bowman has appeared in three of five scenes and provided useful intelligence in at least two of them. That is intentional. He is building dependency. But this should not come at the cost of Mira feeling reactive. After Bowman leaves, give Mira the last word. She has been running the resistance since before the party arrived. Let her say something about this engagement that Bowman could not: not intelligence, but meaning. What this rescue cost her to authorize. What the faces of the freed prisoners mean to her specifically. Let the party see why people follow her rather than him.

What the Party Can Do

Debrief with Mira

Let the party recount what happened. Mira listens carefully and asks practical questions. This is also a chance for players to process the session and note anything they want to follow up on.

Talk to the Prisoners

Each one has a story. Each story is a small window into what the regime is doing and why it matters. Reward players who take the time to learn this.

Accept or Decline the Changeling's Questions

Both choices are valid. Sharing information deepens his access. Declining sharpens his interest. Either way he thanks them and leaves.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

If the party is emotionally spent, let the reunion scenes carry the weight. Not every scene needs a decision. Sometimes watching the human and her daughter hold each other is enough.

Making it Harder

One of the prisoner's families is no longer at their home address. The regime got there first. This is not a mission yet, just a wound that makes the victory feel incomplete.

Increasing Role Play

The elven teacher quietly asks if anyone knows what happened to his students. He was arrested during class. He does not know if the children were taken too. He is trying not to ask directly. Let the party sit with that.

Treasure and Rewards

From the Mission

- All party members receive Heroic Inspiration for the next session

From the Grateful Families

- 50 gp pooled together (all they have)
- Personal favors: a locksmith offers services, a merchant provides discounted equipment
- One prisoner worked at the garrison before the regime's takeover and knows the layout

From the Resistance

- 2 healing potions
- Access to safe houses across the city
- A badge: the broken chain symbol, identifying them as trusted resistance members
- Mira offers training; party members can use downtime to learn skills from resistance members

Development and Dial Impact

Apply all dial changes accumulated across Scenes 3 and 4 here.

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Clean success (all prisoners, no alarm) Word spreads quietly Regime is rattled but has little to act on	+2	0	-1
Messy success (alarm raised, party identified) Wanted posters Patrols doubled Checkpoints on major roads	+1	+2	-1
Partial success (some prisoners freed) Still a victory, but the ones left behind will haunt the party	0	+1	0

Immediate consequences regardless of outcome:

- Increased patrols in eastern districts
 - Checkpoints on major roads
 - Curfew extended to dusk
 - Neighbors grow more nervous about association with the resistance
 - The Kenku broadcast reframes the wagon ambush as a bandit attack on regime mercy workers. Choose one of these consequences:
 - A frightened civilian who refuses to shelter the wounded prisoners
 - A false patrol alert that reroutes the party's extraction
 - A public accusation that a named NPC was involved
-

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

What the Party Should Know

- The resistance can act and win, but victories are never clean
- The regime responds to defiance with escalation, not retreat
- Bowman (the Changeling) is useful, possibly indispensable, and something about him does not quite add up
- Prisoners are being "processed" at the border garrison; no one who arrives there comes back
- The next target is the Imp Warlock, the man running the detention operation at its source

Character Advancement

3rd level reached.

Downtime (Optional)

If you want a breather before Chapter 3, give the party 1-2 days of downtime:

- Train with resistance members to learn a new skill or tool proficiency
- Gather intelligence on the Imp Warlock through NPC contacts
- Craft or acquire equipment with Mira's help
- Develop relationships with freed prisoners and resistance NPCs
- Track the Kenku's evolving broadcasts as the regime's messaging shifts

Future Hooks

- The elven teacher knows about the Archmage's "New History" textbooks and what was being replaced
- The rescued dwarf worked at the border garrison and knows the layout
- The rescued human woman's daughter wants to join the resistance (moral complication)
- The Changeling's pattern of "helpful" interventions is building toward something; each chapter he positions himself as more indispensable

Lead-in to the Next Chapter

Mira spreads a new map on the table. Read or paraphrase the following:

"We bloodied them. Now we need to hit them where it hurts. The Imp Warlock runs the border garrison personally. He is the source of the detention operations, not just a piece of them."

She looks at each of you.

"This won't be like ambushing a wagon. This will be war. Are you ready?"

Considerations

If the party wants to attack the garrison directly Mira makes the case against it:

"A frontal assault is suicide. If we hit the garrison, we do it with stealth, lies, or leverage. Not heroics."

If the party wants to negotiate with Merregons, it is possible, but devils are bound by contracts, not free will, so DCs will be 18+.

Using forged documents lowers the Deception DC to 16.

If the party wants to involve more civilians Mira warns against endangering untrained people, but does accept Joran as a compromise: eager, inexperienced, and impossible to talk out of it.

If the rescue failed completely and the prisoners were recaptured, Chapter 3 becomes a prison break instead of an assault. The plot still advances, just through a different door.

If a party member was captured, it creates personal stakes for the prison break. The rest of the party can extract them, but at cost.

If Joran died, the resistance is shaken but remains determined. His death becomes a rallying cry. Apply Hope -1, but make clear that future victories will carry his name.

Chapter 3 The Border General



"The fortress stands as a monument to cruelty, where justice is perverted and compassion is criminalized."

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 3 escalates the resistance's efforts from guerrilla tactics to direct confrontation with the regime's infrastructure. After the successful wagon ambush in Chapter 2, the party now faces a more formidable challenge: infiltrating the border garrison itself to strike at the heart of the detention operations.

The Imp Warlock, a field commander serving the Rakshasa, runs the garrison with cold efficiency. His abilities and tactical mind make him a dangerous opponent, but his isolation from higher regime support creates an opportunity. If the party can neutralize him and expose the garrison's operations, they will deliver a crushing blow to the regime's border security apparatus.

This chapter also introduces the party's first direct encounter with the Kenku spokesperson. The choice of whether to attempt her rescue

becomes a significant moral decision that will echo throughout the campaign.

The Kenku's True Nature

The Kenku is not a redemption arc. She is not a resistance asset. She is not a victim waiting to be freed. She has been broadcasting for the regime long enough that the line between compulsion and cooperation has blurred, and she has chosen not to examine that line too carefully. The collar constrains her. It does not explain her.

When the party frees her or gets close enough to read her, they are looking at someone who has made calculations about her survival and acted on them. Those calculations will not favor the resistance when the moment comes.

The party may believe she is a potential ally. They may invest real resources in her rescue. They may read her distress as evidence of divided loyalty. All of this is available to them as players. None of it is available to you as DM. You know she is not going to help them. You know that her next significant act will be broadcasting the location of their base in Chapter 4. You know she made a choice.

Play her distress as real. Her suffering under the collar is genuine. Her exhaustion is genuine. Her hesitation during broadcasts is genuine. None of that makes her safe. People can be genuinely suffering and still make choices that harm others.

What this means in practice:

- Do not hint to the party that she wants to help them
- Do not give her body language that signals alliance
- Her communication fragments, if the party attempts contact, should be ambiguous, not warm
- She is watching them. She is assessing them. She is figuring out what they are worth to her
- If the party rescues her, she accepts the rescue without gratitude.
That would be out of character for someone already calculating her next move
- If the party does not rescue her, the regime retains control of the loudspeaker network. The base will still be exposed later through surveillance, informants, or Bowman's movements but not with any degree of certainty around the source

The party's uncertainty is the point. Your certainty is the engine.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Scene 1: Plan the Assault

After gathering intelligence and evaluating options, a plan formulates.

Scene 1 should feel strategic and empowering through information gathering and planning build confidence.

Scene 2: Reconnaissance

A scouting mission that identifies entry points and discovers the Kenku.

Scene 2 should feel tense and methodical with stealth reconnaissance rewards patience.

Scene 3: Infiltration

The party enters the garrison using their chosen approach.

Scene 3 should feel suspenseful as infiltration is

delicate and every choice matters.

Scene 4: The Kenku's Broadcast

The party witnesses the Kenku's propaganda and makes a choice.

Scene 4 should feel emotionally complex since the moral choice about the Kenku has no clean answer.

Scene 5: Confrontation

A confrontation with the garrison commander, whether through combat, negotiation, or subterfuge.

Scene 5 should feel intense and dangerous as the confrontation with the Imp Warlock is the chapter's combat peak.

Scene 6: Extraction

Escaping the garrison with freed prisoners.

Scene 6 should feel triumphant but anxious, the escape is hard earned, but consequences are sure to follow.

RUNNING THE CHAPTER

Designed for: 3rd-level characters

Sessions: 3-4

Advancement: Reach 4th level at end

This chapter is structured as a heist and infiltration scenario with multiple possible approaches. Unlike the more linear ambush structure of the previous chapter, this mission requires planning, reconnaissance, and adaptability. The garrison is too well-defended for a frontal assault, forcing the party to think strategically.

The primary goals are:

- Execute a complex infiltration mission with multiple objectives
- Introduce stealth and investigation as primary approaches over direct combat
- Establish the Kenku's presence as an unresolved question and create a rescue opportunity the party may choose to take
- Provide intelligence about the regime's structure and the Rakshasa
- Demonstrate that major victories are possible but carry significant costs
- Establish the Merregon contract system as exploitable

Guidance

Multiple Entry Points

The garrison has several potential infiltration routes. Present them clearly during planning but do not railroad the party into one approach.

Information is Power

The more reconnaissance the party conducts, the easier the mission becomes. Reward thorough preparation with mechanical advantages.

Alarm Management

Unlike Chapter 2, raising the alarm here does not necessarily mean mission failure. It changes the mission from stealth to chaos, with different challenges and opportunities.

Retreat as Victory

The primary objective is freeing prisoners and gathering intelligence. The party does not need to kill every enemy or explore every room. Encourage tactical withdrawal when appropriate.

SCENE 1:

PLAN THE ASSAULT

This scene occurs 2-3 days after Chapter 2's conclusion. The party has returned to the safe house and Mira has gathered intelligence about the border garrison.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The safe house feels more cramped than before. News of your wagon rescue has spread, and more people have joined the resistance. Some want to help. Others just want somewhere safe to sleep.

Mira clears the table and unfolds a detailed map of the border region. "Thanks to your rescue, we have someone who knows the garrison inside and out." She gestures to an elderly human man with haunted eyes.

"This is Henrik. He was a guard there before the regime took over. He's going to tell you what you're up against."

Henrik speaks quietly: "The Border Garrison isn't just a military post. It's a processing center. They bring prisoners in, catalog them, hold them temporarily, then move them deeper into Rakshasa territory. Once someone crosses that final border..." He shakes his head. "No one comes back."

He points to locations on the map. "The garrison holds maybe twenty prisoners at any time. They're kept in the cellblock here. The commander, an imp... he runs everything from the command tower. And the Kenku..." He hesitates. "She's there. Under guard. Making her broadcasts from the courtyard."

Mira meets your eyes. "This is bigger than a single wagon. If we hit this garrison, we cripple their entire border operation. But it's also far more dangerous. The garrison has walls, patrols, and that Imp commander. This won't be an ambush on a forest road. This is a fortress."
"So. How do we do it?"

Features of the Area

The Map

Henrik's map shows:

- Outer Wall: 15 feet high, stone, patrolled by 2-3 Merregons at any time
- Main Gate: heavy iron, guarded by 2 Merregons, opens only for authorized

- personnel
- Cellblock: attached to the north wall, holds 15-20 prisoners
- Command Tower: central structure, Imp Warlock's office and quarters
- Courtyard: open area used for formations and propaganda broadcasts
- Barracks: houses 8-12 Merregons (most patrol externally)
- Storage Building: confiscated belongings and supplies
- Stables: 6 horses for patrols and supply runs
- Weak Point: old drainage culvert on east wall (marked but unexplored)

Intelligence from Henrik

Henrik can also provide the following details if asked:

- Guard Composition: 10-12 Merregons total plus the Imp Warlock; 2-3 on wall patrol, 2 at gate, 2-3 on external patrol, remainder in barracks
- Shift Changes: dawn and dusk (brief windows of reduced coverage)
- Prisoner Routine: fed once daily at noon, otherwise locked in cells
- Imp Warlock's Habits: rarely leaves the command tower; conducts inspections at irregular intervals
- The Kenku's Schedule: broadcasts three times daily (dawn, noon, dusk) from the courtyard, always with 2 Merregon guards
- Magical Defenses: alarm wards on the cellblock and command tower (DC 15 Arcana to detect, DC 17 Thieves' Tools to disable)
- Communication: Merregons carry signal horns; an alarm summons all available forces
- Escape Routes: north gate (rarely used), drainage culvert (risky), over the walls (exposed)

However Henrik does not know:

- Current prisoner identities
- Exact location of any Merregon contracts
- Whether the Rakshasa ever visits
- How the Kenku's compulsion works
- Detailed interior layout of the command tower

Resistance Resources

Mira can offer limited support:

- **Personnel:** Tam will scout and coordinate extraction; 3-4 Commoners can create distractions but will not enter the garrison
- **Equipment:** climbing gear, grappling hooks, dark clothing, 3 healing potions, 1 potion of invisibility
- **Intelligence Updates:** Tam will observe the garrison for 24 hours before the mission
- **Extraction Plan:** resistance wagons positioned at three potential extraction points north of the garrison
- **Distraction Options:** resistance can stage incidents to draw patrols away (party must specify location and timing)

The Encounter

This scene has no direct encounter. It is a planning session. Let the party drive the conversation. Mira and Henrik respond to questions and react to proposals, but the plan belongs to the party.

Possible Approaches

Infiltration: Enter via the drainage culvert or scale walls at night. Avoid patrols using timing and darkness. Pick locks, disable alarms, extract prisoners silently. Highest skill requirements but lowest alarm risk. Well-suited for parties with rogues or rangers.

Deception: Forge documents claiming authority over prisoners. Bluff past guards with confidence and paperwork. Requires excellent Deception and a believable story. May require the Changeling's help. High risk if caught but allows daylight operation.

Frontal Assault: Resistance creates a distraction drawing guards away. Party enters during the confusion. A mix of combat and stealth. Moderate difficulty, moderate alarm risk. Requires good timing and communication.

Prisoner Uprising: Infiltrate and arm prisoners from storage. Create chaos from inside while the party extracts targets. High chaos, high risk, high potential rewards. Prisoners become allies but also liabilities.

Wait for a Transfer: Learn when the next prisoner transfer occurs and ambush the convoy (similar to Chapter 2). Easier combat but saves only prisoners being transferred and does not disrupt garrison operations.

The Changeling's Contribution

If the party is struggling with planning or requests additional intelligence, Bowman appears.

Read or paraphrase the following:

A quiet knock interrupts the discussion. Bowman enters, nodding politely to Mira. She doesn't look happy to see him, but she doesn't object either.

"I heard you're planning something ambitious." He produces a leather portfolio and spreads documents on the table. "Guard rotations, current prisoner census, the Imp's daily schedule."

"He is paranoid but predictable. He inspects the cellblock every day at sunset. He takes the same route, accompanied by only one guard. If you're inside and prepared, that is your window."

He taps another document.

"The Kenku broadcasts at dawn, noon, and dusk. Dawn has the fewest guards watching because they're changing shifts. If you want to reach her, that's your chance."

He looks at you directly.

"This is dangerous intelligence to possess. If the regime discovered I provided this..."

He doesn't finish the thought.

"Just... be smart about using it. And if you find anything interesting in that command tower, I'd appreciate knowing what that Imp has been reporting to his masters."

What He Provides

- **Guard Rotation Schedule:** precise timing of shift changes, patrol routes, and guard positions (accurate; grants advantage on Stealth checks)
- **Prisoner Census:** 17 current prisoners, including names and "charges" (accurate; helps party prioritize rescues)
- **Imp Warlock's Schedule:** daily inspection routine, meal times, sleep schedule (accurate; creates ambush opportunity)
- **Kenku Guard Detail:** her guards rotate but are always 2 Merregions; dawn shift is most distracted (accurate)
- **Tower Layout:** basic floor plan of the command tower (accurate but incomplete)

What He Asks in Return

"Tell me what you learn about the Rakshasa's operations. What orders the Imp Warlock is following. What the long-term plan is for the prisoners. Information helps all of us survive."

He is building his intelligence network while appearing helpful.

Insight Checks

- DC 10: He is genuinely concerned about being caught with this information.
- DC 13: His questions about the Rakshasa are very specific, almost as if he is reporting to someone.
- DC 16: The intelligence is too detailed; he would need inside access to obtain it.
- DC 19: He already knows what is in the command tower and wants confirmation, not new information.

If confronted, he deflects smoothly:

"I have my sources. Sources I need to protect, just like you protect yours. Use the information or don't, but don't ask me to compromise people who trust me."

Mira's Final Advice

Read or paraphrase the following:

"Whatever you choose, remember your objectives: free the prisoners, gather intelligence about the Rakshasa's operations. If you can capture or kill the Imp, excellent, but don't die trying."

"One more thing: Merregons follow written orders absolutely. If you can find their contract documents, you might be able to manipulate them. Henrik says the Imp Warlock keeps everything in the command tower."

What the Party Can Do

Plan Thoroughly

If the party asks smart questions and creates contingencies, they enter Scene 2 with narrative advantage. Mira expresses confidence.

Rush or Skip Planning

Mira expresses concern and Henrik offers to delay the mission for more intelligence. Complications arise in Scene 3.

Accept the Changeling's Help

They gain mechanical advantages in Scenes 3 and 5. He notes their reliance on him.

Reject the Changeling's Help

They lose some advantages but maintain independence. He is gracious and leaves anyway.

Track the party's chosen approach, as it will affect Scene 3 difficulty:

- Stealth Infiltration: highest DCs, lowest alarm risk
- Social Deception: medium DCs, medium alarm risk, requires documents
- Coordinated Assault: lower DCs, higher alarm risk
- Prisoner Uprising: chaotic, unpredictable
- Transfer Ambush: easier but limited objectives

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

Have Henrik volunteer the drainage culvert detail unprompted and describe the east wall handholds from memory, giving the party two clear entry points without investigation.

Making it Harder

Henrik mentions that the garrison layout has changed since his time there. Some of what he knows may no longer be accurate. The party cannot rely on his intelligence entirely.

Increasing Role Play

Let the party question Henrik about what it was like to work there before the regime. He was a guard when this was a legitimate border post. He has guilt about what it became. He will answer honestly, and it will cost him something to do so.

Treasure and Rewards

From Mira

- Final equipment check: climbing gear, thieves' tools, etc.
- Extraction signals agreed upon with Tam's team

Development and Dial Impact

No dial changes from this scene. Outcomes carry forward as advantages or disadvantages.

SCENE 2:

RECONNAISSANCE

This scene occurs in the 24 hours before the party attempts infiltration. Tam scouts the garrison exterior while the party conducts their own reconnaissance from a safe distance.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The border garrison sits like a scar on the landscape. Gray stone walls crowned with iron, dark banners bearing the Goristro's bull-head symbol hanging limp in the still air. The building is squat, functional, and utterly joyless.

From your vantage point on a wooded hillside half a mile away, you can see the garrison's daily rhythm. Merregon patrols march their routes with mechanical precision. Prisoners are visible briefly when led to the courtyard for midday rations. And three times each day, the Kenku's voice echoes across the wasteland, carried by magical amplification.

Tam adjusts his spyglass and whispers: "She's there. In the courtyard. I can see her."

Features of the Area

Observation Point

- Half a mile from the garrison (safe from patrols)
- Wooded hillside with good sight lines
- Multiple escape routes
- Can be held for extended periods without detection

The Garrison (from a Distance)

- Wall patrol patterns: 2-3 Merregons, predictable routes
- Main gate activity: opens for supply wagons and patrols
- Courtyard activities: prisoner feeding, formations, Kenku broadcasts
- Approximate building purposes identifiable by traffic patterns
- Drainage culvert visible on east side; wall sections with varying handholds

The Kenku's Broadcasts

The party witnesses all three over the course of the day:

- Dawn (6 AM)
"Citizens of Orenthis, give thanks for another day under the protection of our glorious leader.

The border is secure. The law is absolute. Compliance ensures safety."

- Noon (12 PM)
"Enemies of the state have been apprehended and will face justice. The resistance is a criminal organization. Report suspicious activity. Cooperation is rewarded. Resistance is treason."
- Dusk (6 PM)
"Curfew begins at sunset. All citizens must carry authorization papers. Unauthorized travel will result in detention. The Goristro's mercy is absolute for the loyal. His justice is absolute for the treacherous."

Between broadcasts, through the spyglass (DC 12 Perception):

- The Kenku is shackled at the ankles
- Two Merregons stand directly beside her at all times
- When not speaking, she is completely silent and still

The Kenku's Awareness

If the party gets within 200 feet during a broadcast and succeeds on DC 14 Perception, read or paraphrase the following:

The Kenku's eyes briefly lock onto your hiding spot. Her voice doesn't change, but her body language shifts subtly. She does not signal. Her eyes register the party's position and move on with the broadcast. She has clocked them. The broadcast continues without adjustment.

The Encounter

Extended Observation

Allow the party to observe for up to 24 hours, noting:

- Patrol timing: shifts change at dawn and dusk, with a 10-minute window of reduced coverage
- Supply deliveries: one wagon per day, arrives around 2 PM, stays 30 minutes
- Prisoner routines: fed at noon, otherwise remain in cellblock
- Tower activity: Imp Warlock visible in command tower windows, inspects cellblock at sunset
- Kenku schedule: dawn, noon, and dusk broadcasts confirmed

Close Reconnaissance (Risky)

DC 14 group Stealth check to approach within 200 feet.

Success reveals:

- Drainage culvert is 3 feet wide, partially blocked by debris
- East wall section has numerous handholds (easier climbing)
- Gate guards carry keys and signal horns
- Prisoners appear malnourished and injured

Failure yields:

- Patrol spots suspicious activity
- Garrison goes to heightened alert for 1d4 hours
- Party must retreat (Heat +1)

Magical Reconnaissance

Spells such as **clairvoyance**, **arcane eye**, or **scrying** provide detailed interior intelligence:

- Cellblock layout: 12 cells, 3-4 prisoners per cell, single guard station
- Command tower interior: office on second floor, quarters on third, documents visible
- Barracks: 8 Merregons currently resting (off-duty)
- Storage: confiscated belongings, weapons, some valuable items
- Courtyard: open, exposed, difficult to cross unseen
- Magic wards (DC 15 Arcana to detect) protecting the cellblock guard station, command tower office, and storage building

Using obvious magic (visible or audible): 30% chance of detection.

If detected, garrison goes to heightened alert (Heat +1).

Talk to Tam

Tam provides updated observations:

"The patrols are predictable. Too predictable. Like they're following written instructions exactly. Henrik was right about shift changes; there's definitely confusion during the ten minutes when guards swap out."

"The Kenku... I watched her for hours. She never speaks except during broadcasts. The guards treat her like a prisoner too."

"One more thing: I saw a supply wagon get turned away yesterday. Wrong paperwork. The gate guards wouldn't let it in despite the driver arguing."

Whatever rules they follow, they follow them exactly."

The Kenku Question

Mira presents the option to attempt freeing the Kenku, but she frames it accurately:

"Stopping her broadcasts would disrupt their propaganda operation. Temporarily. They'll replace her or fix the collar. The question is whether the risk is worth that disruption."

She does not frame it as a rescue, but as a tactical calculation with an uncertain payoff. The propaganda machine survives with a replacement voice almost immediately in Chapter 4 and you should not sell the party on a victory that will not hold.

If the party is particularly motivated by the rescue angle, let them pursue it. The difficulty increase is real. The reward is ambiguous. Present it honestly: this is not a mission objective, it is an added risk the party is electing to take. The value of their choice is not the outcome, but what it costs them and what they misread. The Chapter 4 raid will land harder if the party went out of their way for her.

Of course, the party does not have to commit right now, they can defer this decision and decide during the mission if the opportunity arises.

What the Party Can Do

Observe Thoroughly

Grant the party advantage on relevant checks in Scene 3. Shift change windows and patrol timing give the party clear entry opportunities.

Attempt Close Reconnaissance

On success, the party is rewarded with detailed knowledge that makes Scene 3 easier. But on failure, the garrison is on alert and Scene 3 becomes harder.

Use Magical Reconnaissance

Provides interior intelligence without physical risk, but visible magic carries a detection chance.

Commit to the Kenku Rescue

Increases mission difficulty across Scenes 3 and 4. The Hope reward is framed as a propaganda disruption. This disruption is real but brief, the replacement broadcaster is operational within 48 hours of the raid. However the party will not be aware of this, they will discover it in Chapter 4.

Mira arranges for magical assistance (via a scroll of **dispel magic** or an NPC caster).

Decide Against the Kenku Rescue

The mission focuses on prisoners and intelligence, objectives are more achievable, and the Kenku can be revisited in a future chapter.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

Tam spots the supply wagon schedule independently and notes that yesterday's wagon was turned away for bad paperwork, flagging the deception approach as viable without requiring a close reconnaissance check.

Making it Harder

The garrison appears to have added a new patrol route since Henrik's time. One wall section the party planned to use is now regularly covered. They will need to find a different approach or wait for a longer gap.

Increasing Role Play

Let the party watch all three broadcasts in real time. Each one is slightly different in tone. By dusk, if they have been watching carefully, they notice the Kenku's hesitation growing longer at each broadcast. What they cannot know from this distance is whether that hesitation is resistance or calculation, whether she is fighting the compulsion or pacing it. Both look the same from a hillside. Do not clarify this for the party. Do not clarify it in your narration. Let it be what it is: observable behavior with no given interpretation.

Treasure and Rewards

From Extended Observation

- Patrol timing (advantage on avoiding patrols in Scene 3)
- Shift change windows (optimal entry timing identified)
- Kenku's schedule (rescue windows)
- Imp Warlock's routine (ambush opportunity for Scene 5)

From Tam

- Map corrections: drainage culvert condition and east wall climbing spots
- Guard behavior notes: Merregions follow orders literally
- Supply wagon schedule: potential deception opportunity

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Thorough observation			
Advantage on relevant checks entering Scene 3	0	0	0
Close recon success			
Detailed interior knowledge Scene 3 difficulty reduced	0	0	0
Close recon failure			
Garrison on alert for 1d4 hours Scene 3 becomes harder	0	+1	0
Obvious magic detected			
Garrison reinforces Heightened Perception on patrols	0	+1	0
Party commits to Kenku rescue			
Mira arranges magical assistance Mission difficulty increases	0	0	0

SCENE 3:

INFILTRATION

The party executes their chosen approach. This scene's structure varies significantly based on planning choices, but all versions share the same core objectives: enter the garrison undetected or with minimal alarm, reach the cellblock and free prisoners, optionally reach the Kenku, optionally gather intelligence from the command tower, and prepare for confrontation or escape.

Read or paraphrase the following (adjust based on the party's chosen approach and timing):

The garrison walls loom before you, dark against the evening sky. Torches flicker on the battlements, casting dancing shadows.

Somewhere inside those walls, innocent people wait in cells, the Kenku broadcasts lies, and the Imp Warlock coordinates the regime's cruelty.

This is the moment. Everything you've planned, everything you've prepared for, comes down to the next few hours.

Tam whispers from nearby: "Extraction team is in position. When you signal, we'll be ready. Good luck." He melts back into the darkness, leaving you to begin.

Features of the Area

Garrison Layout (Interior)

- Courtyard: Central, open, exposed
50 ft x 50 ft
- Cellblock: North side, connected to courtyard
60 ft x 40 ft
- Command Tower: Central, 3 stories
30 ft x 30 ft at the base
- Barracks: West side
40 ft x 60 ft
- Storage: East side
30 ft x 40 ft
- Stables: South side, near the gate
40 ft x 30 ft

Patrol Positions

- 1 Merregon in the cellblock guard station
- 2 Merregons with the Kenku during broadcasts, otherwise in the courtyard
- 1 Merregon in the command tower (ground floor)
- 2-4 Merregons off-duty in barracks
- Imp Warlock in the command tower (2nd floor office)

Stealth Checks by Location

- Courtyard crossing
DC 14 (exposed; patrols have advantage)
- Building to building
DC 12 (shadows and cover available)
- Interior hallways
DC 11 (enclosed; echo risk)
- Tower stairs
DC 13 (creaky, narrow)

Random Complications

While the party operates inside the garrison, roll 1d6 every 10 minutes or at dramatically appropriate moments:

1. **Unexpected Patrol**
A Merregon rounds a corner. DC 14 Stealth to hide or be spotted.
2. **Prisoner Complication**
A freed prisoner panics, calls out, or collapses. DC 13 Persuasion or Medicine to resolve quietly.
3. **Alarm Triggers**
Whether through a failed disabling or random malfunction, the alarm sounds. Imp Warlock alerted; reinforcements arrive in 1d4+1 rounds.
4. **Imp Warlock Movement**
The Imp Warlock leaves his office for an unscheduled inspection. The party may encounter him unexpectedly or lose access to the office.
5. **Supply Delivery**
A wagon arrives at the main gate. Creates a temporary distraction (advantage on Stealth for 2 rounds) but brings more people into the garrison.
6. **Opportune Moment**
A guard becomes distracted, a patrol delays, a door is left unlocked. The party gains advantage on their next check.

The Encounter

The party's chosen approach determines the initial skill challenges.

Entry Methods

Direct Main Gate (Deception)

- Advantages:
Can use supply wagon timing for cover; no climbing or crawling required.
- Disadvantages:
High scrutiny; if caught, immediate alarm; must maintain cover throughout.
- Skill challenges:
DC 16 Deception or DC 14 Persuasion with the Changeling's forged documents to convince guards; DC 13 Deception checks to maintain cover while inside; opposed check against Merregon Investigation +2 when documents are verified.

Emerge in the courtyard.

Hide in a Supply Wagon (Stealth)

- Advantages:
Legitimate reason to enter; wagon is expected and less suspicious.
- Disadvantages:
Limited control over timing; cramped (Medium creatures only, max 3 people); guards inspect cargo thoroughly.
- Skill challenges:
DC 12 Stealth to approach the wagon before arrival; DC 14 Stealth to hide in the wagon (advantage if party includes Small creatures); DC 12 Constitution saving throw to endure the 30-minute inspection or gain 1 level of exhaustion; DC 13 Stealth to exit unseen.

Emerge in the stables.

Through the Drainage System (Athletics)

- Advantages:
Completely bypasses walls and gate; emerges inside garrison proper; low detection risk if done carefully.
- Disadvantages:
Tight quarters (Medium creatures must squeeze; Large creatures cannot fit); 10% chance of flooding if it rains (difficult terrain); one-way entry (cannot use for escape).
- Skill challenges: DC 13 Athletics to clear the culvert entrance debris quietly; DC 12 Athletics to crawl 60 feet of cramped wet darkness; DC 14 Thieves' Tools to unlock the interior grate or DC 16 Athletics to force it.

Emerge inside a utility building (no guards, but locked from the outside).

Scale the Walls (Mixed)

- Advantages:
Direct route; usable for both infiltration and escape; multiple party members can enter simultaneously.
- Disadvantages:
Exposed while climbing (if patrol arrives early, DC 16 Stealth to hide on the wall); requires equipment (climbing gear or 50 ft rope); wall guards have advantage on Perception.
- Skill challenges:
DC 14 group Stealth to approach the walls unseen; DC 12 Athletics to climb (DC 10 on the east wall with good handholds); DC 13 Stealth to avoid wall patrol or wait for a 3-minute window; DC 10 Athletics to descend the interior (or use rope).

Emerge on the cellblock roof.

Objective 1: Free the Prisoners

The cellblock smells of unwashed bodies and despair. Twelve cells line the walls, each holding 3-4 people in cramped conditions. A single Merregon sits at a guard station near the entrance.

Guard station contains: 1 Merregon, an alarm ward (DC 15 Arcana to detect, DC 17 Thieves' Tools to disable), keys to all cells, and an alarm horn.

Cell locks: DC 14 Thieves' Tools to pick, or opened with keys from the guard station.

Prisoner condition: malnourished and injured (1d4 HP each), frightened and uncertain, some recognize the party from broadcasts describing "terrorists" and "extremists." DC 12 Persuasion to convince them to trust you.

Stealth Approach:

Neutralize or bypass the guard (combat, stealth, or distraction), disable the alarm (or accept the risk), unlock cells (keys or lock-picking), convince prisoners to follow quietly, move them to the extraction point. Failure at any step risks detection. A failed alarm disable has a 50% chance of triggering. Loud lock-picking requires DC 14 Stealth to do quietly. Panicked prisoners require DC 13 Persuasion to calm.

Non-Stealth Approach:

Fight the guard (he calls for backup), grab keys or smash locks (1 action plus DC 15 Athletics per lock), lead prisoners out amid chaos. Reinforcements arrive in 1d4+1 rounds.

Objective 2: Release the Kenku (Optional)

During a Broadcast Approach:

The Kenku is in the courtyard, center, on a small platform with 2 Merregons flanking her directly.

The party must reach courtyard unseen (DC 14 Stealth), neutralize 2 guards (combat or distraction), remove collar (magic or skill check), extract before reinforcements (1d4 rounds).

- Advantages: predictable timing; she is already outside her cell; dawn broadcast has fewer nearby patrols.
- Complications: completely exposed; guards are vigilant; she cannot help while compelled.

Between Broadcasts Approach:

The Kenku is held in the command tower (1st floor, small cell) with 1 Merregon guard outside. Slightly easier access but still risky.

The party must enter the command tower (see Objective 3), neutralize the guard (combat or stealth), pick cell lock (DC 14 Thieves' Tools), remove collar (magic or skill check), extract from multiple tower floors.

- Advantages: more enclosed; fewer guards directly involved; she is accessible without the exposed courtyard approach.
- Complications: tower has other occupants; Imp Warlock is upstairs; limited escape routes.

Removing the Collar:

The Kenku's restraints function as a permanent **geas** plus **suggestion** (DC 14 Arcana to analyze). They can be removed by **dispel magic** (DC 14) or **remove curse**. Physical removal requires DC 18 Thieves' Tools but triggers painful backlash (4d6 psychic damage and DC 16 Constitution save or fall unconscious).

The Kenku's Reaction:

Once the collar is removed, read or paraphrase the following:

The golden runes flicker and dim, but do not die entirely. The Kenku gasps, hand flying to her throat. She cycles through fragments. 'Help,' 'Warning,' 'Leave now.' Each in a different voice, a different

person, a different time. She looks at the party for a long moment.

Then she looks away.

The collar's broadcast compulsion has been disrupted, but not destroyed. A DC 15 Arcana check reveals the infernal binding is layered. The surface constraint (approved content list) can be dispelled, but the core ability for the regime to activate an emergency broadcast requires destroying the collar physically (a full action, dealing the psychic backlash) or finding an administrative override at the Bureau of Public Address in the Gilded Tower. She is freer than she was, but she is not free.

Note, she is not grateful. She is assessing. The fragments she offers are real sounds she overheard. They are not lies, but she is choosing which ones to surface. She is giving the party enough to feel they made the right call. She is not giving them anything that costs her.

If the party attempts a DC 15 Insight check while watching her: they sense that something is being managed. Not performed, exactly. Managed. Like someone who has learned to give people what they need to feel they were right.

Do not resolve this. Let the party carry their own interpretation.

If rescue fails (either the collar is reactivated or she is recaptured), another attempt can be made again in a later chapter as the party learns more about collar mechanics.

Objective 3: Gather Intelligence (Optional)

The command tower steps spiral upward into darkness.

Ground Floor:

Guard station (1 Merregon), the Kenku's cell (if between broadcasts), storage room (maps, basic supplies), stairs up.

Second Floor (Imp Warlock's Office):

Large desk covered in documents, filing cabinets with prisoner records, a map of the regional border with marked routes, alarm ward (DC 15 Arcana to detect, DC 17 Thieves' Tools to disable), window overlooking the courtyard.

Third Floor (Imp Warlock's Quarters):

Personal chambers (spartan, little personality),

locked chest (DC 16 Thieves' Tools; contains Merregon contract originals), small shrine to the Rakshasa, stairs to roof.

Documents available if the party searches the office:

- DC 12 Investigation (10 minutes): prisoner transfer schedules, detention quota requirements from the Rakshasa, reports on "processing efficiency"
- DC 14 Investigation (20 minutes): communication logs between the Imp Warlock and Rakshasa, references to "final destinations" beyond the border, mention of "The Architect's requirements" (the Archmage)
- DC 16 Investigation (30 minutes): detailed map of the Rakshasa's border fortress network, list of regime collaborators in nearby towns, evidence of prisoner "selections" for unknown purposes

Merregon contracts (locked chest): written in Infernal; specify duties, limitations, and termination clauses; can be modified with DC 18 Forgery (calligrapher's supplies); can be destroyed (frees Merregons but creates chaos); can be stolen for later analysis.

Risks of gathering intelligence: time-consuming (patrols may discover the party), alarm may trigger, Imp Warlock may return to his office, carrying documents may slow escape.

What the Party Can Do

Move Silently and Avoid All Contact

The highest DC approach but produces the lowest Heat. A fully silent mission allows the party to choose their objectives methodically without time pressure.

Accept Partial Alarm and Adapt

If a single guard is neutralized without calling for backup, the party can continue operating. Treat a suspicious garrison as a new difficulty tier rather than a mission failure.

Prioritize and Exit Early

If the party achieves their primary objective (freeing prisoners) and the alarm is rising, retreating before reaching the Imp Warlock or the intelligence is a valid tactical choice. Mira will respect it.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

- Reduce total guard presence to 8 Merregons
- Alarms disable at DC 13 instead of DC 17
- Imp Warlock remains in his office throughout (predictable location)
- More opportunities for stealth between objectives

Making it Harder

- Additional Merregon patrols added to the interior
- Alarm triggers automatically on the first failed disable attempt
- Imp Warlock actively patrols the tower at irregular intervals
- Kenku's guards are more alert (no dawn advantage applies)

Increasing Role Play

- Emphasize prisoner interactions and the Kenku's emotional weight
- Allow social solutions where appropriate (convince a guard, bluff a Merregon with forged orders)
- Make intelligence gathering more narratively rewarding by including personal effects among the documents

Treasure and Rewards

No new treasure until objectives are secured. Rewards accumulate based on what is achieved before extraction:

- Freed prisoners (up to 17 Commoners)
 - Merregon contracts (if retrieved from locked chest)
 - Documents from the office (tactical and strategic intelligence)
 - The Kenku (if rescued; narrative hook)
-

Development and Dial Impact

Track alarm level throughout this scene as it affects Scene 5 difficulty and Scene 6 escape challenges. But there are no dial changes yet. Dials move based on the final outcome in Scene 6.

- **Silent**
No alarms
Guards unaware
Imp is vulnerable (ambush possible)
 - **Suspicious**
Guards alert but no alarm raised
Imp is cautious
Heightened Perception on patrols
 - **Alarmed**
Alarm sounded
All guards converge
Imp has prepared a defense
 - **Lockdown**
Full garrison response
Scene 6 becomes a desperate escape under fire
-

SCENE 4:

THE KENKU'S BROADCAST

This scene occurs if the party is inside the garrison during one of the Kenku's scheduled broadcasts (dawn, noon, or dusk). If the party is not attempting to rescue the Kenku, this is a brief atmospheric scene. If they are, this becomes crucial to set up that rescuing her is not an act of trust. It is a decision to accept risk in exchange for removing a tool from the regime. And then dealing with those consequences.

Read or paraphrase the following:

A bell chimes across the garrison. You freeze, recognizing the signal. It's time for a broadcast.

From your position, you hear the Kenku's voice echo across the courtyard, magically amplified. But something is different this time. You're close enough to hear the strain beneath the propaganda, the exhaustion in her tone.

"Citizens of Orenthis, the border is secure. The enemies of the state have been identified and will face justice. The Goristro's protection is absolute. Compliance ensures safety. Resistance ensures..."

She pauses. It's barely a second, but you notice. The guards notice too, tensing.

"...consequence. Report suspicious activity. Cooperation is rewarded."

The broadcast ends. Through a window, you can see her in the courtyard, head bowed, two Merregons flanking her closely. The golden collar around her neck pulses faintly. One of the guards barks something in a metallic rasp. She doesn't respond, doesn't move. She's utterly still, like a puppet with cut strings.

Features of the Area

Magical Amplification

- Cannot be interrupted without disabling the collar
- Creates noise cover; Stealth checks within the garrison have advantage for 1 minute during a broadcast

Guard Attention During Broadcasts

- All guards within sight of the courtyard watch the broadcast
- Patrols pause briefly
- Creates small windows of opportunity on either side of the broadcast

The Kenku's Condition

If the party has line of sight and succeeds on DC 12 Perception:

- She sways slightly, as if fighting to stay upright
- Her hands spasm periodically (involuntary stress response)
- The collar's glow intensifies when she speaks
- Her eyes scan the area desperately

If the party succeeds on DC 15 Perception:

- She makes brief eye contact with the party's position.
- Her pause during the broadcast seems deliberate.
- She has clocked them and made a decision about what to do with that information. What that decision was is not visible from this distance.

If the party has **detect magic** active:

- The collar radiates overwhelming Enchantment magic
- Threads of magic extend from the collar into her mind
- The magic pulses in rhythm with her heartbeat
- Breaking it by force would cause severe psychic trauma

Read or paraphrase the following if the party observes her closely:

Up close, you can see what the broadcasts hide. Her feathers are matted and dull. Her wrists bear scars from the shackles. Her eyes are sunken with exhaustion.

But what's most heartbreaking is the moment after the broadcast ends. The magical compulsion releases its hold, and for just an instant, her expression breaks into terror. Then she smooths her face back to neutrality. She's learned that showing emotion brings punishment.

The Encounter

Attempted Communication

If the party tries to signal or communicate with the Kenku during a broadcast:

From a distance:

She sees the signal. She does not respond in kind. Her eyes register it and move on with the broadcast. If the party reads this as caution or fear of the guards, that is a reasonable interpretation. It is also the interpretation she would want them to make.

Through magic (**message**, **minor illusion**):

She hears or sees the contact. She gives nothing back. Not a head tilt, not a hesitation. The broadcast continues cleanly. The party may read this as the collar preventing response. That is possible. It is also possible she simply chose not to use the window.

What she is not doing:

She is not warning them. She is not signaling toward the command tower. She is not trying to help. If the party succeeds on a DC 14 Insight check while observing her across the courtyard, they notice that she has clocked their position and continued the broadcast without adjustment. That is either discipline under duress or something else. Both are true.

Tactical Opportunities During a Broadcast

During the broadcast (60 seconds):

- Guards focused on the courtyard; noise covers movement (advantage on Stealth)
- Opportunity to cross exposed areas safely
- Guards will not abandon posts even for suspicious sounds

Immediately after (2 rounds):

- Guards return to patrols; brief confusion as they resume positions
- Small window for quick actions before positions are reset

Rescue During a Broadcast

Advantages: predictable location; she is already outside her cell; noise cover for approach.

Disadvantages: 2 guards immediately beside her; other patrols in or near the courtyard; must remove collar quickly; no time for stealth after alarm is raised.

Success requirements:

- Approach unseen: DC 14 Stealth (advantage during broadcast)
- Neutralize guards: combat (2 rounds maximum before reinforcements arrive)
- Remove collar: **dispel magic** or DC 18 Thieves' Tools (1 action)
- Extract: must reach exit before lockdown (3-4 rounds)

Whether the collar's removal changes her behavior is a question the party will have to answer in Chapter 4. The compulsion may be gone. The calculations were always hers.

The Imp Warlock's Awareness

Unknown to the party, the Imp Warlock monitors broadcasts. If the party has been operating quietly, he does not know they are here yet. If they make any move during or immediately after the broadcast, his senses detect the disruption and he begins preparing for confrontation (Scene 5).

What the Party Can Do

Observe Silently

No action means no risk. The party documents the Kenku's condition and timing. Emotional weight without mechanical consequence.

Attempt Communication

The Kenku understands they are trying to help. She may provide a critical warning through body language. 25% chance guards notice suspicious behavior; if they do, the alarm is quietly raised.

Rescue During a Broadcast

Alarm is definitely raised. Scene 5 becomes a running battle rather than an ambush or negotiation. Hope gain is massive if she is successfully extracted.

Defer Rescue

The broadcast ends and the moment passes. The party can still attempt rescue from her cell in the tower (Scene 3, Approach 2). Less time pressure but similar difficulty.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

The broadcast runs slightly longer than usual.
The collar is pressing harder than normal.
Whatever she is doing with that window is not visible to the party. This gives the party 90 seconds instead of 60 to act during the noise window.

Making it Harder

An additional Merregon has been stationed at the courtyard perimeter today, apparently as a routine precaution. The party must neutralize 3 guards instead of 2 to reach her safely.

Increasing Role Play

Let the party spend time watching without acting. The three broadcasts, spaced through the day, each reveal something slightly different about her condition. The dusk broadcast, if observed, shows her visibly struggling more than she did at dawn. The Imp Warlock is increasing the compulsion.

Treasure and Rewards

No direct rewards in this scene. What the party observes here informs Scene 5 and the Interlude.

Development and Dial Impact

Track how the party approaches the Kenku throughout this scene. But there are no dial changes yet. Dials move based on the final outcome in Scene 6.

- **Party observes silently**
No consequences
Let emotional weight build
 - **Party attempts communication**
She registers and continues
25% chance guards notice
 - **Party resources during a broadcast**
Alarm raised immediately
Scene 5 becomes a running battle as guards converge
 - **Party defers rescue**
Stealth option maintained
Moral weight carries forward
-

SCENE 5:

CONFRONTATION

The central dramatic question of this scene is: can the party break the garrison's processing logic? Everything else, the combat options, the negotiation angle, the Merregon presence, serves that question.

The nature of this encounter depends heavily on alarm status, party objectives, and whether the Imp Warlock has had time to prepare. There are three main variations.

Variation A: Ambush (Alarm Not Raised)

If the party has operated stealthily and the Imp Warlock is unaware, they can ambush him during his routine inspection.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The command tower office is quiet except for the scratch of quill on parchment. The Imp Warlock sits at his desk, reviewing reports with mechanical efficiency.

Through the window behind him, you can see the courtyard. The cellblock is visible to his left. He's positioned himself to monitor everything.

He doesn't know you're here. Not yet.

Ambush setup:

- Party has a surprise round if DC 14 group Stealth is successful
- Imp Warlock is AC 15 (**mage armor** is always active), HP 78
- He has not cast additional defensive spells; fear and hold person are available
- 1 Merregon guard in the hallway outside (alerted by combat sounds after 1 round)
- Office has one entrance and exit (the tower stairs)

Tactical considerations:

- Window provides an escape route (DC 12 Acrobatics to land safely)

Victory condition:

- Defeat or incapacitate the Imp Warlock before reinforcements arrive (3-4 rounds).

Variation B: Prepared Defense (Alarm Raised with Time to Prepare)

If the alarm was raised earlier and the Imp Warlock has had 5 or more minutes to prepare.

Read or paraphrase the following:

You find the Imp Warlock waiting in his office, standing behind his desk with unsettling calm. Two Merregons flank him, weapons drawn. The papers on his desk are burned, still smoking. The maps have been removed from the walls.

His voice echoes directly in your minds: "You are resistance agents. Crude. Predictable. The Rakshasa will be... disappointed... by your tactics."

His eyes glow with power. "You should have stayed in your sewers."

Prepared defense:

- Imp Warlock AC 15 (**mage armor** is always active), HP 78; he has spent time pre-casting fear on a held action
- 2 Merregons present at full HP
- Office contains one deployed trap (DC 15 Perception to spot; 3d8 psychic damage on trigger)
- Sensitive documents have been destroyed
- Additional Merregons arrive as reinforcements every 2 rounds

Tactical considerations:

- He fights intelligently using Merregons as shields
- He goes after obvious leaders and fights to kill, not subdue

Victory condition:

- Defeat the Imp Warlock and guards
- Escape before overwhelming reinforcements arrive

Variation C: Running Battle (Chaos, No Preparation)

If the party freed prisoners, rescued the Kenku, or triggered alarms but reached the Imp Warlock quickly.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The command tower shakes with the sounds of combat below. Shouts echo from the courtyard. Somewhere, a horn blares the garrison-wide alert.

You burst into the office to find the Imp Warlock standing at the window, watching the chaos unfold. He turns slowly in agitation.

"Impressive," his voice echoes magically. "Destructive and pointless. But impressive." He steps away from the window, arcane energy crackling around his hands. "You have created chaos, but I will restore order. Beginning with you."

Running battle:

- Imp Warlock is AC 15 (**mage armor** is always active), HP 78; no preparation
- Initially alone (Merregons are dealing with prisoners and chaos)
- 1 Merregon arrives each round as reinforcement
- Full garrison alert; no stealth is possible
- Fires may be burning, prisoners may be escaping

Tactical considerations: a

- Angry and fights recklessly
- May grab documents and flee rather than fight to the death
- Chaos works both ways (party can use environment)
- Freed prisoners may create distractions.

Victory condition:

- Defeat, drive off, or bypass the Imp Warlock
- Escape amid the chaos

Features of the Area

Command Tower Office

- Desk (half cover, AC 15, 30 HP)
- Filing cabinets (half cover, AC 13, 20 HP; contain documents)
- Window (escape route, 25 ft drop to courtyard)
- Narrow stairs (difficult terrain; disadvantage on Dexterity saves on the stairs)
- Chandelier (can be dropped with an attack on the chain; DC 13 Dexterity save or 2d6 bludgeoning)

If fires are burning: smoke (lightly obscured; DC 12 Constitution save each round or poisoned); spreading flames (1d6 fire damage to creatures ending turn adjacent); structural damage at DM's discretion.

The Encounter

The Imp Warlock

The Imp Warlock speaks with cold precision, but his anger bleeds through:

- *"Your resistance is mathematically improbable. Yet you persist. Fascinating. Futile. But fascinating."*
- *"The Rakshasa will want you alive. I, however, find that requirement... negotiable."*
- *"You fight for people who will never be free. I have calculated the probabilities. They are not in your favor."*

The Imp Warlock is CR 6. His stat block reflects modified warlock capabilities beyond the base Imp. For a 3rd-level party of 4-5 characters: the Imp alone is an encounter ranging from hard to deadly depending on Merregon support. Scale Merregon presence to your party's size and capability. The ambush variation substantially improves party odds (a surprise round against a target with high spell DC but limited HP creates a winnable window). The prepared defense variation is intentionally very hard and should push negotiation or manipulation as a valid alternative to combat.

This combat should run 3-5 rounds. After Round 5, introduce urgency: a building collapse, massive reinforcements, spreading fire. Force a decision: finish the fight or flee with what the party has.

Alternative Resolutions

Negotiation (Very Difficult):

DC 18 Persuasion or Intimidation to make the Imp Warlock consider dialogue. He will consider deals pragmatically but has no loyalty to anyone. He serves the Rakshasa because it is beneficial, not from belief. Possible bargaining points: information about resistance operations in exchange for safe passage; promise to leave the garrison intact in exchange for prisoners; warning about regime instability (he is not valued enough to survive if the Goristro purges the border command).

Manipulation via Contracts

If the party has the Merregon contracts, they can attempt a DC 16 Deception or Intimidation check along the lines of "Stand down or I destroy these contracts. Your entire garrison becomes unbound."

If the party's threat is convincing, the Imp orders his Merregons to stand down and allows the party to leave with prisoners. He is clearly furious but controlled.

What the Party Can Do

Defeat the Imp Warlock

The primary objective. Works differently across all three variations, but the goal is the same: neutralize him before reinforcements overwhelm the party.

Negotiate or Manipulate

Legitimate alternatives to combat. The Imp Warlock is pragmatic; he serves the Rakshasa out of self-interest. A compelling threat to his survival or his garrison's integrity can produce results without a fight.

Bypass Entirely

If the party has already freed the prisoners and gathered the intelligence they need, skipping this confrontation entirely is a valid choice. Not every chapter needs its boss fight. Mira will not judge them for surviving.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

- Reduce Imp Warlock HP to 30-35
- Delay Merregon reinforcements by 1 round per wave
- Freed prisoners create a distraction at a critical moment

Making it Harder

- A third Merregon arrives at the start of Round 2 instead of Round 3
- The Imp Warlock uses **dominate person** more aggressively and targets different party members each round
- Traps in the office deal max damage
- Environmental hazards (fire spreading, floor sections collapsing) trigger in Round 3

Increasing Role Play

Let the Imp Warlock talk. He is fascinating in a deeply unsettling way. He does not hate the party; he analyzes them. If the party engages him conversationally before or during combat, he will answer questions honestly and in detail, because he does not believe they can use the information to stop what is coming.

Treasure and Rewards

From the Imp Warlock's Body (if killed)

- Focus amulet (+1 to Intelligence-based spell attacks; requires attunement)
- Infernal contract documents
- Personal journal (intelligence about border operations)
- 50 gp in various coins

From the Office (time permitting)

- Maps of the Rakshasa's fortress network (tactical intelligence)
- Prisoner processing records (evidence of regime crimes)
- Merregon contracts (can be used to control or free the devils)
- Communication crystals (linked to other garrisons)

Development and Dial Impact

No dial changes yet. Dials move based on final outcome in Scene 6.

SCENE 6:

EXTRACTION

The mission is complete. Now comes the hardest part.

Read or paraphrase the following (adjust based on circumstances):

The hardest part of any heist is the escape. You have what you came for, but the garrison is [fully alerted / beginning to realize / still largely unaware] what has happened.

[Freed prisoners cluster around you, frightened and injured. / The Kenku clutches her freed throat, still learning to use her voice. / Documents are stuffed into bags and pockets.]

Behind you, [the command tower burns / alarms echo / Merregons begin coordinating a search / chaos reigns]. Ahead lies the exit and freedom, if you can reach it.

Tam's voice crackles from your sending stone: "Extraction team is in position. Multiple routes available. Signal when you're clear of the walls."

Features of the Area

Garrison Status

The extraction challenge scales directly with alarm level from Scene 3. A silent mission produces a quiet exit. A lockdown produces a running battle. Most missions fall somewhere between.

Prisoner Condition

Most freed prisoners have 1d4 HP, are malnourished and terrified, and reduce party movement by half while escorting. 3 or 4 are badly wounded (speed 15 ft., disadvantage on physical checks). 2-3 are elderly or very young (speed 20 ft., need assistance). DC 10 Persuasion to keep them organized; DC 13 Persuasion to prevent panic if combat occurs.

The Encounter

Scope Management

This scene asks the party to simultaneously manage up to 17 frightened prisoners, a possible additional NPC (the Kenku if rescued), a collection of documents, an escape skill challenge, and possible pursuit. That is too many threads to track simultaneously at most

tables. Before running this scene, decide which two or three elements matter most to your group and foreground those. If your players love logistical challenges, run the full prisoner count. If they do not, abstract the prisoner group as described in Chapter 2's escape guidance and focus the scene on the escape route choice and any pursuit. The mission objective is accomplished when the party clears the walls with the majority of prisoners and their most critical intelligence. Do not let bookkeeping obscure that victory.

Choosing an Exit Route

Present all four options clearly and let the party decide.

Route 1: Main Gate (Brazen)

Bluff, fight, or force your way through. The gate is always guarded (2 Merregons minimum; reinforcements available from barracks).

Skill challenges: DC 18 Deception or Intimidation to convince guards to open the gate (DC 16 with forged orders or Merregon contracts); DC 18 group Athletics or 2 rounds of attacks (AC 19, 40 HP) to force the gate; combat with 2-4 Merregons depending on alarm level. Advantages: direct route, wide enough for the full group, gates are designed to open.

Disadvantages: most obvious route; pursuit can follow easily.

Route 2: Over the Walls (Difficult)

Climb walls with prisoners using ropes and climbing gear.

Skill challenges: DC 13 Athletics per prisoner to boost or climb (separate check for each); DC 12 Acrobatics to lower prisoners safely (or use rope for automatic success, slower); DC 14 Stealth to avoid wall patrols or fight 1-2 Merregons.

Advantages: multiple exit points; harder for pursuers to follow.

Disadvantages: slow (1 round per prisoner); prisoners may fall (1d6 damage on failed check); exposed throughout.

Route 3: Drainage Culvert (Return Route)

Return via the entry point if it was used.

Skill challenges: DC 13 Athletics per prisoner to navigate the cramped tunnel; DC 12 Medicine or DC 14 Athletics per incapacitated prisoner; DC 10 Acrobatics for Medium creatures or become stuck (1 round to free).

Advantages: hidden exit; difficult for pursuers

to follow.

Disadvantages: extremely slow with the full group; tight quarters prevent defensive fighting; may collapse.

Route 4: Through the Chaos (Opportunistic)

Capitalize on active confusion if fires, fighting, or alarms are already running.

Skill challenges: DC 12 Survival to navigate burning or chaotic areas; DC 13 Dexterity saves to avoid environmental hazards; DC 11 Stealth (advantage due to chaos) to slip through.

Advantages: Merregons are distracted; multiple improvised exits; chaos masks movement.

Disadvantages: unpredictable dangers; risk of separation from prisoners.

The Escape Skill Challenge (if pursued)

If the garrison is fully alerted, the party faces active pursuit: 2-4 Merregons depending on remaining garrison strength (prioritizing prisoner recapture over killing the party) and possibly an organized search pattern if the alarm has been active for more than 5 minutes.

Goal: 4 successes before 3 failures.

Example checks:

- Athletics DC 13: boost prisoners over obstacles, force doors, clear a path
- Acrobatics DC 14: navigate difficult terrain, balance on narrow surfaces
- Stealth DC 12: hide from search parties, create misdirection
- Deception DC 15: create false trails, bluff pursuers
- Survival DC 13: find hidden paths, use environment to advantage
- Medicine DC 12: stabilize an injured prisoner so they can move faster
- Persuasion DC 14: keep prisoners calm and moving

Automatic successes (consume item or create risk):

- Smoke grenade: breaks line of sight
- Collapse a passage: DC 15 Athletics or a spell; blocks pursuit for 1d4 rounds
- Heroic Rearguard: one character stays behind (faces 2 Merregons alone for 3 rounds, then must escape separately)
- Sacrifice equipment: drop gear to lighten load

Consequences:

- 4+ Successes: clean escape; pursuers lose the trail
- 3 Successes: escape achieved, but pursuers know the general direction (Heat +1)
- 2 Successes: narrow escape; 1d6 damage to each party member and some prisoners
- 1 Success: desperate escape; major injury or one prisoner lost
- 0 Successes: captured (TPK or prison break scenario next session)

Reaching the Extraction Point

Once the party clears the garrison walls, they must cover 1/4 mile to the nearest extraction point. DC 11 Stealth to cross the open ground undetected if trying to stay quiet.

Read or paraphrase the following when Tam arrives:

Three wagons thunder out of the tree line, driven by resistance members. Tam leans out, waving frantically. "Get in! MOVE!"

Loading takes 2 rounds. Merregon pursuit may arrive during loading. The party can choose to abandon some prisoners to save time, but it is a moral choice with lasting consequences.

If pursuit is close, run a short wagon chase (1-2 rounds): DC 12 Animal Handling to keep horses calm and fast; Merregons attempt to overtake (DC 14 Athletics to stay ahead); the party can delay pursuit with arrows, spells, or thrown obstacles.

Read or paraphrase the following when the chase ends:

The garrison shrinks behind you, torches on the walls growing distant. The Merregons' horns echo in the night, but they're not following. They're regrouping.

You made it out.

What the Party Can Do

Escort All Prisoners

Slow but comprehensive. Every person freed is a person saved. Mechanical cost is reduced speed and more difficult skill checks. Moral reward is unambiguous.

Escort Only Those Who Can Move

Pragmatic but haunting. The party moves faster and faces lower skill check DCs, but some prisoners are left behind. This kind of a choice will come up again.

Split the Party

Escort prisoners to the cabin in Thornwood Forest (Chapter 2) while others draw pursuit. Requires a plan for reunification and carries the risk of prolonged separation if the escape skill challenge fails.

Arm Prisoners and Fight Together

Risky but adds action economy. Several freed prisoners are willing to fight if given weapons from the garrison storage. They are Commoners with improvised weapons but they are motivated.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

Remove the pursuit entirely if the mission was conducted silently. The extraction becomes tense but procedural rather than mechanically pressured. Let the weight come from the prisoners' exhaustion rather than combat.

Making it Harder

The Rakshasa has a contingency: a sending stone in the Imp Warlock's quarters automatically alerts a nearby patrol the moment he stops responding. A fresh force of 4 Merregons arrives at the extraction point at the same time as the wagons.

Increasing Role Play

One prisoner refuses to get in the wagon. She has heard about wagons. DC 14 Persuasion or a party member she trusts (from Scene 3 interactions) can convince her. If no one can, she runs and the party has to decide whether to chase her.

Treasure and Rewards

From Successful Extraction

- Freed prisoners (up to 17 Commoners, grateful)
- Gathered intelligence (maps, documents, contracts)
- The Kenku (if rescued)
- Evidence of regime crimes (political value for future chapters)

From Prisoners (once safe)

- 75 gp combined from grateful families
 - Personal favors: a cartographer offers detailed maps, a former garrison guard provides internal intelligence
 - Various contacts across the region
-

Development and Dial Impact

Apply all accumulated dial changes here based on total mission outcome.

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Imp is killed Major loss for regime Cleaner escape Border operations disrupted	+1	+2	-1
Imp is captured Intelligence asset Complicates escape Regime launches manhunt	+2	+2	-1
Imp is driven off He escapes and will report party composition to the Rakshasa	+1	+1	0
Imp negotiates withdrawal Pragmatic resolution He reports to the Rakshasa accurately but not vindictively	+1	+1	0
Successful extraction (all objectives achieved) Major visible victory Regime furious and alarmed Border operations crippled	+2	+2	-1
Partial extraction (some prisoners, some intel) Victory but incomplete Regime knows of incident	+1	+2	0
Pyrrhic victory (objectives achieved but with heavy cost) Victory overshadowed by losses Regime has detailed information	+1	+2	0

Additional modifiers (apply on top of extraction outcome):

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Kenku rescued and extracted	+1	+1	0
Garrison destroyed (burned down)	+1	+1	-1
Many prisoners left behind	-1	0	0
Merregon contracts retrieved	0	0	-1

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

What the Party Should Know

- The resistance has graduated from guerrilla actions to direct confrontation with regime infrastructure
- The Imp Warlock was a field commander, not a leader; the Rakshasa is the next link in the chain
- Prisoners are sorted by the regime, and certain people are being sent not to the Rakshasa but to "the Architect" (the Archmage)
- The Kenku is in the party's custody, if they freed her. She is not a verified asset. She is a person who has been inside the regime's apparatus and survived it through choices the party does not yet know she made. Treat her accordingly: she may hold intelligence, she may surface useful fragments, and she may appear to be building trust. She is not on the party's side. Chapter 4 will make this clear. Do not soften that before it arrives.
- The Changeling is trusted by both the party and the regime's inner circle, which means one of those relationships is a performance
- The regime's response will be significant; this is no longer a nuisance they can ignore

Character Advancement

4th level reached.

Downtime (Optional)

The garrison's fall creates confusion, not clarity. Orders stall. Authority shifts. Different factions argue over control.

The regime will respond, but not cleanly.

The party has just 5 days before the regime's countermeasures fully materialize.

Available downtime activities:

- Train with resistance members or freed prisoners with useful skills (Fenwick, Sister Kara, Lyra)
- Research regime documents from the garrison to deepen intelligence
- Establish new safe houses in districts now connected through the refugee network
- Observe the Kenku. She is present and she is watching. How the party chooses to interpret that is up to them
- Track the evolving broadcasts as the regime's new voice struggles to fill the Kenku's role

Future Hooks

- The Archmage's "Project Provenance" and the Architect's Facility: what is being done with specific prisoners and why
- The Rakshasa's fortress network: six garrisons total; the party hit one
- Merregon contract manipulation: the contracts can be modified or destroyed; 40 bound devils across multiple garrisons represent a significant tactical opportunity
- The Changeling's deepening involvement: the Rakshasa's inner circle distrusts him; the party relies on him; something has to give

Lead-in to the Next Chapter

Read or paraphrase the following:

Mira looks at the maps, the documents, the evidence of the regime's cruelty spread before her.

"The border garrison was just one piece. The Rakshasa controls six of these. And beyond her, there's the Archmage, the Changeling, the Hierophant, all the way up to the Goristro himself."

"This is going to be a long war. But for the first time..." She looks at the freed prisoners, at the resistance members, at you. "For the first time, I think we might actually win it."

Considerations

If the party wants to attack another garrison immediately:

Mira urges caution: the regime is on high alert, they are exhausted, and their Heat is near its ceiling. She will support the plan if the party insists but will ask them to wait one week and let patrols normalize first.

If the party wants to investigate the Architect's Facility directly:

Mira is alarmed and intrigued. She knows nothing about it. She asks for two days to gather any intelligence before the party moves. This becomes the Chapter 4 setup.

If the party wants to use the Merregon contracts:

Mira defers to the party on this. It is a massive tactical option with unpredictable consequences. Freeing 40 bound devils across multiple garrisons would create chaos, but chaos that the regime would need to control. That is not necessarily bad for the resistance. The party should think carefully.

If the party left the Kenku in the garrison, she remains under regime control and continues broadcasting. The Chapter 4 raid is triggered instead by Bowman's movements being surveilled, or by the party inadvertently exposing the base through a Heat consequence. Her betrayal arc simply runs through a different channel.

If the Kenku struggled to communicate meaningfully:
She did not struggle. She chose what to surface and what to withhold. The fragments she produced are the ones she decided the party should have. That is a fact the DM knows and the party does not.

If Joran died during this chapter:
His death becomes a rallying point for the resistance. His name appears in graffiti within days. New recruits mention him. Mira keeps his apron folded on the planning table. Hope -1 now, but future victories that he inspired will carry extra weight.

Chapter 4 Safe Harbor



"We have not won. We have survived. But for now, that is enough."

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 4 is the breathing space between Acts. After the garrison raid, the resistance needs more than a safe house: it needs a home. This chapter is about the work that happens between battles, the building of something worth defending, and the cost of believing you are finally safe.

The party must establish a permanent base of operations, integrate the freed prisoners into a functioning resistance community, and reckon with what they learned at the garrison. They will have one night of genuine rest before the regime finds them again.

The Kenku's broadcast will give away their position. Whether it was forced compliance or something more complicated is a question this chapter deliberately refuses to answer. The Changeling will arrive after the smoke clears, bearing wine and useful intelligence, and the party will have every reason to trust him and

one quiet reason not to.

Note: This chapter presents ambiguity to the party. The DM does not have that ambiguity. The Kenku made a choice. The Running the Chapter section below tells you what that choice was.

This is the last chapter of Act 1. It ends with hope and it ends with a shadow.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Scene 1: The Reckoning

The party absorbs the aftermath of the garrison raid, analyzes intelligence, and integrates the freed community into the resistance. The Kenku's presence generates questions no one can yet answer.

Scene 1 should feel like exhaling as the weight of the garrison mission settles, and the party takes stock of what they actually accomplished.

Scene 2: Building Something

The resistance establishes a permanent base of operations. A brief period of purposeful work gives the community shape: roles, relationships, and something worth defending. Scene 2 should feel warm and purposeful, the building of something impactful creates a rare sense of forward momentum and earned peace.

Scene 3: The Raid

The Kenku's off-schedule broadcast delivers the base's exact location to regime forces. The hardest fight of Act I.

Scene 3 should feel like a gut punch: the safety of Scene 2 is exactly what makes the raid land so hard.

Scene 4: The Morning After

Bowman arrives with supplies and strategic framing for Act II. The raid's cause is obvious. What remains unresolved is her degree of culpability and whether she acted alone, under orders, or under a duress the party has not yet uncovered. Scene 4 should feel like standing at a threshold as the chapter closes with hope intact, but something larger and darker has come into focus.

RUNNING THE CHAPTER

Designed for: 4th-level characters

Sessions: 2-3

Advancement: None

This chapter is deliberately shorter and more intimate than Chapters 2 and 3. It is not a heist or an ambush. It is a chapter about people: what they have lost, what they are building, and what they do not yet know is coming.

The primary goals are:

- Absorb the aftermath and establish an emotional baseline for Act II
- Locate, secure, and fortify a permanent base of operations
- Defend that base when the regime finds it
- Let the party's uncertainty about the Kenku develop naturally, without confirmation or deflection
- Deepen the Changeling's false trust
- Open the door to Act II through the Project Provenance intelligence

Guidance

Let the Rest Feel Real

Scene 2 is the calm before the storm. Do not rush it. Let players interact with NPCs, ask questions, and feel the weight of what they built. The raid in Scene 3 hits harder if Scene 2 landed.

The Kenku's Calculation

For Scene 3 the DM will know what the party does not: the Kenku is going to broadcast the base location. She is not a victim of the collar acting alone. She has made a calculation.

She knows her location.

She was held briefly at the crowded safe house after extraction. Over the following 2-3 days, the resistance moved to the permanent base and she was transported during that move. She observed the route from the safe house to the new base, the entry points, and the surrounding landmarks during that transfer. She memorized them.

When the collar activates for a broadcast on the fifth night, she chooses to include the new base location. The collar may compel her to broadcast on schedule and to stay within approved content, but she chose how much detail to include in that content window. This is not conjecture for the DM, but it is something the party may never be certain of.

What the party can observe:

She was there during the extraction. She was at the base for five days. The raid order confirms the broadcast gave the location. The logic chain is available to any player who follows it. Do not block that reasoning, but do not confirm it either. Let the party arrive at it.

How to play her in this chapter:

Her distress is real. Her exhaustion is real. She is also watching, assessing, and positioning. These are not contradictions. Play the exhaustion straight and let the positioning exist in the silences. The moments where her response to warmth is correct but slightly delayed, the moments where she is present but seems to be somewhere else. She is not malicious. She is surviving. The party may forgive her for that eventually. That is their choice to make, not yours to facilitate.

What Bowman knows:

He does not know she chose this. He suspects either the collar transmitted something before removal, or (if the party freed her) that she made a decision without the collar's involvement. He is not certain which. He offers the former as the more palatable explanation.

The Changeling Should Feel Like a Win

In Scene 4, Bowman should come across as genuinely helpful, warm even. The shadow should be subtle, something a player might catch and another might not. False trust is only effective if the trust felt earned.

This is the End of Act 1

The chapter conclusion should feel like a door opening, not a mission complete. The party has survived, built something, and earned a moment of hope. Then the intelligence about Project Provenance arrives and the scale of what they are actually fighting becomes clear.

SCENE 1: THE RECKONING

This scene occurs 1-2 days after the garrison extraction, once the party and freed prisoners have reached safety. It covers immediate consequences, intelligence analysis, NPC reactions, and the first strategic decisions of the resistance as a real organization.

The first night is genuinely quiet. The five-day build that follows is not. Tension accumulates from day two onward. The safety was real and it is already over.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The resistance safe house in Oren's western district is packed beyond capacity. Freed prisoners reunite with families in tearful embraces. Others sit alone, staring at nothing, processing freedom they had lost hope of seeing.

Mira has cleared the planning table. Maps, documents, and evidence from the garrison are spread across it. She looks exhausted but grimly satisfied.

"Let's talk about what you found. And what happens next."

Features of the Area

The Safe House, Overcrowded

The cellar that served as a planning room for three people now holds seventeen freed prisoners, their families, and a resistance that has outgrown its infrastructure. It is warm in the way that too many bodies in a small space is warm. It smells like relief and unwashed clothing.

The Kenku's Broadcasts

The day after the mission:

"Terrorist attack on border security garrison. Multiple officers murdered. Dangerous criminals escaped. Citizens are advised: these extremists are violent and unpredictable. Report any information immediately. Significant rewards offered."

The playbook is the same, the lie is already running. The victims are criminals. The heroes are terrorists.

The New Voice (if the Kenku was rescued)

A replacement broadcaster, voice stilted and clearly reading from a script:

"Former spokesperson has been revealed as a traitor. The resistance has kidnapped a government official. She is being held against her will. If you have information about her location, report immediately. The Goristro offers clemency to those who assist in her recovery."

The desperation is noticeable. The propaganda machine is not broken, but it is wounded.

The Encounter

Intelligence Analysis

Mira, Henrik, and the party examine what was retrieved from the garrison.

Prisoner Records (if retrieved)

Detailed logs of every detention. Charges are transparently fabricated. Certain prisoners are marked for "special processing," a designation that does not match any known transfer destination.

- DC 12 Investigation
"Special processing" prisoners share traits (magic users, specific races, children). They are not sent to the Rakshasa's fortress. They go somewhere else, marked only as "The Architect's Requirements."
- DC 15 Investigation
The Architect is the Archmage, Minister of Policy. References to "Project Provenance" appear repeatedly. These prisoners are being used for something specific, and the garrison documents do not say what.

Communication Logs (if retrieved)

Messages between the Imp Warlock and the Rakshasa reveal the detention system is quota-driven; the Rakshasa reports to the Goristro; the Archmage has some independent authority; the Kenku's compliance rates have been irregular, with occasional hesitations logged as "collar maintenance".

Merregon Contracts (if retrieved)

- DC 14 Arcana: bound to "enforce order as defined by the Rakshasa's authority"; 3 years remaining on a 10-year contract; payment is the souls of detained prisoners; termination activates if the Rakshasa dies or the contract is destroyed.
- DC 16 Investigation: contracts can be

modified with precise Infernal wording (DC 18 Forgery); destroying them frees approximately 40 bound devils across multiple garrisons.

Maps (if retrieved)

Show the Rakshasa's primary fortress (60+ miles away), a network of 6 smaller garrisons, and one route leading northeast labeled only "Architect's Facility." It does not connect to any known Rakshasa holding.

Observations From the Kenku (if rescued)

The Kenku does not debrief. She does not sit across from the party and share what she knows in exchange for care. She is present, she is quiet, and she occasionally produces fragments, sounds she overheard and voices she mimics without context, in what appears to be an involuntary way.

If the party spends extended time with her and succeeds on a DC 15 Insight check, they can extract the following from careful observation over several hours. These are not gifts. They are fragments the party has to piece together:

- *"The border must be sealed. No one crosses without authorization."* (Rakshasa's voice)
This confirms she has heard senior leadership directly
- *"Children to separate facility."* (Imp Warlock's voice)
An operational detail about prisoner sorting
- *The Changeling cannot be trusted. He serves only himself. Watch him closely.* (Rakshasa's voice)
Even the regime distrusts the Changeling. This one surfaces cleanly, without hesitation, on a DC 15 success

That last fragment is the most dangerous thing she offers, and she offers it willingly. Consider why. She is not doing the party a favor. She is introducing a destabilizing variable into their trust structure at a moment when they feel safe. The Rakshasa's warning about the Changeling is accurate, but the Kenku choosing to surface it now, in this context, is not neutral. The party should sit with this and not be sure what to make of it. That is the correct response.

The Community Problem

17 freed prisoners now need safety, food, shelter, and eventually new lives. Some can return to families. Others are fugitives. Several want to join the resistance. A few are too traumatized to function yet.

Useful prisoners available to the resistance:

- **Lyra** (Cartographer): can create detailed maps from descriptions; invaluable for future operations
- **Fenwick** (Locksmith): expert with locks and traps; available to teach or assist
- **Sister Kara** (Herbalist): makes healing poultices and antitoxins; becomes the resistance's first dedicated medic

Mira's Assessment

Read or paraphrase the following:

"We've hurt them. Now we need to decide: do we press the advantage or consolidate? My recommendation is consolidate. We are not ready for what comes next. But we need a real base, not a cellar. Somewhere we can train, plan, and actually defend."

She presents the strategic question that drives Scene 2: where do they go, and what do they build?

What the Party Can Do

Analyze the Intelligence Thoroughly

Reward players who engage with the documents. The Project Provenance thread is the most important thing in this pile. If the party finds it and asks questions, Mira does not have answers yet. That is the point.

Help Integrate the Refugees

Several prisoners have skills that directly improve the resistance's capabilities. Connecting them to roles is practical and emotionally rewarding. Let this feel like building something, not managing a logistics problem.

Engage the Kenku

She is not a willing intelligence asset. Patient, creative role-play here may be attempted, but will not pay dividends. Alternatively, the party may attempt coercion. That path is detailed below.

Interrogate the Kenku (The Dark Path)

Some parties will be naturally suspicious and will want answers rather than practicing patience. If the party pursues aggressive interrogation, including torture, do not block them. This is a campaign about resistance to tyranny. The party committing acts of cruelty against a prisoner, even one who may have harmed them, is exactly the kind of moral weight this campaign is designed to carry.

Running it:

The Kenku cannot speak freely. She can only mimic. Under duress, she produces fragments faster, not because she is breaking, but because controlled mimicry is harder to maintain under pain and fear. The party gets more fragments, but they cannot be certain which ones are chosen and which are involuntary.

If the party uses physical coercion or sustained psychological pressure, she eventually produces the following, in this order, in voices the party may or may not recognize:

1. *"She's here. She's already here."*
(Unknown voice, a frightened prisoner at the garrison)
2. *"The border must be sealed."*
(The Rakshasa's voice)
3. *"Children to separate facility."*
(The Imp Warlock's voice)
4. *"The Changeling cannot be trusted. He serves only himself."*
(The Rakshasa's voice)
5. After sustained pressure, in a voice that no one in the room can identify:
"I made a choice."

That fifth fragment is the one she does not intend to produce. It surfaces only under genuine extremity, not a single hard question, but real, prolonged pressure. It is three words in a voice that is secretly entirely her own. A party that has spent time with interrogation efforts will recognize as different from every other fragment she has ever offered.

She does not elaborate. She does not confess further. If the party eases off after that fragment, she goes completely silent and stays that way.

What this costs:

Run these consequences without editorializing. The resistance NPCs react based on who they are:

- Mira stops the interrogation if she is present and it reaches physical harm. She does not lecture the party. She simply says: *"That's enough,"* in the tone of someone who has had to say it before. She does not rescind the party's standing in the resistance. She just files this event away.
- Joran leaves the room. He does not come back until the next scene. If a party member checks on him, he says: *"I know she might have done it. I just... I-I needed to not see that."*
- If the party used physical means, Sister Kara treats the Kenku's injuries afterward without comment. If a party member talks to her, she says: *"She needs care. That's all I know how to do."*
- Tam says nothing. He watches the party differently for the rest of the chapter. Not with hostility. With recalibration.

If the party stops the interrogation before the fifth fragment is surfaced (the reveal of her having already made her choice), the party carries an uncertainty in the aftermath of the raid. Whether she had decided before the interrogation begins is entirely at the DM's discretion.

The Kenku afterward:

She is not broken she is just quieter. She continues to be present in the base, and she continues to watch. The raid in Scene 3 will still happen. Her choice is not undone by the party's choice. Whatever she felt during the interrogation, her calculation did not change.

Do not move the dials for the interrogation itself. This is not a public act. The cost is strictly internal, to the party's relationships, to the table's sense of what kind of heroes these people are, and to the quiet question of whether the resistance can hold to something the regime abandoned. That question does not need a mechanical answer, it just needs to be present.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

If the party did not retrieve documents from the garrison, Tam's network has gathered fragments of the same intelligence through street contacts. It is less complete but points in the same direction.

Making it Harder

One freed prisoner is not who they claimed to be. They are not a regime plant (that would be too clean) but their "charges" do not match the pattern of the others. DC 14 Investigation to notice. Nothing resolves this scene; it just adds suspicion.

Increasing Role Play

Give each freed prisoner a moment. Not a speech: a detail. The cartographer who keeps drawing the same room from memory. The cook who immediately asks for a garden. A son who won't sleep unless his mother is in the same room. These types of details make the community feel real when the raid comes for it in Scene 3.

Treasure and Rewards

No mechanical rewards in this scene. The intelligence gathered here is the reward, and it pays out across the rest of the campaign.

Development and Dial Impact

No dial changes from this scene. It is the baseline from which Chapter 4's changes are measured and consequences are accumulating

SCENE 2:

BUILDING SOMETHING

The resistance needs a permanent home. This scene covers locating and establishing a base of operations, the work of making it functional, and the rare experience of building something together.

Read or paraphrase the following:

Mira spreads three options on the table. Not targets. Not objectives. Places to live.

"We've been hiding in borrowed rooms long enough. If this is going to be a real resistance, we need a real base. Somewhere we can train people, store supplies, treat the wounded, and plan operations without whispering."

She taps each location in turn. "None of these are perfect. All of them are possible. This is your call."

Features of the Area

Option 1: The Tannery District

A cluster of abandoned industrial buildings on the river, vacated when the regime seized the Oren tanners' guild.

- **Location:**
In the city of Oren, along the southwest bank of the river
- **Cover:**
Legitimate industrial activity masks noise and traffic
- **Access:**
Multiple entry and exit points, river escape route
- **Risk:**
Urban location means more patrols, more potential informants
- **Capacity:**
Large enough for the full community plus expansion
- **Work required:**
Clearing debris, boarding vulnerable entry points, establishing watch rotations

Option 2: The Old Wind Mill

A decommissioned wind mill just outside Oren, technically outside the patrol grid but visible from the road.

- **Location:**
A minor road off of the northwest gate main road just outside the city of Oren
- **Cover:**
Isolated enough that unusual activity goes unnoticed
- **Access:**
One road in and out, river access to the east
- **Risk:**
Isolation cuts both ways; if discovered, there is only one escape route
- **Capacity:**
Moderate; cramped with the full community
- **Work required:**
Structural repairs, well clearing, fortifying the single approach

Option 3: The Smugglers' Runs

A network of storage tunnels beneath the merchant district on the far west side of Oren, absent from official maps.

- **Location:**
Underneath the city of Oren
- **Cover:**
Completely hidden; no surface presence at all
- **Access:**
Multiple tunnel exits scattered across the west side of the city
- **Risk:**
Unknown structural stability; possibility of other (hostile) occupants
- **Capacity:**
Substantial, if the tunnels hold
- **Work required:**
Mapping the full network, shoring unstable sections, establishing ventilation

The Encounter

No formal encounter in this scene. The resistance's growth and the community's integration are the mechanical content.

Track the following as the scene progresses:

- Base Defense Rating: starts at 0; each significant fortification adds 1 (maximum 5 before the raid)
- Community Readiness: how organized and calm the non-combat members are when the raid hits
- Watch Quality: whether the party establishes a real watch rotation (affects surprise in Scene 3)

Establishing the Base

Once the party chooses a location, this scene covers a few days of community work. Structure it as a series of short vignettes rather than skill challenges. Each one is a moment, not a task.

Track the days in this scene explicitly and verbally mark the passage of each day between vignettes so that when Scene 3 arrives on the fifth night, the elapsed time feels earned rather than declared.

Some suggested vignettes (let the party's interests guide which ones):

The First Night:

Mira insists on a watch rotation. Nobody argues. Someone builds a fire anyway. It is the first fire the resistance has had that was not strictly necessary.

Henrik's Training:

The former garrison guard offers to run basic combat drills. Half the freed prisoners show up. Some of them have never held a weapon. He is patient with them in a way that surprises everyone who watched him being interviewed about the garrison.

Sister Kara's Garden:

She has found a patch of light, wherever the base is located, and planted something. It will not be ready for weeks. She planted it anyway.

Lyra's Offer:

She spreads a blank map of the region and asks the party to walk her through every garrison, patrol route, and safe house they know. She works quickly. By evening, the resistance has its

first complete operational map.

The Kenku:

She finds a corner of the base that faces the door. She does not participate in the work of building. She watches it. She mirrors behavior she has seen before. Whether this is adaptation, survival, or something else is impossible to tell.

If a party member approaches and spends time with her, she does not warm to them in the way that someone building trust would warm to them. She responds. She mimics sounds that might be gratitude. If the party member succeeds on a DC 13 Insight check, they notice that her responses are always slightly calibrated. Just warm enough to satisfy, never warmer. Like someone who has learned what the appropriate amount of warmth looks like.

This vignette exists not to build relationship but to plant a seed the party will remember after Scene 3. Let it be short. Let it be slightly uncomfortable if the party is paying attention. Do not explain why.

The Base Taking Shape

After the chosen vignettes, read or paraphrase the following:

It takes five days. At the end of them, you have something that deserves the word "home." Not comfortable. Not safe, not truly. But organized. Purposeful. The kind of place where people eat together and argue about watch schedules and someone is always fixing something.

Mira stands in the center of it one evening, looking at the maps on the walls, the supply caches, the people moving through with purpose, and she says: "We're not hiding anymore. We're operating."

For the first time in a long time, that feels true.

What the Party Can Do

Choose the Base Location

Each location offers different advantages in Scene 3. The urban tannery makes pursuit harder to coordinate but means civilians could be caught in crossfire. The mill creates a chokepoint defense but limits escape options. The undercroft removes pursuit entirely but makes the fight claustrophobic.

Engage During the Vignettes

Each vignette is an optional role-play moment. Players who engage with NPCs here will care more about what is built when the raid comes for it. Players who skip them will still defend the base in Scene 3, but for different reasons.

Fortify the Base Defenses

Let the party make specific choices about base defense: where the watches go, what the alarm system is, whether they set traps. Each concrete decision carries into Scene 3 as an advantage or an absence.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

The party has time to fully fortify the base and run Henrik's drills, giving them two additional trained Commoner allies in Scene 3's defense.

Making it Harder

A patrol passes too close on Day 3. Nothing happens, but the party knows the clock is running. Remove one day from the preparation window and increase the urgency of the remaining vignettes.

Increasing Role Play

Let the Kenku participate in one of the vignettes in a way that is without emotional opening. She labels the herb garden accurately and without comment. She shows a child a hand game she learned somewhere, then does not engage further. Her helpfulness is unreadable: it could be habit, calculation, or something she does not have words for. Do not let it read as warmth.

Treasure and Rewards

The Base

- Safe house for the full community
- Supply cache (2 weeks of rations, basic medical supplies, basic weapons)
- Lyra's operational map (advantage on Intelligence checks related to regional planning)
- Access to Fenwick's lock-picking expertise (party members can use downtime to gain proficiency in Thieves' Tools)

Base Defense Rating

Track this number into Scene 3. Each point represents a fortification, trap, or watch position that gives the party a concrete advantage during the raid.

- 0-1: Merregons breach the interior in Round 2.
- 2-3: Merregons breach in Round 3 (baseline difficulty).
- 4-5: Merregons breach in Round 4; Phase 1 Xvarts approach from only one direction.

Community Readiness

- Organized: Four stress groups as described in Scene 3.
- Disorganized: All civilians count as one stress group.

Watch Quality

- Rotation established: Party acts before Xvarts in Round 1.
- No rotation established: Xvarts gain a surprise round.

Development and Dial Impact

No dial values shift during base selection and fortification, but consequences are accruing silently. Note this period as deferred consequence accumulation. Everything the party does or skips here will surface in Scene 3.

SCENE 3: THE RAID

The Kenku's broadcast gives them away. What follows might be the hardest fight of Act I:

Read or paraphrase the following (adjust timing based on base location and watch setup):

It is the fifth night. The base is as ready as it will get. People are sleeping, or trying to.

Then the broadcast starts.

The Kenku's voice, magically amplified, fills the air outside. But something is different. This is not a scheduled broadcast. It is the middle of the night.

"Citizens of Orenthis: suspicious activity has been reported at [exact location of your base]. Enforcement personnel are responding. Citizens in the area should remain indoors. This is a safety measure. Compliance ensures protection."

She named it. She named the exact location. In the silence after the broadcast ends, you hear it: boots on stone, the mechanical clank of Merregon armor, and beneath it, the skittering of something smaller and faster.

A patrol was already operating in this district. The broadcast did not start a search, they are already here.

The party knows the Kenku has been at this base for five days. They know the broadcast gave the exact location. The logic chain is available to them. If they pursue it, do not deflect. Let the evidence be what it is. You know she chose this. They are allowed to figure that out.

Features of the Area

The base determines the battlefield. Adjust the following to fit whichever location the party chose.

Urban Tannery

- Multiple entry points (advantage for defenders to choose engagement zones, but harder to seal)
- Industrial equipment and vats as cover and improvised obstacles

- Civilians in adjacent buildings (risk of crossfire; adds moral weight to every loud spell)
- Escape via the river (available if the party chooses to run rather than hold)

Wind Mill

- Single road approach (chokepoint; defenders can force the raid into a bottleneck)
- Mill blades and nearby waterway (can be used to slow or separate attackers)
- Elevated positions (loft and roof provide advantage on ranged attacks)
- Only one escape route (if the bottleneck breaks, the party is trapped)

Tunnels

- Tunnel network (defenders know it; attackers do not; dramatic advantage on Stealth and ambush)
- Claustrophobic combat (large attackers have disadvantage in tight tunnels)
- Multiple exits mean the community can evacuate while the party fights a rearguard
- Risk of structural damage from area spells (DC 12 Strength saving throw for creatures in affected area or become buried under debris)

The Attackers

The raid force consists of:

- 1 Merregon Squad Leader
- 2 Merregon Soldiers (CR 4 each)
- 8 Xvarts (use mob rules if preferred)

The Xvarts arrive first. They are noisy, reckless, and meant to draw attention and create chaos. The Merregons follow 2 rounds later, coordinated and methodical. The Squad Leader holds back until the Merregons have identified the party's position.

Civilian Complications

The 17 freed prisoners are in the base when the raid begins. They are not combatants. They are terrified. Their safety is an objective alongside defeating the attackers.

Treat the prisoners as four civilian groups with shared stress thresholds, not 17 individuals.

Group A: wounded, immobile.

Group B: able but terrified.

Group C: a family with a child.

Group D: one prisoner who may be a regime plant.

Each group has one stress threshold before it breaks and requires a PC action to stabilize. Each civilian group that reaches safety counts as a partial success regardless of combat outcome

The Encounter

Combat Structure

The raid is a three-phase encounter designed to feel like a defense, not just a fight.

Phase 1: Xvart Swarm (Rounds 1-2)

8 Xvarts breach whatever the weakest entry point is. They are individually weak (7 HP, AC 13) but numerous and chaotic. Their goal is not to fight but to destabilize: knock over supply caches, scatter civilians, make noise. Using mob rules, treat them as two groups of 4 (each group acts as one creature with 28 HP and +2 to hit, dealing 2d6+2 on a hit).

If the party established a watch rotation, one party member can act before the Xvarts breach (free action on their turn in Round 1). Otherwise the Xvarts have a surprise round.

Phase 2: Merregon Squad (Rounds 3-5)

Two Merregon Soldiers enter through the primary breach, coordinated and covered by each other. They fight methodically: one advances while the other holds position, switching roles each round. They prioritize the party over civilians but will take prisoners if the opportunity arises.

If the party's Base Defense Rating is 4-5, the DM can consider adding a second wave of 4 Xvarts as well to keep pressure on the party.

Key reminders: Merregons regenerate 5 HP per turn (unless hit by silvered weapons); they fight to subdue unless a party member has killed another Merregon in their presence (then they fight to kill).

Phase 3 Squad Leader: (Round 6+)

The Merregon Squad Leader (use standard Merregon stat block with +10 HP and multi-attack) enters once the Soldiers have engaged. He is not here to fight efficiently. He is here to send a message.

Read or paraphrase the following when he enters:

The Squad Leader does not rush. He steps over the threshold like he owns it, surveys the room, and his gaze settles on you.

"By order of the Goristro, this premises is condemned. All occupants are to be detained for processing. Resistance will be treated as terrorism."

He draws his blade.

"I suggest you choose quickly."

The Silhouette

At Round 3, a party member with line of sight to the exterior and a DC 14 Perception check sees the Kenku standing at the edge of the raid's staging area, outside the base, in the company of no one, watching. Her collar is active and glowing. She is not fighting. She is not fleeing. She is present.

She has been released ahead of the raid force. The Merregons do not need to contain her during the operation because she is not a prisoner right now. She is something else.

She watches until the party member notices her, then turns and walks into the dark. Do not explain this. Let it sit.

It is not a puzzle to solve in this moment. It is a wound.

Victory Conditions

- **Complete Defense**
All Merregons and Xvarts defeated or driven off; all or most civilians safe; base largely intact.
- **Successful Withdrawal**
Merregons not fully defeated but party extracts all civilians via escape routes; base compromised but community survives.
- **Partial Failure**
Some civilians captured or injured; base partially destroyed; party withdraws under pursuit. Scene 4 becomes more urgent and emotionally heavier.
- **Full Failure**
Base lost, multiple civilians captured, party barely escapes. Scene 4 becomes a crisis session before the Act II hook.

For a 4th-level party with established fortifications, possible trained Commoner allies, and prepared battlefield advantages, 1 Squad Leader + 2 Merregon Soldiers + 8-12 Xvarts may resolve faster than the scene's emotional weight requires. If the fight is clearly

going the party's way, use pacing to extend the engagement's tension. The scene's dramatic function is the silhouette and the aftermath, not the fight. Do not let a clean party victory obscure what the night cost them.

What the Party Can Do

Hold the Base

The intended approach. Use fortifications, established watch positions, and the base's defensive advantages to fight on favorable terms.

Prioritize Civilian Evacuation

A valid alternative to holding. Some party members fight a rearguard while others move civilians to the escape route. Loses the base but saves the community.

Use the Environment

Encourage creative use of the base's specific features: industrial vats, machinery, tunnel choke points. Each base location has at least two environmental features that can turn the tide of one phase.

Rally the Trained NPCs

If Henrik ran drills in Scene 2 and the party reinforced this, 3-4 freed prisoners are willing and minimally able to fight (Commoner stat block, improvised weapons). They are not effective combatants but they add action economy in Phase 1.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

- Reduce the raid to 1 Merregon Soldier plus the Squad Leader (total: 2 Merregons instead of 3)
- Xvart mob arrives in a single group of 6 rather than two groups of 4
- Squad Leader does not enter until Round 8

Making it Harder

- A fourth Merregon was positioned outside to cut off the escape route (discovered only when someone tries to use it)
- The Xvarts have a Xvart Warlock leading them (grants the mob one casting of **darkness** per encounter)
- Merregon Squad Leader uses a signal horn if reduced below half HP, calling for distant reinforcements (arrive in 10 rounds, creating hard time pressure)

Increasing Role Play

- A specific civilian the party knows from a vignette is in danger during Phase 2 (Tam's son, Sister Kara, Lyra with her maps)
- Give the Squad Leader a line that references something specific about the party: their names from a wanted posting, a detail from the garrison raid. Let it be clear the regime has been learning about them.
- After the fight, if the party succeeded, Mira says nothing for a long moment. Then: *"They found us in five days. We need to talk about how."*

Treasure and Rewards

From the Merregons (if defeated)

- Merregon equipment (longswords, heavy crossbows; common, not silvered)
- Official raid orders (written in Infernal; DC 14 Arcana to read; confirms the broadcast gave the location)
- Signal horn (can be used once to mimic a Merregon all-clear signal; single use)

From the Base (if held)

- Base remains operational
 - Community morale intact (affects Act II resistance recruitment)
 - Lyra's map undamaged (kept if party defended the base or retrieved it during evacuation)
-

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Complete defense Base secure Regime knows location but assault failed Community shaken but intact	+2	+1	0
Successful withdrawal Community survives; Base is lost Resistance must find new location in Act II	+1	+1	0
Partial failure Some civilians captured Base compromised Regime has names and faces	-1	+2	0
Full failure All civilians captured Base lost; Act II begins in crisis	-4	+2	0

SCENE 4:

THE MORNING AFTER

The raid is over. The base is intact or it is not. Either way, morning comes, and Bowman is at the door.

Read or paraphrase the following:

Dawn finds the base quiet in the way that follows violence: the particular silence of people who are awake but not ready to speak yet.

Mira is looking at the wall where Lyra's map hung. Whether it is still there depends on what happened last night. Her expression is the same either way.

Smoke carries. So does silence. When a place like this stops answering, people notice. There is a knock at the door. Quiet, precise, three times. The way it always is.

Bowman enters carrying a leather satchel and two bottles of wine. He looks at the damage, or the absence of it, and nods slowly. "I heard what happened. I came as soon as I could."

Features of the Area

The Base

Whatever its condition, the base feels different. The vignettes of Scene 2 are either still present (the garden, the maps, the training marks on the floor) or conspicuously absent. Let the physical space reflect what the raid cost.

The Community

People are processing. Some are angry. Some are frightened. Some are unnervingly calm, which is its own kind of warning sign. Tam is with his son. The Kenku is not in the main room.

The Encounter

Bowman's Visit

He produces supplies from the satchel: healing potions, a few coins, and forged papers for three of the freed prisoners whose descriptions matched wanted postings he found in the municipal archive.

He is practical and warm. He does not perform concern. He asks what he can do.

Then, after the immediate business is handled, he sets a document on the table.

Read or paraphrase the following:

"There's something else. I pulled this while preparing your forged papers. It's a reassignment order, routine on its face, but the names on it are familiar. Three of your freed prisoners were scheduled to be transferred before you extracted them."

He unfolds it. It is not a transfer to another garrison. The destination is a ministry office: the Imp's diplomatic bureau, the Mezzoloth's Council chambers, and the Hezrou's enforcement barracks, each appear as potential processing recipients, depending on the prisoner's listed classification.

"The regime isn't just detaining people. It's sorting them. Routing them to whoever can use them." He taps the document. "Each of these offices has a reason to want specific kinds of people. And each of them is running their operation through the same detention infrastructure you just hit."

He looks at you. "You hurt one piece of that infrastructure. But the pieces are connected. Hit enough of them, and the whole system starts to fracture."

What He Is Really Doing

Bowman is not wrong. The intelligence is accurate. He is also framing the party's next moves in a way that serves his own agenda, steering them toward the remaining outer circle lieutenants in an order that benefits him. He has reasons to want the Imp weakened, the Mezzoloth destabilized, and the Hezrou's enforcement capacity reduced. He will not say this.

Insight checks:

- DC 10: He is genuinely pleased the raid succeeded.
- DC 13: He has clearly thought about the outer circle structure in detail, more than a sympathetic clerk would need to.
- DC 16: The way he describes each lieutenant suggests personal familiarity, not research.
- DC 19: He is not suggesting targets. He is clearing a path.

The Broadcast Question

At some point in this scene the question of the broadcast will come up. Someone will ask Mira, or the Kenku, or Bowman, how the regime found them so quickly.

The question is not how. The question is why. But do not answer it. Let the scene hold the question without resolution.

If the party asks the Kenku directly: She is quiet for a long moment. Then she mimics a sound. It is not a lock. It is the specific sound of a door closing. Not slamming, not locking. Just the soft, definitive sound of a door that has been pulled shut from the inside. Then she looks away.

Note: She is not confessing. She is not apologizing. This is the closest she will come to acknowledging that she made a choice. The party can interpret it however they want. You know what it means.

If the party asks Bowman: He considers it carefully.

"The collar compels her to broadcast on schedule. It does not usually dictate specific content. It enforces format and frequency, not substance. Someone fed her that location, or she included it herself within the content window the collar allows."
He pauses.

"I don't know which. But I'd note that she was at your base for five days."

He says this without inflection. He is not accusing her. He is simply stating a fact.

He picks up his wine.

This is the most honest thing Bowman has said to date. He is not protecting the Kenku and he is not protecting the party from the implication. He is just telling them what the logic supports. The party now has everything they need to reach the correct conclusion. Whether they do is their choice.

If the party "interrogated" the Kenku: Bowman notices, but he does not address it directly. When he sets the outer circle document on the table, he says, almost as an aside:

"I heard things were difficult after the raid. I'm sorry I wasn't here sooner."

He looks at the Kenku's corner of the room (wherever she has settled) for exactly one moment. Then he looks back at the party.

"She's still here."

He means it as an observation. The party can read whatever they want into it. He picks up his wine and moves on to the intelligence briefing.

Bowman is not judging the party. He is noting that they did not kill her, which tells him something about their limits. He is filing that information next to everything else he has filed about them. He finds it interesting.

The Garrison Document Fragment

If the party retrieved documents from the garrison and has been analyzing them, one detail surfaces here that did not fit the pattern of the others. It is easy to miss and should not be flagged by Mira or Bowman unless a player asks directly.

On a DC 16 Investigation check while reviewing the prisoner records: a small subset of prisoners, seven in total across three months, were marked with a symbol the party does not recognize. A circle with a line through it. No destination listed. No classification. Just the symbol and two words in a bureaucratic hand: Project Provenance.

There are no other references to it in the documents. Mira does not know what it means. Henrik does not recognize it. Bowman, if shown it, looks at it for a moment and says:

"I have not seen that before."
His voice is even.

DC 19 Insight: that is the first time he has said he does not know something, and he moved past it very quickly.

Leave it there. The thread exists. It is not ready to pull yet.

Mira's Assessment

Read or paraphrase the following:

Mira looks at Bowman's document for a long time. Then she looks at the party.

"The Mezzoloth. The Hezrou. The Yagnoloth." She says each name like she is placing a stone.

"These are the people running the machinery that built those detention wagons, that filled that garrison, that came for us last night."

*"We have hurt the infrastructure. Now we need to hurt the people giving it orders."
She looks at Lyra's map.*

"The good news is we get to choose where we start. None of these targets are going anywhere."

Bowman's Departure

He leaves as he arrived: quietly, without drama. At the door he pauses.

*"There are others inside the regime who are waiting to see if the resistance is real. After last night, I think they will have their answer."
He goes. The party is left with the document, the question about the Kenku, and four names on a map.*

What the Party Can Do

Engage with the Intelligence

Bowman's document opens Act II without prescribing an order. The Imp, Mezzoloth, and Hezrou are all accessible targets. Let the party name which thread they want to pull first. This is where Act II's player-driven structure takes root.

Address the Kenku Question

Do not force a resolution. Let the party discuss it, disagree about it, and arrive at their own positions. Players who trust the Kenku and players who suspect her are both responding correctly to the information they have.

Notice the Fragment

The Project Provenance symbol is in the documents if someone looks carefully. It does not mean anything yet. It should feel like static: present, slightly wrong, not yet loud enough to act on.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

If the party is emotionally depleted from Scene 3, let Bowman's visit be warmer and slower. Give the party more time with the NPCs before the outer circle document lands.

Making it Harder

One of the freed prisoners overheard Bowman speaking quietly to someone outside before he knocked. They do not know who. They mention it to a party member during the scene. Nothing resolves. The seed is planted.

Increasing Role Play

Give each major NPC a small moment not connected to the plot. Mira admits she does not know what she will do when this is over. Tam quietly asks if the party thinks there will be an "over." Sister Kara brings breakfast nobody asked for. These moments make the threshold feeling of the scene land with more weight.

Treasure and Rewards

From Bowman

- 3 potions of healing
- Forged papers for 3 freed prisoners (removes their wanted status)
- The outer circle routing document (strategic value throughout Act II)

From the Chapter

- All party members receive Heroic Inspiration for the next session
 - The base (if held) is now a permanent resistance headquarters with established roles, supply chains, and a functioning community
 - Lyra's complete operational map of the region (advantage on Intelligence checks for regional planning)
-

Development and Dial Impact

This scene can be used as a point of reflection.
But there are no dial changes yet.

- **Base was held** (Community is intact)
The resistance is real and visible
The regime failed to destroy it
 - **Base was lost** (Community survived)
Regime won the location but not the people
Act II begins mobile
 - **Kenku question is left unresolved**
Paranoia and trust can coexist
Both are valid responses
 - **Outer circle set as Act II targets**
Party has agency over order of operations
Act II structure established
 - **Project Provenance clue discovered**
Seed planted
Further details will be revealed as Act II unfolds
 - **Changeling is trusted**
He is positioned for his role at the climax of Act II
The party will remember this scene when he reveals himself
-

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

What the Party Should Know

- The resistance is no longer a handful of people in a cellar. It is an organization with a home, a community, and a purpose. Albeit one that was found and raided within five days of being established.
- The regime's detention infrastructure routes prisoners to specific lieutenants based on classification. The outer circle is not just political. It is operational.
- The Kenku broadcast the base location. The party may not know whether she chose to. They have enough information to form a strong suspicion. What they do with that suspicion will shape how they carry her into Act II.
- The Changeling has been useful at every turn. His intelligence has been accurate. His timing has been convenient. He has never been wrong about anything in a way that cost him anything. The party has every reason to trust him and one quiet, unresolved reason not to.
- The Mezzoloth and the Hezrou are the next major targets. The party chooses the order.
- Somewhere in the garrison, if anyone looked carefully, there is a symbol and two words that do not fit the pattern of anything else: Project Provenance.

Character Advancement

None.

Downtime (Optional)

Before Act II begins in earnest, the party has time to establish roots in the new base:

- Train with Henrik (resistance members gain basic combat capability; party members can use downtime for skill training)
- Work with Lyra to update the operational map with anything learned during the garrison raid
- Observe the Kenku, or attempt engagement if the party chooses
- Research the outer circle targets through resistance contacts (DC 13 History or Investigation per lieutenant; reveals public role, known location, and one tactical vulnerability)
- Establish a sending stone network between the base and two safe houses in the city

Future Hooks

- Mira trusts the party operationally. Most of the resistance does not. Several named members still view them as effective outsiders. That skepticism should remain audible in NPC dialogue through at least the first two chapters of Act II.
- The remaining outer circle: the Mezzoloth, and the Hezrou are each running part of the regime's operational machinery that survived the Imp's fall. Dismantling them will weaken the Goristro's grip on Orenthis
- The Kenku's broadcast: the party may never be certain whether she chose it. But the DM is certain.
- The Changeling's network: he mentioned others inside the regime who are waiting; who are they and what do they want
- The Merregon contracts: 40 bound devils across 6 garrisons; the Rakshasa and the Nine Justiciars are both connected to this thread; it can be pursued whenever the party is ready
- Project Provenance: seven prisoners marked with an unrecognized symbol and two words, no destination, no classification; it does not fit the pattern of anything else in the garrison documents; it is not ready to pull yet

Lead-in to the Next Chapter

Read or paraphrase the following:

That evening, Mira pins Bowman's document to the center of Lyra's map. Around it she places what they know: two names, two offices, two pieces of the machinery that fill the detention wagons and feed the garrisons.

"The Mezzoloth holds the Council. The Hezrou runs investigations for loyalty purges."

She looks at the map.

"Neither of them are invincible. Both of them are our targets"

Considerations

If the base was lost in Scene 3:

Act II begins with the resistance mobile rather than established. Mira adapts. The community is smaller and more hardened. The outer circle framing still lands; it just hits a party that is building from a deficit rather than a foundation.

If the party wants to pursue Project Provenance immediately:

Mira does not know what it is. Nobody does yet. She flags it as something to keep watching and moves on. The party can research it on their own time (DC 18 History or Investigation; no useful result yet; the trail is cold by design).

If the Changeling's comments about the broadcast landed:

Some parties will arrive at Act II with the Changeling in their peripheral suspicion rather than the Kenku. That is also a correct read of the available evidence. Both threads are live. Neither is resolved yet.

If the party confronts the Changeling about the broadcast:

He did not know about it. His surprise is genuine and his concern seems real. DC 18 Insight to detect that he is filing this information away very carefully. He will ask two or three follow-up questions about the collar mechanics before he leaves, framed as concern.

If the party wants to know who Bowman really is:

They do not have enough yet. They will. Act II will give it to them in pieces, one chapter at a time, until the shape becomes clear before Chapter 12. Let the question live.

If the party distrusts the Kenku (or interrogated her):

Do not resolve this before Act II begins. She is still at the base, or she has been asked to leave, or she is being held (whatever the party chose). The question of what she did and why is not answered in Act I. It is carried forward.

- If the party interrogated her and the fifth fragment surfaced ("I made a choice"), they enter Act II knowing something they cannot unknow. That knowledge will color every subsequent encounter with her, and with the concept of justified cruelty more broadly. Do not soften it. Do not confirm it

narratively. Let it sit in the party's inventory alongside their weapons and their guilt.

- If the party interrogated her and the fragment did not surface, the party enters Act II having tortured someone who may have been innocent of the specific act they suspected. That is also a thing they carry. Handle it the same way: present, unresolved, real.

If the party deviates from what has been written here:

Do not force the structure back into place. Instead, go with it but always preserve these three tenets:

- The regime reacts
- The resistance adapts
- The party's choices create consequences

Every aspect of this story evolves from there.

Act II The Reckoning



"We take back our kingdom, one corrupt official at a time."

Act II is the heart of the campaign. The party systematically dismantles the Goristro's power structure, targeting the remaining outer circle lieutenants followed by the middle circle lieutenants in an order that reflects their own strategy and priorities. As the resistance grows stronger, the regime grows more desperate. The Changeling positions himself as an increasingly indispensable ally. He is not.

Tactical Flexibility

As the party moves through Act II, they will learn that there are alternatives to combat. Some lieutenants can be bribed, intimidated, or convinced to defect.

While the Fomorian, the Nycaloth and the Hierophant function as the harder wall between the outer circle and the Nine Justiciars, they should feel like natural escalations rather than a separate tier.

Tone

Act II should feel like momentum building. Early chapters feel like guerrilla warfare: small victories against overwhelming odds, each one harder won than the last. By mid-act, the resistance is a genuine force. By late act, the regime is fracturing and the party are heroes of the people.

The climax of Act II, freeing the Nine Justiciars and restoring legal legitimacy to Orenthis, should feel like a triumph. The party has won. The courts are reclaimed. Hope is returning to Orenthis.

And then the Changeling makes his move...

Objectives

- Weaken the Goristro's regime by defeating or turning key lieutenants
- Expose the regime's lies and win popular support
- Build the resistance into a genuine popular movement
- Break Merregon contracts to collapse enforcement
- Restore the Nine Justiciars and reclaim legal legitimacy

Key Events

- Defeating or turning the Outer Circle (Imp, Mezzoloth, Hezrou)
- Breaking the Merregon contracts
- Stopping the misinformation flow (Fomorian)
- Neutralizing the military threat (Nycaloth)
- Reclaiming the faith (Hierophant)
- Freeing the Nine Justiciars (Act II finale)
- The Changeling's betrayal gambit

The Changeling's Shadow

Throughout Act II, Bowman is a recurring presence. He appears self-serving but generally helpful, which produces an arrangement of convenience:

- Provides useful intelligence; accurate, but curated to serve his agenda
- Positions himself as a potential ally against the Goristro
- Subtly steers the party toward targets that eliminate his rivals
- Plants seeds of trust that make his eventual betrayal genuinely land

No one can prove treachery until Act III. That is by design. The party may suspect him. They cannot catch him. Let that tension accumulate.

The Kenku's Shadow

Running parallel and quieter is the Kenku question. She is still present and she is still watching. Act II does not resolve her. It develops her.

Throughout Act II she produces fragments. Some are useful. Some are not. The useful ones arrive at moments that benefit her positioning, not the party's operational needs. A party paying attention will notice the pattern. A party that has decided to trust her will find reasons to explain it away.

She will not warn them about the Changeling. She has the Rakshasa's words about him. She has surfaced those words once already. She will not repeat them. She does not need the party to act on that warning. In fact, she needs them uncertain. NPCs may warn about her. Mira does not trust her and will say so plainly if asked directly.

Tam watches her the way he watches new arrivals to any room he has been in for a while, not with hostility but with professional attention.

Sister Kara treats her injuries and does not offer opinions about her character.

Henrik, if asked, says: *"In the garrison, compliance and cooperation looked exactly the same from the outside."*

Yet none of this is proof.

Regime Lieutenants

- The Mezzoloth
- The Hezrou
- The Fomorian
- The Nycaloth
- The Yagnoloth
- The Hierophant
- The Nine Justiciars

Party Growth

Act II covers Levels 4 through 12. By the end of Act II, the party should:

- Be celebrated heroes of the resistance
- Have dismantled the outer circle, and most of the regime's operational infrastructure (middle circle)
- Control key institutions (courts, and potentially military)
- Have won genuine popular support across Orenthis
- Feel confident they can win
- Have some degree of cautious trust in the Changeling. Enough that his betrayal gambit costs something real
- Have formed a position on the Kenku (trust, suspicion, or something more complicated) and carried the consequences of that position through the act
- Be standing on the threshold of something larger and darker, with at least two unresolved questions they have been carrying since Act I

Chapter 5 Breaking the Chains



*"There is no law left in this building, only paper...
And paper burns."*

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 5 is the first Act II mission and the only chapter in the act designed primarily around infiltration and puzzle-solving rather than direct confrontation. The target is the Contract Halls inside the city of Oren: the administrative nerve center of the Merregon binding system. Within its vaults are the original documents that gave the Rakshasa authority over every bound devil in the region. Copying, voiding, or misdirecting those contracts would begin unraveling enforcement across Orenthis without firing a single bolt.

The Contract Halls are not a dungeon. They are a bureaucratic fortress: vaulted ceilings, catalogued corridors, locked reading rooms, and a registry architecture designed by the Archmage himself to be functionally impenetrable to anyone who does not know how it is organized. The party must learn the organization to navigate it. That is the puzzle.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Scene 1: The Brief

The resistance identifies the Contract Halls as a target and presents what they know. The party plans the approach. Scene 1 should feel methodical and energizing, with planning carrying real mechanical weight before the operation begins.

Scene 2: Getting Inside

The party executes their chosen approach to entering the Halls. Multiple entry points, multiple methods. Scene 2 should feel tense and deliberate, as early decisions lock in the operating parameters for what follows.

Scene 3: The Registry

Navigating the Halls' interior and solving the organizational puzzle of the Merregon contract registry. Scene 3 should feel cerebral and quietly threatening, with the architecture itself as the primary obstacle.

Scene 4: The Vault

Locating and extracting the target documents from the Halls' central repository.

Scene 4 should feel like the operation's climax, a combination of precision, pressure, and the consequence of every decision made before this moment.

Scene 5: Out the Way You Came

Exiting the Halls, with or without complications, and returning to the resistance with what was taken.

Scene 5 should feel like controlled release of built tension, earned escape rather than lucky flight.

RUNNING THE CHAPTER

Designed for: 4th-level characters

Sessions: 2-3

Advancement: Reach 5th level at end

This chapter establishes Act II's tone of purposeful, strategic resistance by putting the party inside a regime institution that is not defended by soldiers but by complexity. The primary goals are:

- Demonstrate that the regime's power has structural weaknesses that can be exploited without combat
- Introduce the Merregon contract system as a puzzle, not just a background fact
- Give players who favor stealth, investigation, and social play a chapter built around their strengths
- Establish the Contract Halls as a location that will matter again (Epilogue)
- Provide the Mezzoloth's personal contract as a narrative lever
- Weaken Merregon coordination as a tangible, lasting mechanical consequence

Guidance

The Puzzle Is the Point

The registry is deliberately not obvious. Parties that want to simply grab documents and run will find that the wrong documents accomplish nothing. The system must be understood before it can be exploited. Reward players who ask questions, test assumptions, and think before acting.

Stealth Does Not Mean Silence

The Halls are staffed by clerks, archivists, and a small number of embedded Merregon administrative units whose contracts designate them to guard the registry specifically.

Avoiding combat does not mean avoiding all contact. Some clerks can be deceived. Some archivists can be persuaded. Some can even be quietly recruited.

Alarm Is Not Failure

If the alarm is raised, the mission does not end. It changes. The party shifts from systematic extraction to triage: prioritize the highest-value documents, find an alternate exit, and get out before the Merregon response force arrives. A messy extraction is still a victory.

Leverage What Was Learned

The party enters Chapter 5 with intelligence from Act I: the Merregon contract system, the Imp's organizational documents, and whatever Bowman has provided. All of this is useful. Let players apply it. Reward preparation.

SCENE 1:

THE BRIEF

This scene occurs shortly after the party's debriefing at the end of Chapter 4. Mira convenes a strategy session. Lyra's operational map is on the table and a new marker has been added at the center of Oren's civic district: a small circle labeled simply CH.

Read or paraphrase the following:

Mira points to the mark without ceremony.

"The Contract Halls. Every Merregon in Orenthis, bound by contract, and every one of those contracts traces back to a document in that building. The Imp's contracts were a branch. The trunk is there."

She traces the streets around it.

"It is not a garrison. It's a civic building. A four-story structure where the walls themselves are built from compressed infernal documents. Every Merregon in Orenthis is bound by a contract traced back to this building. It is not a fortress, but a bureaucratic landmark where the architecture is as rigid as the law it enforces. The regime doesn't think of it as a military target because they don't think anyone can hurt them through paperwork. That's our opening."

Lyra pulls a second sheet from beneath the map. "Tam found someone who knows the building. He did a job there, before he understood what it was."

A name is written at the top: Fenwick.

"He can tell us how it's organized. He cannot go back in. But he can tell you everything you need to know before you do."

Features of the Area

The Map

Lyra's map shows the Halls' general position in Oren's civic district. Key external features:

- Three public entrances: the main civic facade (heavily staffed), the records annex (moderate traffic), the loading dock at the rear (low traffic, goods only)
- Two known exterior maintenance access points (unmapped by the resistance; Fenwick knows one)
- Adjacent buildings: a civic licensing office to the east, a judiciary archive to the west

The Briefing

Fenwick is guarded but cooperative. He worked as a registry clerk for eleven years before the regime reclassified his position and reassigned him to work he will not describe. He is not afraid of the party. He is afraid of the building.

He can provide the following if asked:

- **The registry organization**
The Halls use a four-tier classification system. Merregon contracts are Tier 1 (highest classification). They are held in the Primary Vault on the third floor. Access requires a Tier 1 key and a corresponding authorization ledger entry.
- **The authorization ledger**
Updated weekly by the Senior Archivist, a half-elf named Corvus, who has worked there since before the regime. He is not loyal to the Goristro. He is loyal to the system. He will not help willingly, but he can be convinced, deceived, or bypassed.
- **The registry language**
Contracts are indexed by demonic sigil, not by name. To find a specific contract, you need to know the sigil or the name-to-sigil conversion table, held in Corvus's personal office.
- **Staff composition**
During operating hours, 12-15 clerks; 3-4 Merregon administrative units (non-combat designation; AC 16, HP 45, but instructed to detain, not destroy); 1 Senior Archivist; 1 Duty Overseer (a Merregon of higher authority; treat as standard Merregon).
- **After hours**
2 Merregon patrol units, 1 Duty Overseer, and one clerk on rotation for overnight records requests (rare but possible).

Fenwick does not know:

- The current Tier 1 key location (it rotates weekly)
- Whether the Archmage has installed additional defenses since his departure
- The current schedule for Merregon contract renewal reviews (which would bring additional Merregon units to the Halls)

The Encounter

No encounter in this scene. It is a briefing. Let the party drive the conversation. Fenwick answers what he knows and flags clearly what he does not.

Mira asks two questions of her own:

- *"Can we do this without anyone getting killed?"*
- *"What happens if we get the wrong documents?"*

Neither has a clean answer. Let the party sit with both.

What the Party Can Do

Ask Smart Questions

Parties that push Fenwick on the specifics of the sigil index, the key rotation schedule, or Corvus's office location gain mechanical advantages in Scene 3. Note these as narrative assets going into the mission.

Propose an Approach

Let the party commit to a primary entry method before the scene ends. This commits their planning advantages going forward. Three viable approaches:

- **After Hours**
Enter at night via the loading dock or a maintenance access point. Fewer staff, no clerks, two Merregon patrols. High stealth ceiling, but the vault lights are off and navigation by feel or light source risks visibility.
- **During Hours with Cover**
Enter as credentialed visitors using forged documents. Clerks are present and potentially useful. The Merregon administrative units are active. The vault is lit and accessible to authorized personnel. High social ceiling, higher exposure.
- **Through the Judiciary Archive**
Enter via the adjacent archive, find the maintenance tunnel Fenwick knows about, and access the Halls' second floor directly. Bypasses all exterior security but the tunnel is not mapped and requires a skill challenge to navigate.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

Fenwick volunteers that Corvus has a predictable schedule: he takes lunch at noon in the records annex courtyard, leaving his office unsupervised for thirty minutes. This creates a clean window for the name-to-sigil table.

Making it Harder

Mira receives intelligence from Tam that a Merregon contract renewal review is scheduled in two days, which will bring six additional Merregon administrative units to the Halls for three days. The party has a two-day window or a five-day wait.

Increasing Role Play

Fenwick asks one question before the party leaves: *"If you find a record of the work order, take it. My name is on it and I would rather it not be there anymore."* He does not elaborate on why the regime would have filed it or how he knows it exists. He clearly does not want to be asked.

Treasure and Rewards

No direct rewards from this scene. The planning session itself is the reward: specific preparations translate into mechanical advantages in Scenes 2 and 3.

Development and Dial Impact

No dial changes from this scene.

SCENE 2:

GETTING INSIDE

The party executes their chosen entry. This scene is a skill challenge structured around the approach selected in Scene 1.

Read or paraphrase the following (based on chosen approach):

After Hours

The civic district empties differently from the residential streets. No families hurrying home. Just clerks pulling collars up against the evening air, the click of their shoes fading until even that is gone. The Halls sit dark except for the Merregon patrols visible through the ground-floor windows, moving in the same route they have walked every night for three years.

During Hours

The Halls' public entrance is everything the regime wants its institutions to look like: marble floors, high vaulted ceilings, banners in the Goristro's colors, and an air of absolute procedural authority. Two Merregon administrative units stand at the front desk. A young half-elf clerk is already asking for papers.

Through the Archive

The judiciary archive smells of old parchment and lamp oil. The archivist at the door barely looks up from her desk. She stamps your access card without reading it. Whatever you told her when you entered was enough. The real challenge is ahead: Fenwick's maintenance tunnel is somewhere behind the east stacks, and the archive is larger than it looked from outside.

Features of the Area

After Hours

- Exterior:
 - Loading dock door (DC 13 Thieves' Tools or DC 12 Athletics to open)
 - Two Merregon patrols pass every 8 minutes
- Maintenance access:
 - Locate the second access point that leads to the building's sub-basement (DC 14 Investigation)
- Interior patrols:
 - Two Merregon patrol units alternate routes (DC 14 Stealth to pass unseen, or with a DC 12 Perception to learn their pattern first, reduce to DC 11 Stealth)

During Hours

- Front desk:
 - Forged papers (DC 14 Deception) or A strong cover story and confident delivery (DC 12 Deception)
 - On failure, a Merregon administrative unit approaches within 1 round
- Clerk access:
 - Corvus is available during hours, get him to discuss the system (DC 15 Persuasion reduced to DC 12 Persuasion if the party has established a plausible pretext such as an authorized research visit or an internal audit claim)
- Merregon administrative units:
 - 3 present, but they are not looking for a fight, they are looking for procedural violations (treat their presence as passive pressure rather than active threat)

Through the Archive

- Tunnel location:
 - Find Fenwick's tunnel entrance behind the east stacks (DC 14 Investigation)
- Tunnel navigation:
 - Pre-defined skill challenge (3 successes before 2 failures);
 - Get oriented in tunnels (Survival DC 12)
 - Maneuver through low clearance (Athletics DC 11)
 - Listen for movement above (Perception DC 13)
- Tunnel exit: Emerges in a supply closet on the Halls' second floor, adjacent to the records anteroom

The Encounter

No combat in this scene under normal circumstances. If the party triggers an alarm:

- Daytime alarm: Merregon administrative units move to contain; one runs the standard Deviation Protocol; 6 minutes before a response force of 2 Merregon patrol units arrives from the district garrison
- Nighttime alarm: Both patrol units respond immediately; 4 minutes before the district garrison receives notification; if the party can neutralize both patrol units before the notification threshold, the alarm may not propagate

What the Party Can Do

Exploit Any Prepared Advantages

If the party researched patrol timing, they gain advantage on Stealth checks for the first round of interior movement. If they have forged authorization papers, Deception DCs drop by 2. Let prior preparation pay off.

Adapt to the Unexpected

One element of the approach does not go as planned. The maintenance tunnel has a partial collapse (Athletics DC 14 or 3 minutes to clear). The overnight clerk is not a stranger but a former neighbor of one party member. Corvus's lunch break is cut short today. Introduce exactly one complication; the party solves it or works around it.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

Fenwick provided a specific patrol timing that is still accurate. The party can move freely for a 4-minute window immediately after entry.

Making it Harder

A Merregon contract renewal reviewer has arrived a day early and is processing documents in the anteroom adjacent to the vault stairs, meaning the second floor has an unexpected Merregon presence that cannot be avoided without detour.

Increasing Role Play

The overnight clerk (if present) is visibly exhausted and deeply unhappy. DC 12 Insight reveals he has been crying recently. He is not a threat. He is a person trapped in a system he cannot leave. The party can speak to him, avoid him, or recruit him. What they choose says something.

Treasure and Rewards

No treasure in this scene. Successful entry is the reward.

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Clean entry (no alarms, no witnesses)	0	0	0
Entry with complications but resolved cleanly	0	0	0
Alarm triggered but contained locally	0	+1	0
Alarm triggered and propagated to city garrison	0	+2	0

SCENE 3:

THE REGISTRY

The party is inside the Halls. They must now navigate the registry system to locate the Tier 1 contract vault and identify which documents are worth taking.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The interior of the Halls is obviously the work of someone who organized obsessively and without mercy. Floor-to-ceiling shelving in every corridor. Ladders on brass rails. Cards in slotted holders on every cabinet.

Numbers, letters, and sigils in combinations that are obviously a system without being obviously what system.

*There are no labels in plain language.
There are no directories on the walls.*

Whatever this building tells you, it tells you in terms it believes you should already understand.

Features of the Area

Combustible Environment

The walls and ceilings are made of compressed paper. Any area of effect spell that deals fire damage has a 50 percent chance of igniting the documents in a 10 foot radius. Ignited documents deal 1d6 fire damage to any creature starting its turn in the area. If a fire persists for 3 rounds, that section of the building becomes unstable, creating difficult terrain and alerting all Merregons in the building.

The Registry Architecture

The Halls use a classification system built on four elements in sequence: Tier (1-4), Sigil Prefix (demonic designation), Temporal Code (year of execution), and Binding Reference (the contracting authority's seal designation).

A full contract index entry looks like this:
1 / ∞×17 / AY3 / RSK-7

Without knowing what any of these components mean, the vault cannot be accessed and the documents cannot be identified even if found.

The party can decode the system through:

Method 1: Corvus's Office

The name-to-sigil conversion table is in Corvus's personal office on the second floor. During hours, the office is occupied. After hours or during his lunch window, it is unoccupied. The table decodes the Sigil Prefix component. DC 13 Investigation to locate it in the office; DC 10 if Fenwick told the party where to look.

Method 2: The Index Cards

A DC 15 Investigation check over 10 minutes reveals the pattern in the card indexing system. On a success, the party learns the Temporal Code structure and the Binding Reference designation for RSK (the Rakshasa) vs other contracting authorities. This does not require Corvus's table but takes time.

Method 3: Force the Vault

Without decoding the system, the party can attempt to force the vault (DC 19 Thieves' Tools; the door itself is AC 19, HP 60, and constructed to resist magic: spells of 3rd level or lower have no effect). Inside are all Tier 1 documents. Without the sigil table, they cannot distinguish Mezzoloth contracts from Merregon contracts from the Rakshasa's own authority documents. They can take everything, but that is heavy, time-consuming (15 minutes to locate and extract), and significantly increases alarm risk.

Method 4: The Overnight Clerk (After Hours Only)

If the party is operating after hours and chose to interact with the clerk in Scene 2, a DC 13 Persuasion check (DC 10 if they treated him with genuine kindness) gets him to walk them through the basics. He does not know everything. He knows enough.

The Encounter

The Registry Puzzle

Run the registry navigation as a structured exploration rather than a skill challenge. Ask the party what they are doing, not what they are rolling. Rolls emerge from specific actions.

- Moving through the halls without triggering patrols: Stealth DC 12 per floor traversed
- Locating Corvus's office: DC 11 Investigation (the office is labeled; the challenge is reaching it)
- Decoding the index cards: DC 15

Investigation (10 minutes)

- Understanding a contract once found: DC 13 Arcana or History (the language is Infernal laced with legal notation)
- Identifying the Mezzoloth's personal contract among the Merregon binding contracts: DC 14 Investigation once the party has the sigil table

What the Party Can Do

Decode Systematically

The methodical approach takes more time but produces complete information. The party knows exactly what they are taking and why. Grant advantage on the Scene 4 vault extraction checks.

Grab and Go

If the party takes documents without fully decoding them, they escape with a mixed haul. The DM determines afterward (based on what the party actually did) how much is useful. At minimum, they extract 1d6 meaningful contract voiding forms. They may also extract meaningless administrative records.

Find Fenwick's File

If Fenwick asked the party to retrieve the work order and they remember, it is findable with a DC 13 Investigation check once they know the classification system. It is filed in the Tier 3 contractor records annex under his name and the intermediary's seal. It documents the specific section he rekeyed, the date, and the contracting party. The contracting party is not the regime directly. It is a private merchant house the party may recognize from other regime-adjacent documents. Fenwick did not know. The file makes clear that someone did.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

The overnight clerk, if engaged in Scene 2, has already written down the sigil prefix for Merregon contracts on a scrap of paper and left it for the party without explaining why. He does not acknowledge it when addressed.

Making it Harder

A second Merregon administrative unit has been logged as patrolling the second floor this evening for reasons the contract records do not explain. This was not in Fenwick's intelligence. It has to be worked around.

Increasing Role Play

Corvus's office contains, alongside the conversion table, a private journal. It is not hidden. He did not think anyone would be inside his office uninvited. The journal documents twelve months of small bureaucratic refusals: contracts he delayed, records he misfiled, a single authorization he denied on technical grounds that may have saved one person from detention. He is not a resistance member. He is a person trying to stay human inside a system that was built to make that harder every month. The party can take the journal, leave it, or read enough to understand who Corvus is before they decide whether to approach him.

Treasure and Rewards

From the Registry

- Name-to-sigil conversion table (permanent; allows the party to decode any Merregon contract they encounter in future chapters)
- Fenwick's personnel file (narrative-only; contains evidence of what the regime tasked him to do; useful as testimony)
- Any administrative intelligence about patrol rotation schedules or garrison supply requests the party notices while navigating (advantage on one future planning scene at DM's discretion)

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Systematic decoding	0	0	-1
Forced vault entry	0	+1	0

SCENE 4:

THE VAULT

The Tier 1 vault is on the third floor. The party must access it, locate the target documents, and extract what they came for before time or circumstance forces their hand.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The vault door is not impressive in the way a dragon's hoard is impressive. It is impressive in the way a locked door in a very quiet building is impressive: it tells you that the people who put it here believed no one would ever reach it by any means they had not already thought of.

The lock is Infernal-threaded, the hinges inward-facing, and the threshold carries an inscription in cramped legal notation that, if you can read it, essentially says:

The authority to access this space is not granted, it is recognized, and recognition requires proof.

Features of the Area

The Vault Door

- **Lock:**
DC 17 Thieves' Tools to pick (DC 14 with the conversion table in hand, as the tool language maps to the lock's notation system)
- **Authorization:**
A Tier 1 key and ledger entry (Corvus has the key on his person during hours; it is locked in his desk drawer after hours, DC 13 Thieves' Tools to open the drawer)
- **Magical ward:**
A glyph of warding triggers on any unauthorized entry; spell save DC 15; on a failed save, a creature is Restrained until the start of its next turn. The glyph can be detected with DC 15 Arcana and disarmed with DC 17 Thieves' Tools.
- **Time:**
Each minute spent inside the vault without the key increases the alarm clock by one step. Establish a clear countdown before the party enters.

Inside the Vault

- **Merregon binding contracts:**
Individual contracts, indexed by garrison designation and binding reference. Voiding them later will weaken that garrison
- **Mezzoloth personal contract:**
One document, filed under Sigil Prefix 5 / #x22 / PW9 / YEQ-4
It contains the Goristro's binding agreement with the Mezzoloth specifically, including the clause that granted him the Speakership.
It also contains a termination clause the Mezzoloth is apparently unaware of: the Goristro can dissolve the Speakership at will, and has simply chosen not to.
- **Voiding forms:**
Blank contract voiding forms, pre-authorized, requiring only a contracting authority's seal to execute. There are seven in the vault.
- **The Rakshasa's ledger:**
A secondary document listing Merregon deployment assignments, quota targets, and garrison command chains.
Not a contract, but provides operational intelligence and weakens Grip

The Encounter

The party cannot take everything. Establish a time pressure (Merregon patrol cycle, the alarm clock from vault entry, or the clerk's return) and let the party prioritize.

Priority targets, ranked:

- Mezzoloth personal contract (direct lever for Chapter 6)
- Voiding forms (the party can grab a stack of 1d6 forms)
- Rakshasa's ledger (useful for Chapters 7-12 planning)
- Specific Merregon contracts (the party can pull 4-6 contracts)

A voiding form is useless without a credible authority seal to execute it. The party almost certainly does not have one.

They can:

- Steal Corvus's personal seal from his desk (DC 13 Thieves' Tools; his seal has low authority but enough to trigger confusion and legal challenge)
- Forge a Rakshasa seal (DC 17 Deception; requires materials; if successful, the form

would not be executed, but can be used for future deception advantage

- Settle for the blank forms and find an authoritative seal later. The Speaker's seal will be available after the Council operation. The right moment is coming

What the Party Can Do

Prioritize and Extract

Every item taken is a choice about what matters. The Mezzoloth contract is the highest immediate value. The voiding forms are the highest long-term value. The Rakshasa's ledger is the highest intelligence value. The party cannot carry all of it without consequences.

Use What They Decoded

Parties that decoded the system in Scene 3 navigate the vault in half the time. Parties that forced the vault are working blind and take twice as long to locate anything specific.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

The glyph has degraded (it fires on only a 1-4 on a d20 rather than on any unauthorized entry) because the Archmage's ward was last renewed six months ago and he has not been back since. Corvus noticed but did not report it.

Making it Harder

The Mezzoloth's contract has been moved to a secondary locked case inside the vault (DC 15 Investigation to locate, DC 14 Thieves' Tools to open) because it was recently reviewed. Someone higher up the chain pulled it for review two weeks ago and re-filed it here. The review notes are attached. The Goristro checked the termination clause. Deliberately. If the party later asks the Yagnoloth why the Goristro hadn't exercised the termination clause of the Mezzoloth's contract, the response is that the Goristro keeps the Mezzoloth in place because a visible, toothless Council legitimizes his rule. A dissolved Speakership would require either direct participation (which requires effort the Goristro does not want to expend) or replacing the Mezzoloth with someone who might actually matter. The Mezzoloth's uselessness was his protection.

Increasing Role Play

If the party reads the termination clause in the Mezzoloth's contract inside the vault, give them a moment. The clause is clinical and total:

the Speakership dissolves at the Goristro's word, with or without cause, with or without notice. The Mezzoloth has been performing institutional authority for years in a building where the paperwork already says he serves at pleasure and has no standing. He does not know. That is worth sitting with.

Treasure and Rewards

From the Vault

- Mezzoloth personal contract (leverage for Chapter 6; the termination clause can be revealed to the Mezzoloth as Institutional Withdrawal acceleration)
- 1d6 voiding forms (each one, when sealed and executed, voids contracts in a designated garrison)
- Rakshasa's operational ledger (advantage on Intelligence checks for any chapter targeting the Hezrou or the Nycaloth)
- Specific Merregon binding contracts (each garrison-specific contract taken provides the option to void that garrison individually in a future scene)

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Mezzoloth contract extracted	0	0	-1
Rakshasa's ledger extracted	0	0	-1
Vault alarm triggered before extraction complete	0	+2	0

SCENE 5: OUT THE WAY YOU CAME

The party exits. What this looks like depends entirely on what Scene 4 cost them.

Read or paraphrase the following

If no alarms were raised:

The night air outside the Halls is the same as when you entered it. Same patrols, same quiet streets, same regime banners limp in the dark.

The building behind you holds nothing it cannot replace. But you are carrying something it cannot replace, and the distance between you and that building is growing with every step.

If alarm(s) were raised:

The building is lit now. Every window. The Merregon patrol signal carried faster than you expected and somewhere behind you a horn is calling the district garrison to attention.

You have what you came for, or most of it. The streets between you and safety have not changed. But the people in them have.

Features of the Area

Exit Routes

The exit mirrors the entry, but with two additional options that become available depending on the party's actions inside:

- Clerk's exit (if the overnight clerk was treated with genuine kindness):
He leaves a service door unlatched on his rounds. No check required. The door is unremarkable enough that Merregon patrols pass it without stopping.
- Corvus's private exit (if the party found his journal and chose to leave it with a note):
He is present in his office late, as he often is. He sees them leave. He does not stop them. He does not follow them. He closes his office door.

The Encounter

If no alarm was raised, there is no encounter. The exit is a skill challenge only if the party triggered a patrol in Scene 4.

If the alarm was raised, 1d4+1 Merregon patrol units converge on the Halls. The party has 3 rounds before the first unit reaches visual range of their position.

Skill challenge (4 successes before 3 failures)
Navigation, Stealth, Deception, Athletics, and social pressure against a pursuing force.

What the Party Can Do

Misdirect the Pursuit

If the party has forged documents or a credible cover story, DC 14 Deception can redirect one Merregon patrol unit per success. Each redirected unit removes one tracker from the converging force and costs one round.

Split and Reconvene

Splitting the party distributes the risk but also distributes the documents. Establish which party member carries which documents before splitting. A captured party member means captured documents.

Use the City

Oren at night is not empty. Curfew is in effect, which means anyone moving has a reason. The party can use that: a staged brawl in a side street, a civilian who happens to get in the way of a patrol, a fire in a waste bin that draws a Merregon unit's attention. The city is a tool if the party thinks to use it.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

The resistance pre-positioned a wagon two blocks from the Halls' loading dock, driven by Tam. If the party reaches the wagon before the 3-round window expires, the exit is clean.

Making it Harder

A Merregon administrative unit encountered in Scene 3 filed a routine anomaly report before the alarm was raised. The district patrol is already on elevated alert and there are 2 additional Merregon units in the streets. The converging force is larger and faster.

Increasing Role Play

If the work order was found and taken, Fenwick is waiting at the resistance safe house when the party returns. He does not ask if they found it. He looks at their faces and then looks at their hands.

He says: *"You found it."* Then, after a moment: *"Was there a merchant seal on it?"*

Whatever the answer is, he nods once and does not ask anything else.

Treasure and Rewards

No new treasure from this scene. What was taken from the vault is the reward.

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Clean exit (no alarm, no pursuit)	0	0	0
Alarm raised, but pursuit evaded	0	+1	0
Alarm raised and party identified during exit	0	+2	0

Once the party obtains an authority seal (either from Corvus during this chapter, or later on in a future chapter) they can use stolen voiding forms to disrupt regime garrisons. This will result in a +1 to Hope and a -1 to Grip per successfully disabled garrison.

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

What the Party Should Know

- The Merregon contract system is more fragile than the regime presents it. The right documents, the right seal, and any garrison collapses without a fight.
- The Mezzoloth's Speakership is legally conditional. The Goristro has the authority to dissolve it at will. The Mezzoloth does not know this. The termination clause is a weapon.
- Corvus exists. He is not a resistance member. He is a person making small choices in a bad system. The party may have created a relationship with him. They may have burned the bridge. What they did matters.
- The Rakshasa's operational ledger weakens the regime's ability to coordinate. The Grip is already fraying.
- The Contract Halls will appear again. In Chapter 18, the restored courts will need these documents as legal foundation. What the party chose to take and what they left behind will determine the scope of what is recoverable.

Character Advancement

5th level reached.

Downtime (Optional)

- Execute void forms with a secured seal (collapses designated Merregon garrisons; each execution is a separate downtime action requiring a sealed authority document)
- Approach Corvus through a third party (DC 15 Persuasion; if successful, Corvus becomes a passive resistance contact, able to misdirect contract audits for up to two chapters)
- Analyze the Rakshasa's ledger (DC 14 History or Investigation; reveals one operational detail about the Hezrou or Nycaloth's deployment chains)
- Study the Mezzoloth's contract (DC 12 Arcana; confirms the termination clause, reveals the Goristro's most recent review date, notes any modifications)

Future Hooks

- The termination clause in the Mezzoloth's contract: The Goristro reviewed it recently. He has not yet used it. Why not?

- Corvus's journal: Twelve months of small refusals. If the party read it and left a note, they have created a relationship that can go somewhere. If they took the journal, they have evidence of a regime employee's quiet defiance. If they ignored it, they have left something behind in that building that is still there.
- Fenwick's file: What was he reassigned to do? The file contains evidence of something the party does not yet have words for. It is connected to Project Provenance.
- The void forms not yet executed: blank forms. Each one is a potential future garrison collapse. They will not all get used in Chapter 5. The rest accumulate as strategic assets.

Lead-in to the Next Chapter

Mira adds the Mezzoloth's contract to the center of Lyra's map. She pins it directly over the Council district marker.

Read or paraphrase the following:

"He's been holding a title the Goristro can take back any time he wants to. He doesn't know that. But we do."

She looks at the contract for a moment. Then at you.

"The Council Halls. The Mezzoloth's seat. His whole performance of authority, and we're holding the paperwork that says it was never really his."

She does not smile. But something in her voice is close to satisfaction.

"Let's go remind him of that."

Chapter 6 The Speaker's Fall



"The office was built to hold the law. What sits in it now is afraid of the dark."

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 6 takes the party into the Council district of Oren for a direct confrontation with the Mezzoloth, Speaker of the Council. This is not a clean kill. The Mezzoloth is not a fighter. He is a bureaucrat armed with institutional authority he has never tested, survival instincts sharper than most creatures twice his CR, and one very useful habit: he will always take a deal if the alternative is death. The chapter is structured in three movements. The approach through the Council district, which has its own political texture and social obstacles. The penetration of the Council Halls proper, which are defended differently from the Contract Halls. And the confrontation itself: a combat encounter that is designed to resolve through the Mezzoloth's Institutional Withdrawal before it reaches its conclusion, unless the party pushes past that opening into a full fight. The Mezzoloth is the boss. But the chapter's real confrontation is with an institution: a

building full of clerks, council members, and bureaucratic functionaries who have spent three years performing governance for a government that does not care about governance. The party walks through all of that on the way to the man at the top.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Scene 1: The Council District

Approach and reconnaissance through the civic district surrounding the Council Halls. Scene 1 should feel politically textured, as the district has a different social atmosphere from the rest of Oren, and that difference is both opportunity and obstacle.

Scene 2: Into the Halls

Entry into the Council Halls proper, past the building's social and institutional defenses. Scene 2 should feel like controlled pressure, since the Halls are not locked down, but every wrong move here has consequences that echo in Scene 3.

Scene 3: The Chamber

The confrontation with the Mezzoloth in the Council Chamber itself.

Scene 3 should feel volatile and high-stakes, with the Mezzoloth's survival calculation running visibly against the party's pressure.

Scene 4: The Aftermath

Dealing with the consequences of the confrontation and extracting from the Council district.

Scene 4 should feel like exhale: the hardest part is done, but Oren is not finished reacting.

The Chamber Has Witnesses

The Council Chambers are not empty. Even under the regime, sessions are observed by functionary members who attend because not attending is itself a risk. A fight in the chamber has an audience. That audience has consequences, for the regime and for the resistance, depending on how the fight goes and what the Mezzoloth says before it ends.

The Mezzoloth's Contract

If the party brought the contract from Chapter 5 and revealed the termination clause to the Mezzoloth before the fight, Institutional Withdrawal triggers one threshold earlier. The knowledge that his authority was always conditional removes one layer of the performance he has been maintaining for three years.

RUNNING THE CHAPTER

Designed for: 5th-level characters

Sessions: 2-3

Advancement: Reach 6th level at end

This chapter is the first Act II combat boss chapter. The primary goals are:

- Deliver the Act II's first major NPC defeat or defection
- Demonstrate that institutional authority collapses under direct pressure
- Establish the Mezzoloth's Institutional Withdrawal as the preferred resolution path, without making combat feel unnecessary or punished
- Give the resistance a visible political victory in the heart of Oren
- Weaken the Council's capacity to legitimize regime actions

Guidance

The Mezzoloth Is Not Looking to Die

He is trying to survive. His tactical behavior reflects that at every stage. He summons backup the moment he feels threatened. He teleports the moment he cannot survive where he is standing. He offers a deal the moment the math no longer favors him. Calibrate his behavior to his survival calculation, not to dramatic pacing.

Let the Deal Land

When Institutional Withdrawal triggers, give it room. The Mezzoloth's offer is genuine and his testimony is useful. A party that takes the deal may gain more than they would have from killing him. Make sure that trade-off is visible.

SCENE 1:

THE COUNCIL DISTRICT

The civic district surrounding the Council Halls operates under different rules from the rest of Oren. It is the regime's public face: maintained, presentable, and crawling with a specific kind of functionary who is neither true believer nor resister but something more uncomfortable: a person who has chosen to keep the institutions running because they believe that institutions, even corrupted ones, are better than their absence.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The Council district is the only part of Oren where the banners look freshly pressed. The streets are swept. The buildings have not been requisitioned. The clerks moving between them walk with the specific posture of people who know exactly how small the margin is between their current situation and what happens to people who are no longer useful.

There are no Xvarts here. There are no Merregon patrols pulling families out of doorways. There are just people in administrative gray, moving quickly, looking at documents more than they look at faces.

Features of the Area

The District

- Elevated foot traffic during business hours (8 AM-6 PM)
- Two Merregon administrative units stationed at the Halls' main entrance (different from patrol units; they are honor guard in function, defense in fact)
- Council session days (alternating Tuesdays): 40+ additional functionaries moving through the district; easier to blend in, harder to move undetected

The Functionary's Canteen

Down the street from the Halls. Clerks eat lunch there. It is possible to overhear operational details about the Mezzoloth's schedule, the Council's current session agenda, or internal complaints about Council operations. DC 12 Perception to overhear useful conversation; DC 13 Insight to identify which speaker's complaints go beyond the permitted level of dissatisfaction.

The Session Roster

Posted outside the Halls on council days. Lists which council members are attending. A DC 12 Investigation check identifies any council member the party has prior contact with, or reveals that three seats are perpetually vacant (the members are being held pending "administrative review")

Broadcast Speaker

A crystal amplifier mounted on the northeast corner of the district broadcasts on the hour. Today's message includes a reminder that the Mezzoloth will be presiding over an open session this afternoon. The regime is using his presence to perform normalcy. This is a prime opportunity.

The Encounter

No formal encounter in this scene. The district is navigable without combat. However there are two complicating social elements:

- **The Functionary Who Recognizes Someone**
One district clerk looks at a party member for a moment too long. DC 14 Insight to catch it. If caught, the party must decide what to do with the recognition: address it, avoid it, or let it play out. The clerk has no loyalty to the regime. She also has no loyalty to strangers.
- **The Council Steward**
The Mezzoloth's personal administrative steward manages access to the Halls and his schedule. He is a gnome named Perris who has been doing this job since before the regime and will continue doing it after, because that is simply his profession. He can be approached directly. DC 14 Persuasion to arrange a meeting with the Speaker; DC 12 if the party has forged council credentials; DC 11 on an open session day (the Mezzoloth is required to be accessible to credentialed parties on session days by the very rules he enforces).

What the Party Can Do

Use the Open Session

On a council session day, the party can attend as credentialed observers (forged credentials, DC 13 Deception, or genuine contact with a resistance-aligned functionary). This gets them into the chamber legally, with the Mezzoloth in the room, before combat becomes necessary.

Approach Through Perris

A successful approach through Perris gets the party a private meeting with the Mezzoloth in an anteroom rather than the chamber. Lower witnesses, higher pressure, same confrontation.

Scout Before Entry

DC 12 Perception pass through the district identifies the Merregon honor guard's posting, the steward's schedule, and the Halls' secondary entrance (a service corridor on the west side, used for document delivery).

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

It is a council session day. The district is busier, the Mezzoloth is present by procedural requirement, and the functionaries are too distracted managing session logistics to scrutinize visitors carefully.

Making it Harder

A district security sweep is occurring in response to the Contract Halls operation. Two additional Merregon patrol units are moving through the civic district. They are not specifically looking for the party, but they are looking.

Increasing Role Play

Let the party see the Council from the outside before they enter it: a group of council functionaries arguing in low, urgent voices outside the canteen about a procedural challenge to a recent regime decree. The challenge is technically valid. No one expects it to succeed. They filed it anyway. The party is witnessing people trying to use the rules the rules were supposed to provide, inside a system that no longer honors them.

Treasure and Rewards

No treasure in this scene. Intelligence gathered here carries forward as operational advantages in Scene 2.

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Party uses the open session (legal, visible to witnesses)	0	0	0
Party approaches through Perris (private, less witnesses)	0	0	0
District security sweep (alarm raised)	0	+1	0

SCENE 2: INTO THE HALLS

The Council Halls are a grander version of the Contract Halls with a fundamentally different defense structure. Where the Contract Halls were defended by obscurity, these are defended by performance. Everything here is meant to look legitimate. The challenge is navigating institutional performance without triggering the machinery underneath it.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The entrance hall of the Council Halls is the regime's best work. Marble floors, restored portraits of past Speakers, banners in Orenthis's original civic colors rather than the Goristro's gold. If you did not know what this building does now, you could believe, for a moment, that you were somewhere that still belonged to the city.

The Merregon honor guard at the entrance does not move. It does not need to. It just stands there, which is its own kind of argument.

Features of the Area

The Council Halls Interior

- **Ground Floor**
Public reception, session registry, visitor credentials check, the steward's station
- **Second Floor**
Council member offices, committee rooms, the Mezzoloth's anteroom
- **Third Floor**
The Council Chamber (main session room, balcony gallery, and the Speaker's dais)

Security

- 2 Merregon honor guard (entrance; will challenge anyone without credentials; will not leave their post unless ordered)
- 1 Merregon administrative unit per floor (total: 3; will summon backup if challenged or if they observe a weapons drawn)
- Council steward Perris moves between the ground and second floor on a predictable 15-minute circuit
- The Mezzoloth's personal guard: 2 standard Merregons stationed outside the Chamber during session; they have specific orders to protect the Speaker

The Mezzoloth's Location

If the party is attending an open session: he is in the Chamber on the third floor, presiding. He cannot leave without triggering a procedural recess, which requires 10 minutes of administrative process.

If the party arranged a private meeting: he is in the anteroom on the second floor, with Perris nearby and one personal guard.

If the party is entering without authorization: he is wherever his current schedule places him; DC 14 Investigation or a successful check against Perris locates him precisely.

The Encounter

Entry itself is a social obstacle, not a combat encounter.

Credentialed Entry (open session or Perris's arrangement)

Proceed without checks. The party is where they are supposed to be.

Forged Credentials

DC 13 Deception against the entrance Merregon; DC 11 with quality forgeries from Chapter 5's resources. On a failure, the honor guard does not attack; it detains and summons the steward, who requests clarification. A second DC 15 Deception or DC 14 Persuasion check resolves the challenge.

Unauthorized Entry

Service corridor (DC 12 Thieves' Tools; opens to the ground floor supply room); steward's patrol creates a 4-minute window per floor where movement is unobserved.

What the Party Can Do

Use the Session Window

An open session constrains the Mezzoloth physically and procedurally. He cannot dismiss the session unilaterally. The party can use the session as the confrontation space, with witnesses present.

Move to the Anteroom Before the Session Ends

If the party arrives during a session but wants a private confrontation, they have the session's duration (approximately 90 minutes) to reach the anteroom before the Mezzoloth returns. This clears the chamber of witnesses and reduces the personal guard to 1.

Prepare the Confrontation Space

If the party reaches the Chamber or anteroom before the confrontation begins, they can establish positioning. DC 12 Perception identifies the room's exit points, the Speaker's dais access points, and the teleportation distance from the chamber to the nearest exterior wall.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

Perris arranged the meeting and escorts the party directly to the anteroom. No credential check required. The party is presented to the Mezzoloth with an introduction.

Making it Harder

The Mezzoloth is aware that something happened at the Contract Halls. He does not know it was the party, but he is aware. His personal guard has been doubled to 4 Merregons and he has not been in his Chamber for two days. He is in a secured room on the second floor and Perris's schedule has been suspended.

Increasing Role Play

If the party is attending the open session, they hear the Mezzoloth speak. He is presiding over a procedural debate about district boundary reclassification. He runs the session correctly. Every rule, every process, every precedent: correct. The content of what is being debated has no meaning under the regime's actual authority, but the form is meticulous. He is a creature who learned the forms and cannot let go of them even when the forms have been emptied.

Treasure and Rewards

No new treasure. Positioning and intelligence gathered here carry directly into Scene 3.

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Clean entry (credentialed, no alarms)	0	0	0
Unauthorized entry detected but resolved socially	0	0	0
Unauthorized entry detected and Merregon response summoned	0	+1	0

SCENE 3:

THE CHAMBER

The confrontation with the Mezzoloth in his institutional space. This is the chapter's combat encounter and its potential resolution before that combat reaches a lethal conclusion.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The Council Chamber is larger than it needs to be for the government it currently hosts. The gallery seats are half-empty. The council members who are present watch from a careful distance, in the posture of people who have learned not to appear too interested in anything.

At the far end, on an elevated dais behind a desk that could seat three, the Mezzoloth sits. He is not what most people expect from a regime official. He is not imposing. He is not threatening. He is a medium-sized creature in very formal vestments, holding a gavel he has not used, watching you cross the floor toward him with an expression that is doing an enormous amount of work to look like calm.

He knows why you are here. He has known for at least ten minutes.

"This chamber," he says, with great procedural dignity, "is in session."

Features of the Area

The Council Chamber

- **Dimensions:** 80 feet long, 50 feet wide, 30-foot ceiling
- **The Gallery:** 20-foot elevated walkway along the north and east walls; access via two staircases; provides high ground and line of sight to the entire chamber
- **The Dais:** 5 feet elevated, 15 feet across; the Mezzoloth starts here; it is difficult terrain to ascend under pressure
- **Pillars:** 8 stone pillars arranged in two rows; provide three-quarters cover; the Mezzoloth will use them during combat
- **Exits:** Main entrance (south), service entrance (east, behind the dais), emergency egress (west gallery, drops to a corridor below via a 10-foot ladder)
- **Witnesses:** 1d6+3 council functionaries in gallery seats; they will not fight; they will not help; they will remember everything

The Mezzoloth's Personal Guard

If entering through the public session: 2 Merregons positioned at the Chamber entrance (40 feet from the dais). If entering through private meeting: 1-2 Merregons depending on how the approach in Scene 2 went.

Each Merregon here has been specifically contracted through the Mezzoloth's delegated authority. If the party has the Mezzoloth's contract and reveals the termination clause, these Merregons must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or become confused about their chain of command (Incapacitated for 1 round; on a failure of 5 or more, they immediately disengage and leave the chamber).

The Encounter

Initiative and Opening

If the party approaches peacefully: the Mezzoloth opens with Procedural Delay and attempts to talk. He is buying time for the Survival Calculation to complete.

If the party reveals the contract immediately: the Mezzoloth's composure breaks for one round. He makes the Survival Calculation immediately, at disadvantage (the knowledge that his authority was conditional accelerates the math). Institutional Withdrawal may trigger before combat begins.

If the party attacks without warning: roll initiative. The Mezzoloth uses Teleport on his first turn to move behind the dais pillars, then uses Summon Yugoloth (50% chance) as a bonus action. He will attempt to create distance before engaging.

Combat

Round 1

The Mezzoloth uses Procedural Delay on the party's highest-action-economy character (the creature most likely to pin him down). Merregon guard advances. If Summon Yugoloth succeeds, the summoned Mezzoloth appears within 60 feet and acts on the same initiative.

Round 2

If Survival Calculation has not triggered: Mezzoloth uses Teleport to reach the east service exit, casts cloudkill to create a disengagement screen, and attempts to escape through the service corridor. He is not fleeing

the building, he is repositioning for Scene 3's next phase. If Survival Calculation triggers here: Institutional Withdrawal activates.

Round 3+

If the fight continues past Round 2 without Institutional Withdrawal: the Mezzoloth is cornered and uses every defensive option available. He does not fight back hard; he fights to survive until the calculation resolves in Withdrawal's favor.

Institutional Withdrawal

When Survival Calculation triggers and the Mezzoloth fails his saving throw, he teleports to the far end of the Chamber, away from exits, near a pillar, both hands raised, trident held flat and offered toward the party in surrender position.

Read or paraphrase the following:

He stops.

*Not tactically. Not to buy time. He just... stops.
The trident goes horizontal. His posture changes.
The formal dignity evaporates.*

*"Alright," he says. His voice sounds different without the performance in it. Smaller. More honest.
"Alright."*

*He sets the trident on the floor. The sound of it is the loudest thing in the room.
"What do you want from me?"*

What the Mezzoloth Offers

When Institutional Withdrawal triggers, the Mezzoloth offers one of the following, party's choice:

- Location of a Council document implicating a higher-ranking regime official (specifically: a memo from the Goristro authorizing the Hezrou's loyalty purges, with the Goristro's seal; this removes any doubt about who ordered what and is actionable before a restored court)
- Access codes to a restricted area of the regime's infrastructure (specifically: the Council's emergency authority channel, a magical communication network used to reach every regime lieutenant simultaneously; the resistance can use this to broadcast, misdirect, or disrupt)
- Written testimony against the Goristro usable as legal evidence before a restored court (the Mezzoloth has witnessed enough

to constitute a genuine first-person account; he knows this will cost him; he offers it anyway because the alternative is death and testimony at least gives him a position)

If the party brought the contract from Chapter 5 and has not yet revealed the termination clause: the Mezzoloth notices it. DC 13 Insight reveals he recognizes the document. He does not acknowledge it. But his offer becomes more generous. He adds a fourth option:

- Full cooperation with the resistance's Act II operations (passive intelligence; he will not actively spy, but he will not obstruct, and he will route certain regime communications through delays that give the party additional operational windows)

After Institutional Withdrawal

The witnesses in the gallery are present for all of this. At least two of them are going to tell someone what they saw. The party has approximately 20 minutes before the district receives a report that the Speaker was confronted in open session.

What the Party Can Do

Accept the Withdrawal

Take the offer, let him surrender, and extract. This is the mechanically superior outcome. The documents or testimony he provides are more valuable than his defeat as an NPC.

Push Past the Offer

If the party kills the Mezzoloth after Institutional Withdrawal, they do not receive the offered intelligence and the witnesses in the gallery saw a resistance operatives kill a surrendering official in the Council chamber. This will be the Kenku's next broadcast. It will not be inaccurate.

Use the Termination Clause

If the party reveals the termination clause before or during the confrontation, the Mezzoloth requires a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or immediately triggers Institutional Withdrawal without combat. On a success, he uses it as fuel: he knows the Goristro would dissolve his position anyway, so he has nothing left to protect. He fights harder for two rounds (advantage on all attack rolls) before the Survival Calculation overrides even that.

Use the Witnesses

The council functionaries in the gallery are watching. A party that makes a clean, non-lethal takedown in front of witnesses and then offers a visible, public alternative to regime cooperation is planting seeds. DC 15 Persuasion (no action required; the speech can happen during the confrontation as part of role-play) moves one witness from passive observer to potential future contact.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

The summoned Mezzoloth does not appear (treat as a failed Summon Yugoloth roll), removing the second body from the encounter. The fight resolves faster and Institutional Withdrawal triggers at the first threshold.

Making it Harder

The Mezzoloth has been aware of the party's movements since the Contract Halls operation and has prepared: the cloudkill has a 24-hour component that he pre-cast into a small vial (use it as an action on Round 1, no spell slot expended); the service exit leads to a secondary room where 2 additional Merregons are positioned specifically in case of exactly this scenario. Defeating them adds a fourth combat round to the encounter before Institutional Withdrawal triggers

Increasing Role Play

Give the council functionaries in the gallery faces. One of them is visibly crying after the Mezzoloth's surrender, not from grief but from something she cannot name: relief, maybe, or the recognition that the thing she has been working around for three years just publicly broke. Another one is already writing something in his ledger. The party does not know what. The DM should decide.

Treasure and Rewards

From Institutional Withdrawal

(party's choice of only one)

- Memo implicating the Goristro in the Hezrou's loyalty purges (legal evidence; advantage on Persuasion checks against any council functionary for the remainder of Act II)
- Emergency channel access codes (the resistance can use this once per chapter to create a regime communications disruption; after three uses, the channel is changed)

- Mezzoloth's written testimony (legal document; +1 to all future Restore the Courts skill challenges; dramatically strengthens the Chapter 12 finale)
- Full operational cooperation (passive intelligence upgrade; the resistance receives advance warning of 1 regime action per chapter for the next three chapters)

From the Chamber

- Council session minutes, last 90 days (Intelligence check DC 13 reveals two items the party can follow up on: a budget reallocation to the Nycaloth's compound and a procedural notation that the three vacant council seats are held by individuals in "Project Provenance administrative review")
- The Speaker's ceremonial seal (has genuine institutional authority; can authenticate forged council documents for the rest of Act II; critical for executing remaining void forms from Chapter 5)

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Institutional Withdrawal accepted Offer taken	+2	+1	-1
Mezzoloth killed after Institutional Withdrawal With witnesses present	-2	+2	-1
Termination clause revealed; Withdrawal triggered without combat	+1	0	-1
Witnesses observed a calm, non-lethal resolution	+1	0	0
Emergency authority channel accessed	0	+1	0

SCENE 4:

THE AFTERMATH

The confrontation is done. The district is beginning to react.

Read or paraphrase the following:

Outside the Halls, the district is not yet in crisis. Not quite. The clerks moving through the streets are walking faster. Someone has stopped to look at the Halls' entrance. The Kenku's scheduled broadcast is four minutes from now and you have a reasonable guess about what it will say.

The Mezzoloth is either gone, surrendered somewhere he will not be immediately found, or dead. The Council chamber is either intact or it is not. The witnesses are already talking.

You have what you came for. Now the question is how long you have before the regime figures out what just happened in the heart of its civic district.

Features of the Area

The District's Response

- 6 minutes before the district Merregon units receive any report
- 12 minutes before the response force deploys
- 20 minutes before the Kenku's broadcast names what happened

If the party exits the district before the 6-minute mark: clean exit, no pursuit encounter.

If the party is still present at the 6-minute mark: 2 Merregon patrol units begin converging on the Halls. DC 14 Stealth or DC 13 Deception to avoid contact. Each contact avoided costs 2 minutes of movement.

The Mezzoloth's Position

If alive and surrendered: he leaves the city by nightfall. He does not return to the Halls. His formal status within the regime remains technically intact for several days before it is quietly dissolved. During that window, his ceremonial seal remains valid. The party has a narrow operational window.

If dead: the regime reacts faster. Heat increases more. But there is no testimony document available.

The Encounter

No formal encounter in this scene.

What the Party Can Do

Extract Cleanly

Move through the district at normal pace before the 6-minute window. DC 11 group Stealth check. The district is distracted enough by functionaries converging on the Halls that the party's exit goes mostly unobserved.

Recruit from the Witnesses

If the party spoke to any witness during the confrontation, this is the window to make contact. One follow-up check (DC 13 Persuasion) can establish a future contact relationship with one council functionary. They are not joining the resistance. They are leaving a door slightly open.

Use the Broadcast

If the party has access to the Kenku's broadcast and acts within the 20-minute window, they can potentially intercept or misdirect the scheduled broadcast using intelligence from Act I (the crystal amplifier technology, the collar mechanic). DC 17 Arcana or DC 16 Thieves' Tools to interrupt one scheduled broadcast. Success means the district does not receive the Kenku's account for another hour. The window extends.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

The district response is slower than expected because a second incident elsewhere in Oren draws the nearest response force. The party has 12 minutes instead of 6. The exit is unhurried.

Making it Harder

The Mezzoloth's personal steward, Perris, watched what happened and has already sent a messenger to the district garrison. The response window collapses to 3 minutes. The party must move immediately.

Increasing Role Play

If the party exits the district through the canteen, the functionaries who were arguing there in Scene 1 are still at their table. They look at the party as they pass. No one says anything. One of them raises his cup very slightly, a gesture so small it could be nothing. It is not nothing.

Treasure and Rewards

No new treasure from this scene. All rewards were established in Scene 3.

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Clean exit before the 6-minute window expires	0	0	0
Exit between report and response force deployment	0	+1	0
Broadcast triggered	0	+2	0
Functionary witness recruited as future contact	+1	0	-1

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

What the Party Should Know

- The Mezzoloth's position is gone, or soon will be. The Council's capacity to legitimize regime actions has collapsed. Whatever processes remained are now headless.
- The Speaker's ceremonial seal is in the party's possession. It is a genuine institutional authority instrument. Use it carefully and quickly before the regime invalidates it.
- The Goristro had the authority to dissolve the Speakership at any time. He chose not to, until now. That choice is worth thinking about. He kept the Mezzoloth in place because a weak, visible Council was useful. Now it is not. What replaces it will be worse.
- Project Provenance appears again. Three council seats held by individuals in administrative review under that designation. Two words in a garrison document in Chapter 1. Now they have council-level authority. The shape is starting to become visible.
- The Hezrou and the remaining middle circle lieutenants are next. The party has intelligence from the Mezzoloth's documents and the Rakshasa's ledger that makes those targets more visible than they were before.

Character Advancement

6th level reached.

Downtime (Optional)

- Authenticate forged documents with the Speaker's ceremonial seal (each use costs one day; the seal's validity window is approximately 2-3 weeks before the regime realizes it is still in circulation)
- Deliver the Mezzoloth's testimony to a trusted legal contact (establishes foundation for Chapter 12's court restoration; requires finding a safe recipient)
- Use the emergency authority channel (Grip -1 for one chapter; the channel is usable up to three times before the regime changes it)
- Research Project Provenance (DC 18 Investigation; the council minutes contain a reference that, combined with the garrison document, begins forming a coherent picture; a success on this check gives the party a significant revelation at DM's

discretion. The three vacant council seats are the first named individuals they can connect to the program)

Future Hooks

- The council functionary who raised his cup: He is not a resistance member. He is a person who just watched something change and has not yet decided what to do about it. The party may have left without his name. If they went back for it, they have a potential future asset in the civic district.
- The Mezzoloth's location: He left. Where he went is not the party's immediate concern. But he is alive, and he has testimony, and eventually someone else will find him. That someone may or may not be the party.
- Project Provenance: Three council seats. Void forms from Chapter 5. Garrison documents from Chapter 1. An Archmage who writes policy. A symbol the party has seen exactly once. The picture is forming.
- The regime's response: The Goristro will replace the Speaker. The replacement will be worse. What the party does between now and that appointment determines whether the replacement faces an institution in ruins or one that has been quietly redirected by people who are still inside it

Lead-in to the Next Chapter

Mira takes the Speaker's seal out of the party's hands and holds it up in the lamplight of the resistance safe house.

Read or paraphrase the following:

"This is real. This is a genuine institutional seal from the Council of Orenthis. It is ours right now."

She sets it on the map. It lands on the marker for the Hezrou's compound, south of the city.

"He is a creature who believes in authority. He's been running loyalty purges on the Goristro's behalf because someone said he had the authority to do so. We have a document here that says the Council never ratified that authority. Not formally. Not legally."

She looks at the party.

"We go south. We bring the seal. We show him what the Council actually says about his office."

A pause.

"And if he doesn't care about the Council's authority, we show him what we think about his."

The road south from Oren is a day's travel to the Hezrou's compound.

Chapter 7 Null and Void



"The empire of law requires only that someone, somewhere, believes the paper is real."

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 7 is a single session interlude designed to give the party one clean, consequential victory and advance them to 7th level through milestone before the Hezrou fight.

since the operation succeeds or fails on procedure, not combat.

Scene 3: What Stops

The void executes, the garrison ceases to function, and the party extracts with seven freed prisoners.

Scene 3 should feel like witnessing something genuinely new, a small and irreversible change in what the regime can do.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Scene 1: The Window

Mira identifies the opportunity and the party plans their approach.

Scene 1 should feel urgent and energizing, as the seal's validity is a countdown and the party has exactly what they need to act.

Scene 2: The Voiding

The party executes the operation at the Millgate garrison.

Scene 2 should feel precise and quietly tense,

RUNNING THE CHAPTER

Designed for: 6th-level characters

Sessions: 1

Advancement: Reach 7th level at end

This interlude is a deliberately low-combat bridge between Chapter 6 and Chapter 7. It demonstrates the Merregon contract system collapsing in practice, gives the party a concrete use for the materials they acquired in Chapter 5, and advances them to a level appropriate for the Hezrou encounter.

The primary goals are:

- Execute the first successful contract void and make its consequences legible
- Give the party a clean win before the more volatile Chapter 8
- Demonstrate through play what the contract system means when it stops
- Advance the party to 7th level

Guidance

The Operation Is Not a Fight

The Millgate garrison has Merregons. The party is not here to fight them. The operation succeeds when the void form reaches the contract anchor. Everything else is getting there without triggering a combat the interlude was not designed to support.

The Void Should Feel Real

The moment the contracts fail is the interlude's dramatic center. Give it room. The Merregons stopping is not a victory celebration. It is something stranger and more specific than that, a system running out of instructions, and it should feel that way.

Let the Party Choose

Three approaches are available and all three work. The party's choice reflects their preferred style and their trust in their own capabilities. Honor whichever approach they commit to.

SCENE 1:

THE WINDOW

This scene occurs in the resistance safe house immediately following the events of Chapter 6. The Speaker's ceremonial seal is still in the party's possession. Mira has been thinking about it since they returned.

Read or paraphrase the following:

Mira sets the Speaker's seal on the table next to the stack of voiding forms. She does not smile, but her jaw unclenches for the first time in days.

"The garrison at Millgate. Twenty-two bound Merregons. The contract binds them to the Rakshasa's regional authority through the Council's endorsement." She taps the seal. "The endorsement chain requires a Council-level instrument to execute a void. We have one. Right now."

She looks at the seal the way you look at something that is about to expire.

"We have maybe four days before the regime invalidates this. We should use it today."

Features of the Area

The Map

Lyra's operational map shows the Millgate garrison eight miles south of Oren, positioned on a secondary road that feeds into the border garrison network. It is smaller than the border garrison the party raided in Chapter 3 and serves a different function: it is a regional staging post, not a processing facility. Its Merregons run patrol routes and checkpoint enforcement for the surrounding districts.

The Contract Chain

Mira has spent an hour with the Rakshasa's ledger and the void forms from Chapter 5. She can explain the following if asked:

The Millgate garrison's Merregons are bound by a contract that runs through two endorsements: the Rakshasa's regional authority and the Council's institutional validation of that authority.

The Mezzoloth's Speakership provided the Council's endorsement. Executing a voiding form with the Speaker's ceremonial seal

removes the Council's endorsement from the chain.

Without that endorsement, the Rakshasa's authority over that specific garrison becomes legally unanchored. The contracts collapse.

The party does not need to understand all of this mechanically. Mira understands it. She needs them to get the form inside.

What Henrik Knows

The former garrison guard has been to Millgate twice in his career. He can provide:

- Gate composition: 2 Merregons on the main gate, one interior administrative Merregon at the duty desk
- Anchor location: the contract anchor is in the administrative post on the garrison's ground floor, a locked document case behind the duty desk
- Civilian traffic: the garrison processes civilian transit papers twice daily, at dawn and at midday, which means there is a legitimate reason for non-military individuals to approach the gate during those windows
- The duty overseer: a Merregon of higher designation than standard, stationed inside; it reviews documentation discrepancies; it has never encountered a Council-level voiding instrument because no one has ever presented one

The Encounter

No encounter in this scene. This is a planning session with three approaches.

Direct Approach:

The party enters openly, presents the sealed instrument with full confidence, and invokes Council authority to conduct a contractual audit. DC 15 Persuasion combined with the genuine seal reduces this to a near-certainty on a success. A failure means the garrison's duty overseer calls for clarification from a superior, which no longer exists.

External Execution:

If the party has a spell-caster with sending or message, they can relay the form's contents to an identified cooperative prisoner inside who has access to the administrative corridor. DC 16 Arcana to execute the void remotely through a

willing intermediary holding the original document near the anchor. This requires advance intelligence about a cooperative prisoner inside. The Mezzoloth's testimony from Chapter 6 mentioned several names currently held at secondary garrisons.

Courier Deception:

One party member poses as a Council administrative courier, presenting the voiding form disguised as routine reassignment paperwork during the civilian transit window. DC 14 Deception to pass the gate check; DC 12 with Fenwick's document quality and the genuine Speaker's seal. The Merregon gate guard examines the document, finds it procedurally correct, and admits the courier. The form is delivered to the administrative post by the garrison's own filing system.

What the Party Can Do

Choose an Approach and Prepare

Let the party commit to one approach before Scene 2 begins. Each approach has a different primary check and different failure modes. Preparation appropriate to the chosen approach, reviewing the Mezzoloth's testimony for the external execution, practicing the courier cover with Fenwick for the deception approach, drafting the formal audit language with Lyra for the direct approach, grants advantage on the primary check in Scene 2.

Ask About Failure States

Mira answers honestly. A failed gate check means the duty overseer calls for clarification upward. There is no one above to answer. After 30 minutes without a response, the overseer will make a decision. What decision it makes without instructions is genuinely unknown. The Merregons follow written authority. There is no written authority telling them to detain the party. There is also no written authority telling them not to.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

Fenwick volunteers that he produced a specific document format for a similar Millgate transit request two years ago and still has the template. The courier deception DC drops to DC 11.

Making it Harder

A regime administrative notice arrived at Millgate this morning invalidating certain Council-issued documents pending review, a precautionary response to the Mezzoloth's disappearance. The civilian transit window is suspended. The party must find another entry point or a way to establish their document's legitimacy before the notice is applied.

Increasing Role Play

Let the party see Mira think for a moment before she speaks. She has been holding this plan since they walked back in with the seal and she is checking it one more time in front of them.

When she finishes, she says:

"This is the version of the fight I prefer. No one gets hurt. The paper just stops being believed."

Treasure and Rewards

No direct rewards in this scene.

Development and Dial Impact

No dial changes from this scene.

SCENE 2:

THE VOIDING

The party travels to Millgate and executes their chosen approach. This scene covers the operation itself, from arrival at the garrison to the moment the voiding form reaches the contract anchor.

Read or paraphrase the following (adjust based on chosen approach and timing):

The Millgate garrison is exactly what Henrik described: functional, joyless, built for a purpose and maintaining that purpose without variation. Two Merregons at the gate. A civilian transit line that moves efficiently because the Merregons processing it follow procedure to the letter and procedure does not allow for conversation.

The garrison's banner hangs from the main post: the Rakshasa's regional sigil above the Goristro's bull-head. Both of them, stacked. The order is deliberate.

Inside, through the gate, you can see the administrative post. The document case is behind the duty desk. The duty overseer stands at it, reviewing papers with the attention of a creature that has never been given a reason to stop reviewing papers.

The form in your hands, signed and sealed, is the reason.

Features of the Area

The Garrison Exterior

The main road approaches from the north. A 20-foot cleared perimeter surrounds the palisade. The civilian transit line forms on the road's east shoulder during transit windows. The gate is wide enough for a wagon and guarded by 2 standard Merregons.

The Administrative Post

Ground floor, center of the garrison, visible through the gate. One duty overseer. The contract anchor is in a locked document case (DC 14 Thieves' Tools or a key the duty overseer carries) behind the desk. The anchor is a single page of Infernal-script contract binding, bearing the Rakshasa's seal and the Council's endorsement stamp. The voiding form, once placed within 10 feet of it, requires

10 minutes of uninterrupted proximity or direct delivery to execute.

The Civilian Transit Line

If arriving during the transit window (dawn or midday): 8-12 civilians waiting to have papers processed. The Merregon gate guards are occupied and their attention is on the line. This is the courier deception's optimal window. The line also means the party has cover within a crowd if anything goes wrong.

The Encounter

Direct Approach

The full party presents themselves at the gate and invokes Council authority for a formal contractual audit.

Primary check: DC 15 Persuasion with the Speaker's seal visible; DC 13 with preparation advantage from Scene 1.

On a success: the duty overseer receives them formally and escorts them to the administrative post. The voiding form is presented and recognized as a Council instrument. The overseer files it correctly.

On a failure: the overseer calls for clarification upward. The response window opens.

External Execution

One party member establishes contact with a named cooperative prisoner via sending or message.

Primary check: DC 16 Arcana to execute the void remotely through a willing intermediary holding the original document near the anchor.

On a success: the prisoner receives the encoded voiding form instructions, locates the administrative corridor, and positions themselves near the document case during a routine movement window. The void executes from their position.

On a failure: the connection is established but the prisoner cannot safely access the administrative corridor within the available window. They will try again in 2 hours. The party must wait or find a secondary approach.

Courier Deception

One party member approaches the gate during the transit window with the voiding form presented as official Council paperwork.

Primary check: DC 14 Deception (DC 12 with Fenwick's document quality and the Speaker's seal; DC 11 with preparation advantage from Scene 1).

On a success: the gate Merregon examines the document, finds it procedurally correct, and passes the courier through to the administrative post. The duty overseer receives the document, notes its Council provenance, and routes it to the document case as standard filing. The form is now inside

On a failure: the gate Merregon holds the document and signals the duty overseer. The overseer approaches the gate to examine the document directly. A second DC 15 Deception check can resolve the challenge. On a second failure, the overseer calls for clarification upward through the command chain. The response window opens, described below.

The Response Window

If the duty overseer calls for clarification from a superior: there is no superior available to respond. The Mezzoloth is gone. The endorsement chain above the Rakshasa's regional level no longer has an operational node at the Council. The overseer waits for 30 minutes, receives no response, and makes a procedural decision: in the absence of contrary instruction, a legitimately sealed Council instrument is filed as presented. The void executes 30 minutes late.

This is the interlude's clearest illustration of the Merregon contract system's fundamental nature: it follows written authority absolutely, which means it is paralyzed when that authority is absent. The failure state is not defeat. It is delay.

What the Party Can Do

Execute the Chosen Approach

The operation is designed to succeed if the party commits to their approach. The failure states produce delay, not failure. Let the party experience the Merregon procedural logic working against the regime even in the failure case.

Observe During the Wait

If the party is waiting outside for the response window to resolve: they can observe the garrison's routine. DC 11 Perception identifies the contract anchor case location precisely through the administrative post window. DC 13 Perception during the response window identifies the moment the duty overseer makes the filing decision: it straightens slightly before processing the document, a behavioral tell for a Merregon making a determination without instruction.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

The civilian transit window is unusually long today due to a backlog from a prior day's closure. The courier has 40 minutes instead of 20. The gate Merregons are processing efficiently and the primary check has advantage from reduced scrutiny.

Making it Harder

A second duty overseer was transferred to Millgate three days ago as a precautionary reinforcement following the Contract Halls operation. Two overseers review the document together. Both must be satisfied. The primary check DC increases by 2 and the response window, if triggered, extends to 45 minutes.

Increasing Role Play

Let the courier, if that approach is used, experience the specific quality of presenting false documents to a creature that cannot be persuaded, only satisfied procedurally. The Merregon does not look at the courier's face. It looks at the document. It looks at the seal. It looks at the document again. Then it steps aside. The courier has been found compliant. That is all that happened.

Treasure and Rewards

No direct rewards in this scene. The void executing is the reward.

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Form delivered without detection	0	0	0
Response window triggered but resolved procedurally	0	0	0
Party identified during the operation	0	+1	0

SCENE 3: WHAT STOPS

The voiding form has reached the anchor. This scene covers the void executing and its immediate consequences.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The change is not dramatic. There is no explosion, no cry of pain. The golden text on the garrison's posted contract orders simply stops being legible. The Infernal fades like ink in water.

For a moment, nothing happens. The Merregons on their patrol routes continue walking. Force of habit, maybe. Or the fact that something that has governed your behavior for three years takes a moment to stop.

Then the first one stops walking. It looks at its hands. It looks at the garrison wall. It looks at the party, or the courier, or whoever is closest.

And then, one by one, they put down their weapons.

Not in surrender. Not in defeat. In the specific, disoriented way of a creature that has just had the only instruction it was ever given removed, and does not know what to do next.

Features of the Area

The Merregons

Twenty-two Merregons with no directives. They do not attack. They do not flee. They stop. Some leave the garrison through the main gate and walk south, following no route. Some remain inside and stand in place, waiting for orders that will not come. A few die because their contracts included life-sustaining infernal energy; this is not the majority, but it happens, and it should not be played for horror. It is simply a consequence.

The Prisoners

Seven people are held in the garrison's cells. The cells are not locked from the inside and the Merregon guards assigned to them have no directives. The prisoners walk out. Two of them recognize the party from resistance contacts. Three of them have never heard of the resistance and are confused about what they are walking out into. One of them

does not walk out immediately; she sits on her cell cot for a few minutes, processing, before someone thinks to come back for her.

The Encounter

No combat in this scene.

The duty overseer has received no directives. It stands at the administrative desk. If the party approaches it: it looks at them. It waits. It is waiting for instructions that will not arrive. A DC 17 Persuasion check can establish basic communicative contact; on a success, the overseer provides one piece of operational intelligence from the garrison's records before its behavior becomes too degraded to interpret. This is not a reliable tactic. It is a possible one.

What the Party Can Do

Retrieve the Garrison's Records

The administrative post is unguarded. DC 11 Investigation to locate the transfer records from the past 90 days; DC 13 to locate a supply requisition chain that references the Nycaloth's northern compound by routing code, a detail that confirms Chapter 9's target without naming it directly.

Speak With the Prisoners

Each prisoner has a story. The party does not need to hear all of them. But one of them worked as a civilian contractor at the garrison before his detention and knows the layout of three other secondary garrisons in the region. His information is outdated by six months but still largely accurate. He will share it if the party asks.

Watch the Merregons

The party can observe the disengaged Merregons for as long as they choose before extracting. There is no mechanical payoff. There is the experience of seeing a system stop functioning and understanding, from the outside, what the system was.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

The garrison records are already partially sorted by a Merregon administrative unit that was mid-task when the void executed. The Investigation DC to locate the transfer records drops to DC 9.

Making it Harder

A Merregon from outside the void's range, a contract runner from the Rakshasa's regional office, arrives at the garrison gate 20 minutes after the void executes to deliver updated patrol orders. It is not hostile. It is confused. It has valid orders and a functioning contract and it is standing at the gate of a garrison that has stopped functioning. How the party handles its presence determines whether word of the void reaches the Rakshasa in 2 hours or 6.

Increasing Role Play

Mira is a mile south with extraction wagons. When the party arrives with seven people who were in cells this morning, she counts them. She does not say anything immediately. Then she says: "*Seven.*" She means it as a number and also as something else. Let that land before moving on.

Treasure and Rewards

From the Garrison Records

- Transfer records, 90 days (intelligence on regional prisoner routing; useful for Act II planning)
- Supply requisition routing code referencing the Nycaloth's northern compound (confirms Chapter 9's target location)

From the Prisoner with Contractor Knowledge

- Partial layout intelligence for 3 secondary garrisons (outdated by 6 months; reduces DC of any planning check for those garrisons by 2)
-

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Void executed successfully	+1	+1	-1
Seven prisoners freed	+1	0	0
Contract runner delayed and word reaches Rakshasa in 6 hours	0	0	0
Contract runner arrives and word reaches Rakshasa in 2 hours	0	+1	0

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

What the Party Should Know

- A contract void works exactly the way the documents said it would. The Merregons stop. The garrison stops. The prisoners walk out. The endorsement chain matters and the endorsement chain is broken.
- The void form required the Speaker's ceremonial seal. That seal is now used. Its validity window is nearly closed regardless. The party has voiding forms but they will need authority seals to execute them. The Mezzoloth's cooperation from Chapter 6 may have included guidance on where other institutional seals exist.
- The Rakshasa knows something happened at Millgate within 2 to 6 hours depending on the contract runner's situation. She does not know exactly what. She knows a garrison stopped functioning. That is enough to concern her.
- Seven people are now with the resistance who were not this morning.

Character Advancement

7th level reached.

Lead-in to the Next Chapter

The wagon ride back to Ören takes two hours. The seven freed prisoners are quiet in the way people are quiet when they are calculating what is still there to go back to.

Mira rides in the front wagon. Partway through the journey she passes a folded document back through the canvas:

Lyra's updated map with a new marker south of the city.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The note attached says only:

"The Hezrou. When you're ready."

She has written "when" and not "if."

Chapter 8 The Investigator's Reckoning



"He was not given authority because he deserved it. He was given it because he would not stop asking for it, and asking was less exhausting than explaining why the answer was no."

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 8 takes the party south of Oren to the Loyalty Bureau: a run-down compound the Hezrou has occupied since the Goristro handed him an authority he never knew what to do with except aim at people. The Hezrou commands the regime's internal loyalty investigation apparatus, the purges, the midnight door-kicks, the lists of names compiled by informants who understood correctly that generating names was the only way to stay off the list themselves.

He is CR 8 in isolation. He is CR 8 with a mediocre tactical mind and an ego that functions as an active liability in combat. He is genuinely dangerous in the way that a large, violent creature with poor impulse control is dangerous: not because he is clever, but because he is powerful and he has never been told no by anything that survived the attempt.

The chapter is built around one central truth: the Hezrou can be beaten before the fight begins, during the fight if the party exploits his limitations, or after the fight if the party chooses to let him humiliate himself in front of his own forces. All three are valid. The chapter does not reward simply walking up and fighting him. It rewards understanding what he is.

He is not a mastermind. He is not a schemer. He is a toad-shaped bureaucrat with too much muscle and not enough self-awareness, running a compound that smells of mold and self-importance, whose walls are decorated with portraits of himself standing next to a demon lord who barely remembers he exists.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Scene 1: Intelligence

The party gathers what they know about the Loyalty Bureau, plans their approach, and makes decisions that shape the encounter to come.

Scene 1 should feel methodical and slightly

absurd, as the target is genuinely not that impressive and the intelligence confirms it.

Scene 2: The Compound

Navigating the Loyalty Bureau exterior, dealing with its Merregon forces, and reaching the Hezrou without triggering a full-compound response.

Scene 2 should feel tense but not oppressive, since this is an institution run by someone who has never had to actually defend it.

Scene 3: The Portraits

The party encounters the physical evidence of the Hezrou's psychology: the interior of his compound and its very specific decor. A scene of dark comedy and genuine unease.

Scene 3 should feel quietly wrong, the way a powerful creature with no self-awareness is always quietly wrong.

Scene 4: The Investigator

The confrontation. The Hezrou starts confident and ends as something much smaller. Whether that ending is defeat, humiliation, or flight is up to the party.

Scene 4 should feel volatile and kinetic, since the Hezrou's tactical limitations are the party's greatest weapon.

Scene 5: The Fallout

Dealing with the compound's remaining forces and extracting with whatever the party came for.

Scene 5 should feel like clearing a space that is already half-empty, as the Hezrou's departure unmoors everything he was holding together.

RUNNING THE CHAPTER

Designed for: 7th-level characters

Sessions: 2-3

Advancement: Reach 8th level at end

This chapter is the first Act II encounter that is won primarily through tactical exploitation rather than preparation. The Hezrou cannot be negotiated with in any meaningful way. He cannot be turned. He cannot be redirected through paperwork. He can be manipulated, outmaneuvered, and made to look stupid in front of his own forces, which produces a

Chapter 8

loyalty collapse that is as damaging to the regime as his defeat.

The primary goals are:

- Deliver the Hezrou's defeat and dismantle the loyalty investigation apparatus
- Introduce the Outmaneuver mechanic as the chapter's central tactical puzzle
- Demonstrate that the regime's internal investigations were never as formidable as its reputation suggested
- Surface intelligence about the Nycaloth's compound to the north (Chapter 10 setup)
- Give the freed prisoners and resistance members a visible, unambiguous win

Guidance

He Has Never Lost

The Hezrou's entire identity is built on the assumption that he cannot be stopped. His tactics reflect this: he does not hedge, he does not build in fallbacks, he does not position Merregons defensively. He builds them as a forward line he can stand behind while they make the first contact. This is his weakness and it should be visible from the moment the party observes him.

His Merregons Are Not His

The Merregon Loyalty Detail bound to the Hezrou runs through his delegated authority under the Rakshasa's framework. The party has the Rakshasa's operational ledger from Chapter 5. They know this. If the Hezrou's authority instrument is disrupted or his sub-contract made invalid through his incapacitation, defeat, or the party producing a Council-authenticated document challenging the delegation, the Merregons' directives collapse. This is the non-combat resolution path for the compound phase.

Humiliation Is a Weapon

The Outmaneuver mechanic exists to make the Hezrou look foolish in combat. But the party can pursue the humiliation angle before the fight begins through social play. A publicly visible defeat of the Hezrou, his Merregons watching him charge the wrong target, berate an ally, or have his authority publicly challenged and crumble, is worth more than a quiet kill. Regime loyalty collapses faster when people see the thing they were supposed to be afraid of fail publicly.

The Portraits

There are eleven portraits of the Hezrou in this compound. The party should see at least four of them. Each one depicts him in a slightly more heroic pose, standing slightly closer to the Goristro. In the most recent one, he and the Goristro appear to be approximately equal in size. The Goristro is painted significantly smaller than his actual dimensions. No one in the compound has commented on this.

SCENE 1:

INTELLIGENCE

This scene occurs in the resistance safe house 2-3 days after the Interlude. The party has intelligence from multiple sources and must integrate it into a plan.

Read or paraphrase the following:

Lyra puts the compound marker on the map without ceremony. Eight miles south of Oren, set back from the main road behind a tree line that was planted, according to the original survey documents, as an ornamental feature. The Hezrou has apparently been informed it is a defensive perimeter. He has been very proud of it ever since.

She marks the patrol routes Henrik identified from the Rakshasa's ledger. Then she marks the portraits.

"Henrik recognized the name from garrison transfer documents. The Hezrou signs his loyalty purge orders with a personal sigil." She taps the ledger page. "The sigil is on every detention order for the last eighteen months that came through channels not routed through the Rakshasa. He has been running independent purges."

Mira adds: "Which means the Goristro gave him a direct line. And he has been using it to settle personal scores more than to identify actual dissidents." A pause. "Which also means some of the people on his lists are people the regime would not have touched otherwise."

She looks at the party.

"He is not smart. He is not strategic. He is large, he hits hard, and he has never been in a room where someone said no and meant it. That changes today."

Features of the Area

The Map

Lyra's updated map shows:

- **Outer fence line:** wooden palisade, 10 feet high, poorly maintained with multiple sections of degraded posts; DC 11 Athletics to climb, DC 10 at compromised sections
- **Main gate:** iron-reinforced wood, guarded by 2 Merregons
- **Parade ground:** open central area where the Hezrou holds inspections; large, exposed,

his preferred operating space

- **The Keep:** two-story stone building, the Hezrou's residence and command center
- **Barracks:** houses the Merregon Loyalty Detail, 8-10 Merregons at any time
- **Trophy building:** a secondary structure the ledger notes as "administrative archive"; Henrik suspects it is something else
- **Ornamental tree line:** 80-foot buffer between the palisade and the road; the Hezrou calls it the Defensive Perimeter of His Most Loyal Compound

Intelligence from Henrik

If asked, Henrik, the former garrison guard can provide:

- **Guard Composition:** 10 Merregons total in the Loyalty Detail; 2 at the gate, 2 on fence patrol, 4 in the barracks on rotation, and 2 that serve as the Hezrou's personal forward cordon in any engagement
- **The Hezrou's Habits:** holds morning inspections on the parade ground at dawn; eats alone in the Keep; never leaves the compound; has not left the compound in 6 weeks, which means he does not know the party exists yet
- **The Trophy Building:** Henrik saw it listed as "evidence archive" in transfer documents but the ledger's resource allocation puts no administrative staff there; it is either a storage facility or something else; he cannot say which
- **Patrol Gaps:** the fence patrol has a 4-minute window on the east side between rotation passes, reliably, every time, because the patrol route was designed by someone who measured it wrong

What Henrik Does Not Know

- Whether the Hezrou has been warned about the party's activities
- The exact layout of the Keep interior
- What is in the trophy building

The Encounter

The party should discuss possible approaches.

Dawn Inspection Ambush

The Hezrou's dawn inspection puts him in the open parade ground with a forward Merregon cordon but without the full barracks force. The party can time entry for just before the inspection, reach the parade ground, and confront him before he is positioned behind his

Merregon shield. His Loyalty Theater trait fires but the Merregons are not yet between him and the party.

Reputation Assault

The party can approach openly, presenting credentials of defeated regime officials, the Mezzoloth's deal documents, the Imp Warlock's records, or the voided garrison contract from the Interlude, as a social pressure campaign. The Hezrou cannot be negotiated with, but he can be made uncertain, and an uncertain Hezrou is tactically compromised before the fight begins.

Merregon Contract Disruption

If the party has a remaining void form and the Speaker's seal still has time, they can attempt to disrupt the Hezrou's sub-contract authority before engaging. This removes the Merregon forward cordon from the fight entirely if successful. The anchor point for the sub-contract is the Keep's administrative room, first floor, east wing.

Straight Infiltration

Enter via the compromised east fence section after the 4-minute patrol window, reach the Keep, locate the Hezrou. Highest stealth requirement, most controlled engagement conditions.

Mira's Assessment

Read or paraphrase the following:

"He has been running independent purges. That means people on his lists who are also on ours. Which means if we move now, before the regime has time to brief him on what happened at the Council Halls and the Millgate garrison, he still does not know what is coming."

She closes the ledger.

"I want to be clear: the goal is the loyalty investigation apparatus, not just him. If he is gone and his sub-contracts are void and the files in that trophy building are in our hands, we have broken the internal purge system. Even if the Goristro assigns a replacement, they start from nothing."

"The trophy building is a secondary objective. Reach it if you can. But get him first."

What the Party Can Do

Prepare for Outmaneuver

The Outmaneuver mechanic requires a DC 13 Intelligence check, or a Deception or Persuasion substitution.

Parties that plan specific manipulation tactics in Scene 1 reduce this to DC 11 for their first Outmaneuver attempt in Scene 4. Let them name what they plan to do. If the plan is coherent, honor the DC reduction.

Research the Trophy Building

A DC 13 Investigation check on the ledger reveals one additional detail: the resource allocation for the trophy building includes a ration line. Something inside requires feeding.

Flag the Sub-Contract

If the party identifies the sub-contract disruption as a viable approach, Mira assigns Fenwick to produce a blank void instrument for the Hezrou's specific sub-contract chain. It requires the Speaker's seal if it still has validity, or a DC 18 Forgery check with the Rakshasa's ledger as reference material to produce a convincing enough instrument to confuse the Hezrou's Merregons without official seal backing.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

Henrik personally identifies the east fence compromise point and confirms the patrol gap is consistent. He walked that route for two years. Stealth checks at that entry point have advantage.

Making it Harder

The Hezrou received a memo three days ago, not about the party specifically, but about increased resistance activity. He has doubled the fence patrol frequency, eliminating the reliable 4-minute gap. The east section still has the compromised posts but the patrol window is now inconsistent, 1d4 minutes and variable.

Increasing Role Play

Let the party ask Henrik what the Hezrou was like in the garrison transfer documents, not as a fighter, but as an authority figure. Henrik thinks about this for a moment, then says: "Every order he signed had his personal sigil in three places. The regulation is one. He wanted to make sure everyone knew it was him."

Treasure and Rewards

No direct rewards in this scene.

Development and Dial Impact

No dial changes from this scene.

SCENE 2:

THE COMPOUND

The party approaches and enters the Loyalty Bureau. This scene covers the exterior approach, entry, and navigation to the Hezrou's position.

Read or paraphrase the following (adjust based on chosen approach):

The ornamental tree line is genuinely impressive, if you assume it was planted for aesthetic purposes rather than defense. The compound beyond it is not. The palisade is the kind of construction that happens when someone specifies requirements to a contractor and the contractor meets those requirements exactly and no further. Eight feet in some places. Twelve in others. The discrepancy is not intentional.

In the center of the compound, through the gaps in the fence, you can see the parade ground. And on the parade ground, if it is dawn and the Hezrou is following his schedule, a large toad-shaped figure in ceremonial armor that is slightly too small for him, standing in front of a line of faceless Merregons, doing something that from this distance appears to be a speech. The portraits on the Keep wall are visible from 200 feet away.

Features of the Area

Exterior

- **Main gate:** 2 Merregons; DC 15 Deception to bluff through or a brief combat
- **East fence compromise:** DC 11 Athletics, DC 10 with Henrik's precise knowledge; no check required during the 4-minute patrol window
- **Tree line:** provides concealment from the compound interior; DC 11 Stealth to use as cover approaching

Interior

- **Parade ground:** 60-foot-wide open area, completely exposed; the Hezrou's preferred space, but the least defensible
- **Barracks:** 40 feet west; holds 4-8 Merregons depending on rotation
- **The Keep:** 30 feet north of the parade ground; two-story stone, ground floor administrative, second floor the Hezrou's quarters and trophy display
- **Trophy building:** 20 feet east of the Keep;

single story, barred windows, padlocked exterior door (DC 14 Thieves' Tools)

The Merregon Loyalty Detail

10 Merregons total:

- 2 at the gate
- 2 on fence patrol
- 2 on the parade ground as the Hezrou's forward cordon
- 4 in the barracks.

During dawn inspection, all 10 are present on the parade ground by the inspection's third minute. The Hezrou has never noticed this creates a window where the barracks are unoccupied.

Sub-Contract Anchor Point

First floor of the Keep, east wing, administrative room. A locked document case (DC 14 Thieves' Tools) holds the Hezrou's sub-contract authority form: a single page of Infernal text bearing the Rakshasa's seal and the Council's former endorsement stamp. Delivering an executed void form to within 10 feet of this document executes the void.

The Encounter

The compound navigation is a stealth-and-decision challenge, not a formal skill challenge. Ask the party what they do; rolls emerge from specific choices.

Patrol Timing

If the party scouted the approach, they know the fence patrol gap and the inspection schedule. Each piece of advance intelligence removes one potential complication from the compound approach.

The Dawn Inspection Window

During the inspection, the Hezrou is on the parade ground, occupied with his speech. He delivers variations of the same speech; the Merregons do not respond; he does not notice. The barracks are empty. The Keep's ground floor is unoccupied except for one administrative Merregon at the duty desk.

The inspection lasts 8 minutes. The party has this window to reach the Keep's administrative room, the trophy building, or the parade ground perimeter before the inspection ends and the Merregons disperse to patrol.

The Trophy Building

If the party investigates the trophy building before engaging the Hezrou: the padlock opens to DC 14 Thieves' Tools. Inside is a 30-foot space that is half filing archive and half something else. Six large cages line the east wall. Five are empty. One holds three people: two adults and a child. They are alive. They are not prisoners from the garrison lists. They are from the Hezrou's personal detention roster, people he took without regime authorization because he wanted to and no one stopped him. The ration line from the ledger was for them.

This is not a trap. He simply has a private holding facility that the Rakshasa does not know about, because the Rakshasa does not care about his operational details. He has been detaining people for personal reasons and no one has checked.

The three prisoners can be freed. They cannot be extracted until after the Hezrou is dealt with. If the party tells Mira about them during extraction, the information about unauthorized private detention is actionable intelligence against the Hezrou's standing in the regime, after the fact, but useful as testimony.

Sub-Contract Disruption

If the party executes a void form at the administrative anchor before engaging the Hezrou: on initiative count 20 of the first combat round, the Hezrou's 2 Merregon forward cordon must make a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, they become Confused for 1 round. On a failure by 5 or more, they immediately withdraw from the engagement. The Hezrou does not notice for one round that his cordon is gone. He continues advancing.

What the Party Can Do

Use the Inspection Window

The 8-minute gap allows the party to reach the administrative room, the trophy building, or a position flanking the parade ground before the Hezrou finishes his speech. Position is everything in this encounter. Let the party earn it by moving smart.

Observe the Speech

A DC 11 Perception check from the tree line lets the party hear the inspection speech. It is about loyalty, vigilance, and the importance of reporting suspicious activity. He uses the

phrase "according to my very detailed and comprehensive intelligence" at least twice. There is no intelligence. He received no intelligence. This is his standard speech. DC 13 Insight confirms he gives it every morning without variation.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

The inspection runs long today. The Hezrou lost his place in the speech and started over. The window is 12 minutes instead of 8.

Making it Harder

One of the Merregon fence patrol units is running a non-standard route today. It is not an intentional security upgrade; one of the patrol Merregons malfunctioned in a minor way and its route has been slightly randomized. The east fence gap timing is unreliable.

Increasing Role Play

If the party can hear the inspection speech, let them hear the Merregons not respond. Eight faceless helmets facing forward in perfect synchrony while a large toad creature with too-small ceremonial armor explains his commitment to excellence. The specific quality of silence that constitutes being unable to feel contempt.

Treasure and Rewards

Freed Prisoners

- Three freed prisoners from the trophy building (narrative; their existence as unauthorized detainees is usable testimony)

Administrative room documents

- Loyalty purge orders from the past 18 months (DC 13 Investigation to extract the relevant ones in 5 minutes; these list every unauthorized purge the Hezrou conducted independently, with his personal sigil)
-

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Sub-contract disrupted before engagement	0	0	-1
Trophy building prisoners discovered	0	0	0
Compound entered without alarm	0	0	0
Fence breach detected by patrol	0	+1	0

SCENE 3:

THE PORTRAITS

This scene occurs during compound navigation, either immediately before the confrontation or as the party moves through the Keep. It is atmospheric and short, half a scene rather than a full one. It exists to make the Hezrou comprehensible before the party fights him.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The Keep's interior hallway has seven portraits. You count them before you realize you are counting them, because they demand to be counted.

The first four are formal and reasonably proportioned. The Hezrou stands with three Merregons in the garrison courtyard. His sigil is visible on his armor. He looks like what he is: a regime official at a posting that gives him authority he probably should not have.

The fifth portrait is larger. He is standing closer to the Goristro. They are approximately the same height, which is not accurate.

The sixth portrait has no Merregons. It is just him, in what appears to be a pose that was described to the artist verbally and interpreted with varying degrees of charity.

The seventh portrait is at the end of the hall, directly opposite the door to his chambers. In it, the Goristro is slightly shorter than the Hezrou.

There is an eighth portrait in the chamber beyond. You can see the edge of it from here.

Features of the Area

The Hall

The portraits are lit by permanent light spells. The frames are gilded. Someone polishes them regularly. Not the Merregons; their contracts do not include this function. The Hezrou polishes them himself. This is not stated anywhere. It does not need to be.

The Trophy Room

If the party enters the second-floor display room: twelve additional plaques, seals, and decorative items line the walls, each labeled in the Hezrou's handwriting. Most of them are

items taken from people he detained. A few are from places and events that, on examination, he was not present at. DC 12 History to identify the inaccuracies; DC 10 to notice that the items' condition does not match their claimed age.

The Encounter

No encounter in this scene. No checks required. Just allow the party to react.

What the Party Can Do

Use the Portrait Evidence

In Scene 4, a party member who points to the portrait discrepancy during the confrontation, specifically the Goristro's diminished height, may use it as an Outmaneuver action. The Hezrou must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or become Enraged in the wrong direction: he charges toward the portrait wall rather than the nearest enemy and takes his move action destroying the seventh portrait. He then recalibrates and charges the correct target, but he has wasted his movement.

Read the Trophy Room Inaccuracies

If identified, these can be used in Outmaneuver attempts as well. Publicly calling out a false trophy or a claimed medal from an engagement he was not present at triggers an Outmaneuver-adjacent reaction: the Hezrou must make a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or waste his bonus action bellowing at the accuser rather than using Intimidating Presence or Merregon Orders.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

The seventh portrait hangs directly across from the Keep entrance. The party cannot miss it. No Perception check required to notice the height discrepancy.

Making it Harder

The Hezrou is in the second-floor trophy room reviewing his collection when the party enters. He hears them from above. Scene 4 begins earlier than planned; he charges down the stairs at the end of Scene 3 rather than being found on the parade ground.

Increasing Role Play

Let the party have a moment with the portraits that is just theirs. Joran, if present, would stand in front of the seventh portrait for a long time without saying anything. He is the kind of person who understands what it means when someone needs to make themselves bigger than everything else.

Treasure and Rewards

No direct mechanical rewards. The portrait evidence is usable in Scene 4 as described.

Development and Dial Impact

No dial changes from this scene.

SCENE 4:

THE INVESTIGATOR

The confrontation with the Hezrou. This encounter is designed to reward tactical intelligence over raw damage output, but it does not penalize a party that chooses to fight straight; it simply means they fight a harder version of the encounter.

Read or paraphrase the following:

He sees you before he finishes his turn. The inspection is still in progress, three Merregons standing at attention, the other seven having dispersed to their posts, and he looks at you from across the parade ground with an expression that cycles through confusion, outrage, and something that is probably delight in about four seconds.

"You," he says. The word carries more weight than it should, because he delivers it with the full force of someone who has been waiting his entire career for a moment exactly like this one and is slightly alarmed that it has actually arrived.

He points at you. Then he points at the Merregons. Then he points at you again.

"Bring them."

Features of the Area

The Parade Ground

70 feet wide, 50 feet deep, completely open. Stone-paved. The Hezrou's banner flies from a pole at the north end: his personal sigil, not the Goristro's. There is a DC 11 Perception check to notice the distinction.

The Keep wall to the north has three portrait-facing windows. The portrait of the Goristro at diminished height is visible through the center one.

Merregon Loyalty Detail

At the time of confrontation: 2 Merregons serve as a forward cordon on the parade ground. If the alarm is raised, 2 additional Merregons arrive from the barracks at the start of Round 3. Any further Merregons are occupied elsewhere in the compound and will not join the fight unless the combat extends past 10 rounds.

The Hezrou uses Merregon Orders aggressively in the first two rounds to push the forward cordon toward the party while he approaches from behind them.

The Stench Aura

10-foot radius. Remind the party about it before the encounter rather than during. If the party read the stat block from the Regime Compendium, they know. If they did not, the first creature to start its turn within range will know very quickly.

The Encounter

The Hezrou is CR 8 with Merregon support. For a 7th-level party of 4-5, this is a Hard encounter that approaches Deadly with the full Merregon contingent engaged. The Outmaneuver mechanic dramatically adjusts the encounter difficulty. A party that never uses Outmaneuver fights a Deadly encounter. A party that uses it consistently fights a Hard encounter that trends toward Medium. This should be communicated through play, not meta gaming: the Hezrou's Loyalty Theater trait fires on the first round, granting advantage on his first attack and first Intimidation check. Then he takes damage from the party. Then he loses Loyalty Theater. The shift in his tactical behavior when he is no longer invincible in his own estimation is visible and significant.

Combat Round 1

The Hezrou uses Merregon Orders as a bonus action: one forward cordon Merregon advances to the nearest party member. The Hezrou advances toward the nearest visible target, using Loyalty Charge if he can move in a straight line toward at least 3 creatures. He uses Intimidating Presence as a bonus action if Loyalty Charge is not available. The party has the initiative window to use Outmaneuver or establish positioning before the charge resolves.

Round 2

If a party member used Outmaneuver successfully in Round 1: the Hezrou either charged the wrong target, wasted his movement, or berated a Merregon. He loses Loyalty Theater if he has not already. He is Enraged on his next turn if Outmaneuver failed.

If Outmaneuver failed in Round 1: he is Enraged and has advantage on his next attack. He targets whoever attempted Outmaneuver.

Round 3

Merregon reinforcements arrive from the barracks if a signal was given. If the sub-contract was disrupted, the forward cordon Merregons may already be gone. The Hezrou is at or below half HP if the party has been dealing consistent damage. Enrage triggers.

Round 4+

Enraged Hezrou is a more dangerous opponent but a less tactically coherent one. He cannot use Merregon Orders while Enraged. His Merregons now act independently, which means they revert to standard Subdue Protocol. The Hezrou and his Merregon support are now fighting at cross-purposes: he is trying to kill, they are trying to subdue.

This creates openings.

Outmaneuver Tactics (for DM Reference)

Let players be creative. The following are examples of valid Outmaneuver attempts, not an exhaustive list:

- Pointing to the seventh portrait mid-fight and saying something specific about the Goristro's height (triggers the portrait response described in Scene 3)
- Addressing him by a title lower than his claimed rank, such as Commander instead of High Investigator, or simply calling him "the guard"; this requires DC 13 Deception and is worth playing for the reaction regardless of mechanical outcome
- Producing the purge orders from the administrative room and reading names from them aloud (forces a DC 13 Wisdom save or he charges toward the party member reading them, triggering Outmaneuver's misdirection effect)
- Claiming the Goristro sent the party specifically to audit his operations (DC 14 Deception; on success, the Hezrou hesitates for one full round, ending his turn without taking action as the Survival Calculation begins processing; on failure, he is Enraged)

The Killing Blow and Its Absence

The Hezrou does not offer surrender. He has no Institutional Withdrawal equivalent. When reduced to 0 HP, he simply falls.

However, if the party has used Outmaneuver at least twice successfully and the Hezrou is

reduced below 25 HP, run the following:

His last charge carries him into the Keep wall. He bounces off. He looks at the portrait through the window, the one where the Goristro is shorter than him, and then he looks at the party.

For one moment, something moves across his face that is not quite the expression of a creature that has ever examined itself. It is more the expression of a creature that has just, for the first time, been made to feel what everyone around it has always felt about it.

Then he charges again. He does not stop until he is dead or the party puts him down.

There is no redemption here. But there is a moment of recognition that should be played honestly and not for comedy.

What the Party Can Do

Fight Straight

Valid, harder, winnable. The Merregon cordon is the main challenge. The stench aura is an ongoing pressure. Loyalty Charge can knock multiple party members prone simultaneously. A party that fights straight is fighting a difficult but fair encounter at their level.

Exploit Outmaneuver Consistently

The optimal approach. Three successful Outmaneuver uses across the encounter effectively reduce the Hezrou's action economy by 30-40% and produce the encounter that was designed for the level. The DC is 13. It is achievable. Reward parties that build a pattern of use.

Use the Sub-Contract Void

Removes the forward cordon before the fight. The Hezrou does not immediately notice. By the time he reaches for Merregon Orders on Round 1, the Merregons are already gone. He uses the action anyway, bellowing at empty space. The party should see this.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

Start the encounter without the barracks reinforcements available. The alarm system has been broken for three weeks. The Hezrou has been told about it. Nothing has happened. Only the 2 forward cordon Merregons are engaged.

Making it Harder

The Hezrou received recent intelligence, not about the party specifically, but enough to know that something is happening in the city. He begins the encounter with 2 additional Merregons already positioned at the Keep entrance, making his total forward force 4.

Increasing Role Play

Let the party see Blame Downward fire in real combat conditions. The moment a Merregon takes a hit that was clearly aimed at the Hezrou, have him point at it and declare it responsible in front of the entire remaining force. The Merregon complies without comment. This is the mechanical trait but it is also everything anyone needs to know about what kind of commander he is.

Treasure and Rewards

From the Hezrou's Body

- Loyalty Investigator's signet (his personal sigil stamp; authenticates detention orders with his authority; usable to revoke, redirect, or countermand existing purge orders for 1d4+1 days before the regime invalidates it)
- Personal correspondence from the Goristro (3 letters, handwritten; confirm direct authorization for the loyalty purges; admissible as legal evidence)
- 200 gp in assorted coin and confiscated valuables he never logged

From the Administrative Room (if not yet retrieved)

- 18 months of purge orders bearing his sigil
- Names of informants the Hezrou used (double-edged: usable to identify regime collaborators, but some of them were coerced; the party must decide what to do with the list)

From the Trophy Building:

- Three freed prisoners (their testimony about unauthorized private detention is usable before restored courts)

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Hezrou defeated	+1	+1	-1
Purge orders recovered	+1	0	-1
Prisoners freed from trophy building	+1	0	0
Informant list used against collaborators	-1	0	-1
Informant list suppressed	+1	0	0
Loyalty Theater visibly failed in front of Merregons	0	0	-1

SCENE 5: THE FALLOUT

The Hezrou is down. The compound is now a question.

The sub-contract ran through the Hezrou's delegated authority. That authority is now void. The Merregons bound specifically to his investigation apparatus must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or become Confused for 1 round as their scripted directives conflict.

On a failed save by 5 or more, they immediately disengage and withdraw from the compound.

The Merregons from the main Rakshasa garrison contracts are unaffected but have no current orders here.

In the Keep, the eleven portraits that remain are now simply paint on wood.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The Merregons that remain do not immediately attack. The Hezrou's forward cordon is either gone, confused, or standing over his body without instructions. The barracks Merregons are waiting at the parade ground entrance for an order that is not coming.

Features of the Area

Compound State

Assuming no full alarm was raised: 4-6 Merregons present, 2-4 of which are sub-contract bound and potentially disengaging. 2 are Rakshasa-contract Merregons with no specific directive here.

The Loyal Detail's Confusion

Merregons operating under the sub-contract are, for the first time, without instructions. Run this exactly as the Millgate void from the Interlude: some of them leave, some of them stand in place, some of them simply sit down on the parade ground. The party has seen this before. It does not make it less strange.

The Documents

The administrative room holds everything the party needs for the Hezrou's chapter to become useful intelligence for Chapter 10 (Nycaloth) and Chapter 12 (Hierophant). The Rakshasa's

ledger cross-referenced with the purge orders reveals a resource reallocation toward the Nycaloth's direction over the last three months: supplies, prisoner labor, and something listed only as "talent acquisition." This is flagged by Lyra when the party returns and adds a marker to her map north of the city.

The Encounter

The remaining Rakshasa-contract Merregons are not attacking. They are not allied with the party. They are waiting. If the party moves to extract without engaging them, they do not follow. If the party attempts to destroy the compound or remove significant items, one Merregon attempts to physically block the action, not to fight, but to enforce property preservation protocols in its contract. This is exploitable: the party can produce any document that claims authorization to remove property, the void form, the purge orders, or the Hezrou's signet stamp. DC 12 Deception with any of these is sufficient to satisfy the Merregon's requirement.

Extraction

Tam has wagons positioned on the road, same as every other chapter. Three freed prisoners, whatever documents the party took, and however many party members are still standing.

The Kenku's broadcast, when it arrives, calls the Hezrou's death an "attack on the Ministry of National Loyalty by violent extremists." It does not use the party's names. It uses descriptions. The descriptions are accurate. She was given accurate descriptions.

The Loyalty Bureau behind them has no flag flying. The Hezrou's personal sigil banner has fallen. It was tied to the pole with a single knot that he tied himself, the morning of every inspection, and it was not made to outlast him.

What the Party Can Do

Extract Cleanly

Move out before the Rakshasa-contract Merregons receive new orders. The window is approximately 20 minutes before a district signal carries news of the Hezrou's fate.

Destroy the Compound

Possible but not recommended by Mira. The physical compound has limited strategic value. Burning it draws significant attention and produces an increase to Heat.

Approach the Disengaged Merregions

A creative party may attempt contact with a Merregion that has disengaged from its contract. This creature has no directives, no orders, and by the terms of its infernal contract no longer owes service. It is not immediately cooperative, but it is not hostile. DC 17 Persuasion to establish basic communication with a recently freed Merregion. On a success, it provides one piece of operational intelligence from the garrison interior. This is not a reliable tactic. It is a possible one.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

All Merregions remaining are sub-contract bound and all fail their Wisdom saving throws. The compound is empty when the party begins extraction.

Making it Harder

A Rakshasa-contract patrol from the nearest regional garrison was routing through the Loyalty Bureau when the confrontation began. They are not hostile to the party yet, as they have no specific orders regarding the party, but they are present, their contracts are valid, and they will enforce whatever the Rakshasa's standing orders specify if given a reason to.

Increasing Role Play

If the party looks back at the compound as they leave, describe the seventh portrait through the window one more time. The Goristro, painted shorter than the creature he commands. No one will polish that frame again.

Treasure and Rewards

Reward

All rewards were discovered in Scene 4.

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Clean extraction (no engagements)	0	0	0
Compound is destroyed	+1	+2	0
Disengaged Merregion provides intelligence	0	0	-1
Broadcast airs with accurate party descriptions	0	+1	0

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

What the Party Should Know

- The loyalty investigation apparatus is dismantled. The Hezrou's sub-contracts are void. His purge orders are in the resistance's hands. The independent detention pipeline that fed private prisoners to his compound is gone.
- The informant list is a problem with no clean answer. Every name on it is someone who fed names to the Hezrou. Some of those people were coerced, some opportunistic, some true believers. The party has to decide what to do with it. Mira will not make that call for them.
- The Nycaloth has been receiving resource reallocations from the Hezrou's budget for three months. The ledger's cross-reference places this in the context of "talent acquisition." Whatever the Nycaloth is building to the north, it has been funded by the loyalty investigation apparatus that no longer exists.
- Project Provenance appears again. Two of the names on the Hezrou's independent purge list are also names in the Council session minutes from Chapter 6, listed as under administrative review. A DC 14 Investigation check to connect these confirms: some of the Hezrou's unauthorized detainees were selected against criteria that match the Project Provenance symbol. He was selecting for something. He did not know what.
- The Hezrou's personal correspondence confirms the Goristro authorized the loyalty purges directly. Combined with the Mezzoloth's testimony from Chapter 6, the legal case against the Goristro is building.

Character Advancement

8th level reached.

Downtime (Optional)

- Process the informant list (DC 13 Insight check per name to assess degree of coercion; time-consuming but produces a more nuanced set of decisions)
- Use the Loyalty Investigator's signet to issue countermanding detention orders (each use revokes one outstanding purge order and potentially redirects a Merregon patrol; the signet's validity window is 1d4+1 days)

- Research the Nycaloth's resource reallocation (DC 13 Investigation; confirms the supplies were routed to a northern compound; reveals a building project of unclear purpose)
- Deliver the Goristro's personal correspondence to resistance legal contacts (builds the evidence record for Chapter 13's court restoration)

Future Hooks

- The informant list and what the party does with it will resurface. Names on that list live in the city. Some of them are frightened people who made terrible choices. Some of them are not. The party carries that list into Act II's later chapters.
- The Nycaloth's resource reallocation and "talent acquisition": what has he been building, and with whom?
- Project Provenance is no longer two words on a garrison document. It has a selection criterion. It has names. The shape is becoming clearer. It is not a pleasant shape.

Lead-in to the Next Chapter

Lyra adds a new marker to the map: west of Oren, where the Fomorian's compound sits.

Read or paraphrase the following:

"The Ministry of New Truths," Mira says. She does not say it the way she says most things, with the flat pragmatism of someone solving a problem. She says it the way you say the name of something you have been dreading.

"He is not like the others. He does not know he is lying. That is what makes the building feel the way it does from outside. The walls do not lie because they are ordered to. They lie because whatever is inside them genuinely believes."
She marks the route west.

"The world bends toward him when he is present. Tam came back from a reconnaissance pass last month and spent two days certain that something he knew to be true was wrong. He could not say what."

She pauses.

"He eventually remembered. But it took two days."

"We go west next. And we bring someone who can hold onto what they know when everything around them is trying to take it."

Considerations

If the party used the informant list, NPC attitudes across Oren will shift subtly in the next chapter. Some regime-adjacent functionaries who were on the list will be noticeably more cooperative. Others, who were named by the party as collaborators and have been quietly removed from their positions, will be absent from places where they previously appeared. Mira does not comment on this.

If the party suppressed the informant list, Tam quietly asks why (once), and accepts the party's answer without further comment.

Chapter 9 The Minister of New Truths



"He is not performing madness. He does not know what performance means. He knows what truth means, and he knows the truth, and the truth is exactly what he says it is, and the walls agree with him."

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 9 takes the party west of Oren to the Ministry of New Truths, a compound that has been reality-warped by three years of the Fomorian's presence into something that does not quite obey the same rules as the land around it. The approaches feel wrong before anything specific happens. Colors are slightly off. Sounds arrive from the wrong direction. Distances are difficult to judge.

This is not a haunting. It is not an illusion. It is the specific environmental effect of a cursed giant who genuinely believes impossible things with complete conviction, and whose proximity to any space for long enough bends that space toward his certainty.

The Fomorian is CR 8 with expanded traits that push him toward CR 9-10 in this encounter. He

is physically formidable, his Evil Eye produces cascading madness effects that can rapidly destabilize the party, and his New Truth Proclamation and legendary actions make him a genuine threat in extended combat. But he is also, fundamentally, a creature whose Intelligence score is 9 and whose Wisdom score is 6, modified upward from base but still reflecting someone whose grip on external reality is not operational.

He can be defeated. He can be disrupted through Delusional Certainty. He can be made to fight himself, or more precisely to fight his environment, through carefully timed agreement with his delusions. What he cannot be is reasoned with, converted, or turned. There is no Institutional Withdrawal here. There is no deal available. He will die certain he was right, and he will die confused about what "right" means.

The chapter is built around two challenges that run simultaneously: the reality distortion of the compound, which makes reliable knowledge unstable, and the Fomorian's combat mechanics, which make reliable tactics unstable. A party that addresses both is fighting

the encounter that was designed for them. A party that ignores the reality distortion will find themselves at an increasing disadvantage as the fight extends.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Scene 1: What We Know Points West

Preparation and approach. The intelligence on the Fomorian is better than expected, as several of his former acolytes are now with the resistance, but the compound itself defies standard reconnaissance.

Scene 1 should feel sobering and oddly funny, as the intel briefing makes the Fomorian sound both absurd and genuinely dangerous in equal measure.

Scene 2: The Distortion Begins

The approach to the compound and entry. Reality bends here before the gates, and the party must learn to navigate instability before they face its source.

Scene 2 should feel disorienting and cumulative, as each small wrongness is individually manageable but the sum of them is a specific kind of pressure.

Scene 3: The Ministry of New Truths

Moving through the compound interior. The warped architecture, the Believers, and the specific psychological geography of a place built around total delusional certainty.

Scene 3 should feel like walking through someone else's conviction, uncomfortable, internally consistent, and completely wrong.

Scene 4: The Minister

The confrontation. A volatile, high-variance encounter built around the tension between the Fomorian's genuine power and his fundamental cognitive limitations.

Scene 4 should feel dangerous and slightly surreal, as the Evil Eye's madness effects and the Unpredictable Movement trait mean this encounter does not resolve the same way twice.

Scene 5: After the New Truth

Extracting from the compound as the reality distortion begins to clear and dealing with the Believers who remain.

Scene 5 should feel like surfacing, as the air clears, sounds arrive from the right directions, and what the party knows is reliable again.

RUNNING THE CHAPTER

Designed for: 8th-level characters

Sessions: 2-3

Advancement: Reach 9th level at end

This chapter is the most mechanically unusual encounter in Act II. The Fomorian's expanded stat block includes traits designed to produce high variance, specifically Unpredictable Movement, the Short-Term Madness table option, and New Truth Proclamation, alongside the environmental reality distortion, which creates disadvantage on specific checks before combat even begins.

The primary goals are:

- Deliver a genuinely disorienting encounter that rewards the party's ability to adapt rather than plan
- Use the Believers as a moral complication that does not have a clean answer
- Establish that the Fomorian's damage to Orenthis was not military but epistemic; he made people uncertain about what was real, and that uncertainty does not clear immediately when he dies
- Introduce the Hierophant's location east of the city through recovered New Truth pamphlets that cross-reference the Cathedral of Gold
- Continue the Project Provenance thread through compound documents

Guidance

The Reality Distortion Is Pre-Combat

The compound's regional effects extend beyond the Fomorian himself. Before the party reaches the Fomorian, they are already subject to a version of his influence. Not at full strength, but enough to be felt. This is not a separate mechanic; it is role-play and narration that builds toward the fight's disorientation.

Calibrate the Madness Table

The stat block explicitly flags that the Short-Term Madness table is high-variance and provides a fixed fallback: Frightened, move away. Make this decision for your table before the session, not during the encounter. If your players enjoy unpredictability, use the table. If tactical consistency matters more, use the fixed effect. The thematic value is identical. The mechanical difference is significant.

The Believers Are Not Enemies

The Cultist Fanatics present in this encounter are people who have been convinced of impossible things by a creature whose Evil Eye literally warps perception. They are dangerous. They are also not agents of the regime in the way that the Merregons are. They do not have contracts. They have beliefs. A party that treats them as obstacles to remove will find them obstacles. A party that treats them as people who have been subjected to reality distortion for months will find more options available.

The Fomorian Talks During the Fight

He talks. Constantly. The New Truth Proclamation is partially mechanical but mostly characterological; he is explaining his discoveries to the party in real time while fighting them. Let him talk. The things he says are wrong in specific, recognizable ways that reflect how propaganda works: repetition, false certainty, the delegitimization of sources that contradict him. The party is fighting a combat encounter and a demonstration of epistemological breakdown simultaneously.

He Does Not Know He Lost

If the party uses Delusional Certainty effectively, agreeing with his New Truths convincingly, the Fomorian will explain to the party at some length why their tactics against him are exactly what he predicted. He is not being sarcastic. He believes this completely. Let it land as both absurd and genuinely sad.

SCENE 1:

WHAT WE KNOW POINTS WEST

This scene occurs in the resistance safe house 1-2 days after Chapter 8's conclusion. The party has better intelligence on the Fomorian than on most other targets because his compound generates defectors: people who believed the New Truths, then stopped believing, and found their way to the resistance in a state of profound disorientation.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The woman who used to believe the New Truths sits across the table from you and does not make eye contact with anyone directly. She has been with the resistance for three weeks. She still sometimes catches herself thinking that something she knows to be true might be wrong, and has to hold very carefully onto the specific memory of learning it.

"I was inside for four months," she says. "I believed it. All of it. I need you to understand that I genuinely believed it, not because I was stupid, not because I was weak, but because when you are near him long enough, truth starts to feel like a choice you are making. And he offers you certainty instead."

She looks at her hands.

"The compound does it before you even see him. The building gets inside your thinking and makes you doubt the things you were most sure about." A pause. "The things you are most sure about are the ones it targets first."

Features of the Area

The Resistance's Intelligence Sources

Three former New Truth adherents are now with the resistance, each recovered at different points in their deprogramming. They can provide the following if asked:

From the woman who recently defected:

- **Compound layout:** outer courtyard, the Pamphlet Hall where he dictates to scribes, the Ministry Chamber where he conducts research, and the Proclamation Platform on the exterior where the broadcasts originate
- **The Believers' hierarchy:** a small inner

circle of 4 Cultist Fanatics who have been there longest; approximately 12 Cultist Fanatics in varying states of conviction; several are clearly uncertain but afraid to leave

- **The Fomorian's schedule:** he sleeps during the day and is most active between dusk and midnight; his Evil Eye fires more frequently when he is tired, meaning after midnight

From an earlier defector, partially recovered:

- **Exterior reality distortions:** begin approximately 200 feet from the compound wall and intensifies toward the center
- **Interior reality distortions:** there are sections of the compound that are more distorted than others; the Ministry Chamber is the worst; the outer courtyard is almost normal
- **The Proclamation Platform:** seems to be the anchor the distortion; it is where the broadcasting equipment is installed and where the Fomorian has spent the most continuous time

From the earliest defector, mostly recovered but still avoiding mirrors:

- **Project Provenance:** mentioned in the Fomorian's pamphlets, not by name but by implication; a series of New Truth proclamations about "scientific validation of natural hierarchies" and "the measurement of capable minds" align with what the party now knows about the Archmage's selection criteria.

The Fomorian does not know he is connected to Project Provenance; he believes his research validates the regime's policies independently; he has never met the Archmage; the connection is ideological, not operational

Lyra's Map

The compound is marked west of Oren, 11 miles by the main road, set back from the road in a location that was originally a civic retreat. The grounds are walled but the walls predate the Fomorian's occupation. They were built for aesthetics.

The distortion radius is marked at approximately 200 feet from the compound wall. Lyra has drawn it as a dotted circle and labeled it: things become less reliable here.

The Encounter

The party discusses possible approaches:

Dawn Entry While He Sleeps

The Fomorian sleeps during daylight hours. The compound runs on his schedule. The inner circle Cultist Fanatics hold study sessions during the day; the outer Cultist Fanatics tend to the grounds. A dawn entry means the Fomorian is likely in the Ministry Chamber at rest and the compound is at its lowest activity state. The reality distortion is still present but the Evil Eye is not active from a sleeping creature.

Dusk Entry at Full Power

The Fomorian is most active after dusk. This is the highest-difficulty approach but also the most information-dense; the party can observe his behavior in the Proclamation Platform's broadcast context, which provides tactical intelligence on how Delusional Certainty is most effectively deployed against someone currently in a state of conviction-performance.

Through the Believers

The party can enter as apparent converts, having studied enough New Truth pamphlet language to pass initial scrutiny. DC 14 Deception to pass a Cultist Fanatic's evaluation; DC 12 if the party has the pamphlets from Chapter 5's compound documents or from the resistance's recovered materials. This approach provides interior access and time to observe before combat.

Sister Kara's Advice

If the party consults her before departing: she has spent three weeks working with the defectors and has specific, practical knowledge about the distortion's effects. She does not have mechanical counters. She has coping strategies.

Read or paraphrase the following:

"The thing the distortion targets is things you are certain about. Not things you know casually, things you have built yourself around." She hands the party member a small wrapped packet of herbs. "It is not magic. It is just sharp. When something starts to feel wrong about what you know, smell this. It brings you back to something physical and present."

She pauses.

"The woman who left after four months, the one who spoke to you, she held onto her daughter's

name. That is what she said. Every time something tried to shift, she said her daughter's name."

Mechanically, party members who have established an anchor, a person's name, a specific memory, a tangible object they trust, have advantage on saving throws against the compound's reality distortion effects during Scene 2 and against the Fomorian's New Truth Proclamation in Scene 4.

This is a role-play mechanic. Ask each player, before Scene 2 begins, what their character's anchor is. Do not skip this. It will come in to play in Scene 4.

Mira's Assessment

Read or paraphrase the following:

"He is not playing games with us. He is not pretending to be insane for advantage. What goes on inside that compound is what he genuinely believes is true, and it has been that way for long enough that the building believes it too."

She does not have a plan to offer. This is unusual.

"This is the one where you trust each other more than you trust what you are seeing. Go in knowing that. Come back knowing the same things you knew when you left."

What the Party Can Do

Establish Anchors

Ask each player what their character's anchor is before leaving. Grant advantage on distortion-related saves throughout the chapter for characters who have one.

Review the Pamphlets

Reading several New Truth pamphlets gives the party advantage on Deception checks to use the Through the Believers approach, and more importantly gives them the language for Delusional Certainty in Scene 4. Knowing what he believes before walking in means knowing what to agree with.

Plan for the Believers

The party needs to decide before they enter what they are going to do about the Believers. Mira does not have a clean answer here either. "Some of them chose this. Some of them were chosen by it." She leaves the distinction to the party.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

The third defector, the one who is mostly recovered, offers to draw a compound map from memory. His memory is not fully reliable; DC 12 Investigation to note which sections are accurate versus distorted by recall. But it is substantially complete.

Making it Harder

The compound's distortion radius has expanded since the defectors left. What was 200 feet is now 350. The distortion begins earlier, and the party may notice it during approach before they expect to.

Increasing Role Play

Let the player anchors be spoken aloud at the table, not just noted privately. The moment in Scene 4 when a player invokes their anchor in the middle of a madness effect needs to have been set up here to land properly.

Treasure and Rewards

No direct rewards. Intelligence and anchor establishment are the mechanical outputs of this scene.

Development and Dial Impact

No dial changes from this scene.

SCENE 2:

THE DISTORTION BEGINS

The party approaches the compound. This scene covers the approach through the distortion radius and entry through or over the compound wall.

Read or paraphrase the following:

It starts before the wall. That is the first thing: before you can see the compound clearly, before the wall is visible as more than a gray line between trees, something about the way distance works stops being reliable. The tree line to your left is 40 feet away. Then it is 60. Then it is 40 again. You did not move.

The colors are wrong in a way you cannot quite specify. Not dramatically wrong. Just slightly. The way something looks when you are not quite sure you are remembering it correctly.

Ahead, the compound wall comes into focus. The banners are the Fomorian's own sigil, not the Goristro's, which is true of every lieutenant's compound but which here seems more pointed. He is not decorated with the regime's authority. He is decorated with his own.

The closer you get, the more that certainty costs you.

Features of the Area

The Distortion Radius (350 to 200 feet)

Read or paraphrase the following on first entry:

Something you were just thinking about is slightly harder to hold onto. Not gone. Just slightly further back than it was. You can reach it if you try. You should probably hold onto the ones that matter.

Mechanically, party members who have not established an anchor must succeed on a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw or have disadvantage on their next Intelligence check. Not saves, skill checks specifically. Characters with anchors make this save with advantage.

Do not describe this as a roll. Describe it as an experience and let players respond. The mechanical effect happens in Scene 3 if it happens at all.

The Distortion Radius (200 to 50 feet)

The compounding increases. Sounds arrive slightly before or after their source is visible. The light falls at wrong angles.

Party members who have not established an anchor must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or have disadvantage on their first saving throw against the Fomorian's New Truth Proclamation in Scene 4, regardless of when that save occurs. Characters with anchors save with advantage.

The Compound Wall

Stone, 12 feet, original construction and not maintained to any military standard.

Multiple entry options:

- **Main gate:** two Cultist Fanatics on exterior watch; DC 14 Deception with New Truth language, DC 12 if the party has pamphlets
- **Scaling:** DC 12 Athletics, DC 10 on the east section where a vine growth provides natural handholds
- **Through the Believers approach:** DC 14 Deception at the main gate, DC 12 with pamphlets, leads to interior access as apparent converts

The Proclamation Platform

Visible from 100 feet outside the wall: a raised stone platform in the outer courtyard where broadcast equipment has been installed. The crystal amplifiers are anchored to the platform. The platform itself radiates the distortion more strongly than the surrounding compound. A DC 14 Arcana check identifies the platform as the anchor point for the environmental effect. Destroying or heavily damaging the platform (AC 13, HP 45) reduces all distortion effects to one tier lower for the remainder of the chapter.

The Encounter

Exterior Watch

Two Cultist Fanatics are on exterior watch during day hours. They are not trained guards. They are true believers performing a function they were assigned because belief includes duty. They will not attack immediately; their response to strangers is to ask questions about what New Truths the strangers accept.

DC 11 Insight reveals they are frightened but performing certainty. They are the most recently converted people in the compound and the ones most susceptible to doubt.

A party that does not use the New Truth approach can create a distraction (DC 11 group Stealth to circle the wall and scale while their attention is drawn) or disable the watch without combat (DC 13 Persuasion from anyone presenting as a refugee seeking truth; DC 15 Intimidation to dissuade pursuit if simply running).

Random Distortion Events

Roll 1d6 on entry through the wall and once during Scene 2 navigation:

1. A party member momentarily cannot recall which direction north is. No mechanical effect but the moment of uncertainty is real and noticed.
2. A party member sees a figure at the far end of the courtyard that is not there when they look directly at it. DC 13 Wisdom save or they waste their movement on their first turn in Scene 3 moving toward it.
3. Sounds from the direction of Oren are clearly audible for a moment, something that should be too far away to hear. One of them is a name. DC 15 Perception to identify whose name.
4. Two party members simultaneously recall the same memory that neither of them has. It fades immediately. No mechanical effect. They both know it happened.
5. A section of the wall the party just climbed looks, from inside, like it was never climbed. The handholds they used are not visible. They are on the correct side. This is confirmed by others. The wall does not care.
6. Nothing happens.

What the Party Can Do

Disable the Proclamation Platform

Destroying the platform reduces distortion effects by one tier throughout the compound. This takes time and is noisy. If done before entry it alerts the compound. If done after entry during navigation it can be achieved as a secondary objective without full alarm if the party is already past the outer courtyard.

Use the Through the Believers Approach

Entering as apparent converts means the distortion is present but the party moves through it with a Cultist Fanatic escort who has been here long enough to navigate it reliably. The Cultist Fanatic's guidance grants the party advantage on the first distortion-related save in Scene 3.

Invoke Anchors

The first time a party member chooses to invoke their anchor, speaking it aloud in character, they immediately end any current distortion effect on themselves. This can be done once per scene.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

The platform has already partially degraded. The Fomorian struck it with his Greatclub during a particularly emphatic proclamation last week and one of the crystal amplifiers is cracked. The Arcana check to identify the anchor point is DC 11, and the platform has only 25 HP remaining.

Making it Harder

The Cultist Fanatic on exterior patrol has been in the compound for eight months and her perceptions are significantly higher. She navigates the distortion radius without any apparent difficulty, which means she can track the party through it at full effectiveness. DC 16 Stealth to avoid her.

Increasing Role Play

Let the random distortion events be described from each affected character's perspective, not from an omniscient narrator. The player describes what their character experiences. This is the scene where the distortion becomes personal, not abstract.

Treasure and Rewards

No direct rewards. Positioned advantage and anchor invocations are the mechanical outputs.

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Proclamation Platform disabled before engagement	0	+1	-1
Clean entry, no alarm	0	0	0
Cult watch alerted but not breached	0	0	0
Full alarm raised on entry	0	+1	0

SCENE 3:

THE MINISTRY OF NEW TRUTHS

The party is inside the compound. This scene covers navigation through the interior toward the Fomorian's location, encountering the compound's architecture, its documents, and its Believers.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The interior of the compound is organized. That is the first thing that surprises you: the visible chaos of contradictory proclamations on every wall, the floor-level chalk diagrams, the stacks of pamphlets in every corner, all of it is organized. It has categories. It has a filing system. It has a logic.

The logic is wrong. But it is consistent. The walls on your left display proclamations about health and nutrition that directly contradict each other, each labeled as "confirmed by Ministry research." The walls on your right display maps of Orenthis with borders that do not correspond to any borders that have ever existed, each labeled with a date that is in the future.

At the far end of the outer courtyard, a Cultist Fanatic is carefully copying a new pamphlet from dictation notes. The dictation notes are in a handwriting that is too large for the page.

Features of the Area

Compound Interior

Outer Courtyard:

Least distorted area. 50 by 60 feet. The Proclamation Platform is here if not already destroyed. Scribes work during the day. 2-4 Cultist Fanatics present during day hours.

Pamphlet Hall:

30 by 40 feet, interior building. Where new proclamations are written, copied, and sorted. DC 13 Investigation to find the Project Provenance adjacent pamphlets while navigating this room.

DC 14 Investigation to find the correspondence with the Hierophant's Cathedral of Gold, referenced obliquely as "the golden house that asks the right questions."

DC 15 Investigation to find a pamphlet series documenting "cognitive resistance mapping"

across Orenthis districts. The methodology described involves tracking which citizens required repeated exposure versus single-exposure compliance. This data structure would be familiar from the Border Garrison's Project Provenance notations.

Ministry Chamber:

The Fomorian's primary working space. 40 by 50 feet with a 25-foot ceiling. This is the most distorted interior space in the compound. All Wisdom saving throws made inside this room are made at disadvantage for characters without anchors. The Fomorian sleeps here during the day if dawn entry was chosen.

Proclamation Archive:

A 20 by 30 feet room holding every pamphlet ever produced. DC 12 Investigation over 10 minutes surfaces evidence of the propaganda network's reach: how many copies of each pamphlet were distributed, to which districts, through which channels. This is actionable intelligence for Act II's later chapters, particularly Chapter 13's court restoration where the scope of information corruption needs to be documented.

The Believers

The compound holds approximately 12 Cultist Fanatics. Their disposition depends on whether the party entered as apparent converts.

If using the Through the Believers approach: the party moves with an escort. Cultist Fanatics assess them; DC 14 Deception to pass a Fanatic's evaluation.

If not using this approach: Believers treat the party as potential enemies. They will not immediately attack, as the compound is not a military installation and attacking visitors is not in their scripted behavior, but they will summon a Cultist Fanatic if the party appears to be searching rather than visiting.

The Uncertain Cultist Fanatics

DC 13 Insight identifies 3-4 Cultist Fanatics who are not fully convinced. They perform certainty but their body language communicates doubt in ways the more devoted members have learned not to notice. These individuals can be reached.

DC 13 Persuasion, not Deception since the approach must be genuine rather than

manipulative, opens a brief, private conversation with a doubting Cultist Fanatic. On a success, they provide one of the following:

- The Fomorian's precise location within the compound at this moment
- A route to the Ministry Chamber that avoids all Cultist Fanatic patrol paths
- The location of a document proving the "research" citations in the pamphlets are fabricated; this document is in the Ministry Chamber under the Fomorian's personal writing desk; it is simply a blank ledger labeled "Source Research Journal" with no entries

The Believers As a Moral Question

The party must navigate through or past the Believers to reach the Fomorian. The Believers are not contracted devils. They are not regime officials. They are people whose perceptions have been altered by proximity to a cursed giant who genuinely believes impossible things.

If combat occurs with Believers before the Fomorian is engaged: apply it accurately. They fight with the ferocity of people defending something they have built their identity around. But keep it legible that they are human.

If the party chooses not to engage Believers in combat: this is achievable with stealth (DC 13 group Stealth to cross the compound without triggering a search) or the conversion approach. Not engaging them is the mechanically and morally cleaner path but it is not the only valid one.

When a Fanatic Doubts in Front of Others

If the party successfully reaches an uncertain Cultist Fanatic and the conversation goes on long enough to become visible: a confident Cultist Fanatic will intervene. This is not combat. It is the compound's social immune system. The confident Fanatic speaks over the uncertain Fanatic, redirects the conversation, and physically positions themselves between the party and the doubting individual.

This is interesting in the way that all information control is interesting: it is extremely obvious once you know what to look for, and extremely invisible until then.

The Encounter

No formal encounter in this scene. If the party triggers a Cultist Fanatic response:

- 2 Cultist Fanatics approach and ask questions: DC 14 Deception, DC 16 without New Truth language, or combat
- Full compound response if alarm is triggered: 5 Cultist Fanatics move as a group and attempt to contain rather than immediately attack

What the Party Can Do

Gather Intelligence from the Pamphlet Hall

The Project Provenance adjacent pamphlets and the Hierophant cross-reference are both available here. Each retrieval is a separate action taking 10 minutes each. The party cannot do both without time pressure unless one party member covers the other.

Find the Blank Research Journal

This item, found in the Ministry Chamber, is the most damaging piece of evidence in the compound: proof that the Ministry of New Truths' research base is entirely fabricated. It has no citations because there were never any sources. This is admissible evidence in a restored court and is worth more as testimony than as a physical object. Described to Lyra, it becomes part of the resistance's documented case.

Recruit a Doubting Cultist Fanatic

Not immediately; the compound is not a safe place for them to defect right now. But establishing contact and providing instructions for how to reach the resistance after the Fomorian is gone sets up a potential post-combat source. These individuals, once the compound's reality distortion clears, may become valuable witnesses.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

One doubting Cultist Fanatic approaches the party proactively. He has been waiting for something to happen for two months and the party's presence is the first external variable in that time. He provides the Ministry Chamber route without requiring a check.

Making it Harder

A Cultist Fanatic has been assigned specifically to watch for visitors who behave like investigators rather than converts. She has developed a very specific set of behavioral cues to look for. DC 16 Deception to pass her evaluation, DC 14 with New Truth language.

Increasing Role Play

In the Pamphlet Hall, let the party see the scribes working. Not under duress; they are copying with what appears to be genuine enthusiasm. One of them is writing in her own margin notes, small annotations that contradict the main text. She has not noticed she is doing it. This is the distortion working in reverse: her underlying knowledge pushing back against the surface belief.

Treasure and Rewards

From the Pamphlet Hall:

- Project Provenance adjacent pamphlets (establishes the ideological connection to the Archmage's selection criteria; DC 13 Investigation to understand the link)
- Reference to the Hierophant's Cathedral of Gold, described as "the golden house that asks the right questions"; partial navigation toward Chapter 12

From the Ministry Chamber

Accessible if the party reaches it before the confrontation:

- The blank research journal (proof of fabricated research; high evidence value)
 - 6 months of broadcast logs (maps the misinformation network's reach; useful for Chapter 13's court restoration)
-

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Party avoids all Believer combat	+1	0	0
Pamphlet Hall intelligence recovered	0	0	-1
Doubting Fanatic successfully reached	+1	0	0
Full compound alarm triggered	0	+1	0
Cultist Fanatic defeated in interior	0	+1	0

SCENE 4:

THE MINISTER

The confrontation with the Fomorian. This is the chapter's combat encounter and its most mechanically demanding scene. The reality distortion is at maximum intensity in the Ministry Chamber, the Evil Eye fires before combat even formally begins, and the Fomorian's absolute certainty makes standard intimidation and persuasion useless while creating specific exploitable vulnerabilities through Delusional Certainty.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The Ministry Chamber is where certainty lives and deforms the space around it.

The walls hold contradictions floor to ceiling: proclamations that assert opposite things about the same subject, each in the same confident script, each labeled as confirmed by Ministry research, each pointing to the blank journal under the desk as its source. The floor is covered in chalk circles, diagrams, equations that resolve to nothing, maps of the body labeled with conditions that do not exist.

At the center of the room, in a chair that was built for someone significantly smaller, the Fomorian is either asleep or so profoundly still that the distinction is unclear.

*He opens one eye.
"I expected you," he says. His voice is conversational, like someone completing a sentence that started a long time ago. "The old truths always send something eventually. To try to silence the new ones." He stands. The chair splinters under the movement. "They never understand that silence is how you know you are right."*

*He looks at the party with genuine curiosity.
"Which ones are you carrying?"*

Features of the Area

The Ministry Chamber

40 by 50 feet, 25-foot ceiling. Completely covered in proclamations. The floor diagrams are difficult terrain; DC 11 Acrobatics to navigate at full speed, and a failure means the creature's speed is halved that turn as they try not to disturb the chalk.

The distortion is at full intensity here. Characters without anchors have disadvantage on all Wisdom saving throws made in this room for the duration of the encounter. Characters with anchors make these saves normally.

Curse of the Evil Eye (Passive)

Before initiative is rolled: any party member who can see the Fomorian must succeed on a DC 13 Charisma saving throw or be subject to Evil Eye. Run this as the room description resolves, before the party takes any action. It fires before anyone speaks.

The First Roll

Let the passive Evil Eye fire before anyone declares an action. Some party members will already be affected when the encounter formally begins. This is intentional and thematic: the Fomorian has been in this room long enough that his gaze precedes his intent.

The Encounter

Initiative and Combat Tone

The Fomorian does not attack immediately. He explains. His opening action is New Truth Proclamation if it has recharged, or a Greatclub attack if it has not. He is not tactically sophisticated but he is not purely reactive either; he will use Lurch legendary actions to close distance and will fire Evil Eye at the party member who appears to be directing the others.

Delusional Certainty in Combat

This is the encounter's central mechanic. To use Delusional Certainty, a party member must use their action to agree with one of the Fomorian's New Truths with performative sincerity (DC 12 Deception).

The key phrase is performative sincerity; the character must appear to genuinely agree, not to mock.

Things the Fomorian believes that can be agreed with:

- That the old truths are manufactured by enemies of the Ministry
- That certain foods cause mind alteration and are being distributed by the resistance; he has specific pamphlets on this
- That the Goristro's success is evidence of his own theories' validity
- That anyone who doubts the New Truths

- has been contaminated by old ones
- That the specific party member speaking is one of his more promising potential converts
- That the research behind any specific pamphlet is sound and confirmed

A successful Delusional Certainty check causes the Fomorian to not target that creature with attacks or Evil Eye until the end of the creature's next turn, and grants the creature advantage on Charisma checks against him.

The Redirect Believer bonus action follows a successful Delusional Certainty: the Fomorian can use his bonus action to point at a different party member and declare them an enemy of the New Truth, forcing the manipulating creature to make a DC 13 Charisma save or lose his trust. If this fires, the manipulating creature must succeed on a new Delusional Certainty check before they can attempt it again.

This creates a rhythm: successful manipulation buys one round of safety, Redirect Believer potentially ends it, and the party must alternate who is performing sincerity.

The Madness Table Decision

Run whichever Evil Eye version you decided on in Session Preparation. If using the table: results should be read aloud as the affected character's experience, described by the player if possible. If using the fixed effect of Frightened and move away: the affected character must use their movement to put distance between themselves and the Fomorian on their next turn.

Anchors in Combat

A character who invokes their anchor mid-combat, speaking it aloud in character, immediately ends any current madness effect on themselves and gains advantage on their next Wisdom saving throw against the Fomorian's abilities. This can be done once per scene.

If the Believers Are Present

If the optional Believer encounter is included, 1-2 Cultist Fanatics enter from the Pamphlet Hall at the start of Round 2, arriving to protect the Fomorian. They do not have tactical coordination with him. They simply throw themselves between the party and their Minister. They are not soldiers. They are people

defending something they built their identity around.

Unpredictable Movement

Roll the d6 at the start of each Fomorian turn. On a 1: he stops mid-charge to explain something urgent, his speed halved. On a 6: he moves with sudden conviction, speed 50 feet. On anything else: normal speed. Do not warn the party about this; let it resolve as described behavior, not as a telegraphed mechanic.

Round 1

The Fomorian uses Evil Eye if Curse of the Evil Eye passive has not already produced madness effects on all visible creatures, or New Truth Proclamation if recharged. He targets whoever he perceives as the party's direction-giver.

Round 2

The Fomorian uses Greatclub multi-attack. If a party member used Delusional Certainty successfully in Round 1, the Fomorian does not target them; he moves around them, explaining something to them as he passes on his way to someone else. Redirect Believer fires as a bonus action toward the second most prominent party member.

Round 3

New Truth Proclamation recharges on 5-6. If it fires, all creatures within 30 feet must save. This is the encounter's highest-pressure moment, with multiple simultaneous madness effects in a small space.

Round 4+

If the party has been consistently using Delusional Certainty, the Fomorian is fighting at reduced effectiveness. If they have not, the madness effects are accumulating and the encounter is trending toward its harder version. Both are valid outcomes but they feel meaningfully different.

Vindicated Reaction

When a spell-caster in the party casts a spell that deals damage to the Fomorian: he uses Vindicated as a reaction to point at the caster and declare that this proves everything. All creatures within 30 feet must save (DC 13 Charisma) or have disadvantage on saving throws against Evil Eye until the end of their next turn. This should be run without comment; he is completely sincere in declaring that being hit by a fireball confirms his thesis.

Righteous Stumble

When the Fomorian would be knocked prone: he stumbles forward instead, potentially knocking an adjacent creature prone. This is both a significant defensive trait and a characterological one; he cannot fall. Not in any sense. Play it without irony.

The End

The Fomorian does not surrender. He does not have a deal available. If reduced to 0 HP, he falls. His final words, if any, should be declarative rather than defeated; he is still explaining something as he goes down. What he is explaining is wrong. He believes it completely.

If the party has successfully used Delusional Certainty three or more times during the encounter, the Fomorian's last action is not an attack. He turns to the party member most recently trusted and says, in a voice that has lost most of its force but none of its certainty:

"You understand. Finally. Someone who understands."

Then he falls.

What the Party Can Do

Use Delusional Certainty Consistently

The optimal approach. DC 12, achievable, produces a more manageable encounter and the narrative payoff described above. Parties that have read the pamphlets have an advantage; they know what he believes and can speak it fluently.

Focus Fire

Legitimate, harder. The Fomorian has 172 HP and regenerates nothing, but his action economy with the Evil Eye and New Truth Proclamation means extended fights produce cascading effects. Focus fire is viable but benefits from a plan for handling madness effects.

Destroy the Proclamation Platform

(If Not Done in Scene 2)

If the party can access the outer courtyard during the fight via a movement action that moves outside the Ministry Chamber, destroying the platform reduces distortion effects by one tier immediately. This is situationally accessible and adds a secondary objective that can change the fight's texture.

Chapter 9

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

The Proclamation Platform was destroyed in Scene 2, removing the passive Curse of the Evil Eye from the Ministry Chamber. All Wisdom saves in the chamber are made without disadvantage. The encounter is notably more manageable.

Making it Harder

The optional Believers are present from the start of Round 1, not Round 2. The Cultist Fanatic leads with hold person targeting the party's most mobile member. The fight opens on three fronts simultaneously.

Increasing Role Play

The Vindicated reaction firing on a damaging spell is worth describing every time. The Fomorian's complete, genuine certainty that being harmed confirms his theories is the encounter's most fully realized characterological moment. Let him be believed in his wrongness. Do not let the party or the table treat it as comedy, because it is not comedy. It is the specific tragedy of someone whose conviction has made them impervious to evidence, and they have caused enormous harm from inside that impenetrability.

Treasure and Rewards

From the Fomorian's Body:

- The Minister's Research Seal (his personal authority stamp for pamphlet distribution; usable to authenticate pamphlets for the propaganda network; usable to distribute counter-messaging or false regime communications for 2-3 chapters before the network identifies the source as compromised)
- 60 gp in confiscated valuables
- Personal proclamation notes (the originals from which all pamphlets are derived; irreplaceable evidence that the research citations were constructed after the conclusions)

From the Ministry Chamber:

- Blank research journal (proof of fabricated methodology)
- Broadcast logs (propaganda network reach map)

From the Pamphlet Hall:

- Project Provenance adjacent pamphlets
 - Hierophant cross-reference
-

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Fomorian defeated	+1	+1	-1
Minister's Research Seal recovered	+1	0	-1
Research journal and broadcast logs recovered	+1	0	0
Believers defeated in combat	0	+1	0
Believers avoided entirely	0	0	0
Doubting Fanatic survived and will defect	+1	0	0

SCENE 5:

AFTER THE NEW TRUTH

The Fomorian is dead. The compound begins to clear.

Read or paraphrase the following:

It takes about ten minutes for the air to start being honest again.

Not all at once. First the distances become reliable; you can tell how far away the wall is and trust the number. Then the light falls correctly. Then sounds arrive from the directions they should arrive from. The chalk diagrams on the floor are still there. The proclamations on the walls are still there. But they are just paper and chalk now, not competing claims on reality.

In the outer courtyard, three Cultist Fanatics are sitting on the ground, looking at each other and at the compound walls, with expressions that suggest they are calculating something they have been prevented from calculating for a long time.

The Cultist Fanatics are not in the courtyard.

Features of the Area

Compound After the Fomorian's Death

The 4 Cultist Fanatics have two possible dispositions:

If the Believers were not engaged in combat: 2 of the 4 have left the compound through the main gate. 2 remain, processing. They are not hostile. They are not rational yet. DC 12 Persuasion to speak with them without triggering a defensive response.

If the Believers were engaged in combat: 1-2 remain depending on casualties. The others fled. Those remaining are frightened and disoriented.

The Cultist Fanatics are processing in real time. The distortion is lifting and the things they were certain about are being re-examined against what they were certain about before. This takes time and it is not comfortable to watch.

The Doubting Cultist Fanatics

If Reached in Scene 3

They are ready to leave now. DC 11 Persuasion to confirm the contact and provide resistance safe house directions. They will not arrive immediately; they need time to compose themselves. But they will arrive.

The Broadcast Network

The Proclamation Platform is either destroyed or still standing. If standing, the party can use the Minister's Research Seal and the platform to send one broadcast under the Fomorian's authority before the network identifies the source as compromised. One broadcast. It can say one thing. Let the party decide what.

The Encounter

No combat in this scene.

If a Cultist Fanatic is still present and the party approaches: DC 12 Persuasion to open a conversation. They are disoriented but not immediately dangerous. A successful check begins a longer process of deprogramming that plays out in the background over subsequent chapters.

Extraction

Tam's wagons are positioned on the road. The drive back to Oren takes 2 hours. During that time, the party members with anchors may notice that invoking their anchors requires less effort now than it did in the compound. The distortion does not follow them. What they know is still what they know.

The Broadcast Decision

If the party uses the Proclamation Platform before leaving, they have one broadcast to send.

Suggested content and mechanical effects:

- *"The Ministry's research is fabricated; all citations in all New Truth pamphlets refer to a blank journal with no entries."*
Effect: High impact on civilian belief in the New Truths propaganda, low operational value.
- *"Internal Ministry alert: all New Truth distribution is suspended pending review."*
Effect: Operationally disrupts the propaganda distribution network for 1d4 chapters before the regime identifies the source.

- *"The Minister of New Truths has been removed from his position by order of the Goristro."*
Effect: Plants confusion within the regime's internal communication structure. Multiple lieutenants will attempt to verify this and receive conflicting responses.
- Something of the party's own design: let them draft it.
Apply effects accordingly.

The Kenku's Replacement Broadcast

Within 4 hours of the party leaving the compound, the regime's replacement voice broadcasts a correction. It calls the Fomorian a martyr. It claims his research is being expanded. It does not mention that the building is now empty.

What the Party Can Do

Use the Platform for One Broadcast

The most consequential single action available in this scene. Let the party deliberate. There is no wrong answer, only different effects.

Approach the Remaining Believers

Not to recruit; they are not ready. But to begin a conversation that acknowledges what they were subjected to without demanding they condemn it immediately. A party that does this is planting seeds in Act II's later chapters when former Believers may resurface.

Retrieve Everything from the Pamphlet Hall

If not done in Scene 3, this is the last opportunity before the compound is sealed by regime forces, approximately 6 hours after the Fomorian's death, at which point a Merregon detail will be sent to assess the situation.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

All Cultist Fanatics have fled before the party exits the Ministry Chamber. The outer courtyard contains only disoriented Cultist Fanatics and no tactical threats.

Making it Harder

A Merregon patrol from the nearest regional garrison has been dispatched to the compound after a long silence from the scheduled broadcast time. They arrive 20 minutes after the Fomorian's death, not 6 hours. The party has that window to extract or confront.

Increasing Role Play

Give the party a moment with the three Cultist Fanatics sitting in the courtyard. Not a conversation about politics or the regime. Just a moment where one of them looks at the walls covered in proclamations and says, to no one specifically: "I wrote half of those." She is not asking for absolution. She is acknowledging it. Let that be enough for now.

Treasure and Rewards

All rewards have been described above. The one-broadcast opportunity is the scene's primary mechanical output.

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
One broadcast sent (Values may vary)	+1	0	0
Doubting Fanatics given resistance contact	+1	0	0
Clean extraction before Merregon patrol	0	0	0
Merregon patrol engaged at compound	0	+1	0
All compound documents recovered	+1	0	0

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

What the Party Should Know

- The Ministry of New Truths is dismantled. The pamphlet distribution network will continue briefly under momentum, but its source is gone, its research is proven fabricated, and its platform is either destroyed or broadcasting counter-regime content.
- The reality distortion does not persist without the Fomorian. People who were subjected to it will take time to recover. Some will recover quickly. Some are carrying certainties that will not fit back through the door of doubt for months. The party saw this in the faces of the Cultist Fanatics in the courtyard.
- The Project Provenance connection is now ideological as well as operational. The Fomorian's "natural hierarchy research" provided the intellectual justification for the Archmage's selection criteria. He did not know he was doing this. The Archmage did.
- The Hierophant's Cathedral of Gold is referenced in the compound's documents as "the golden house that asks the right questions." Chapter 12 is due east.
- The propaganda network's reach has been mapped through the broadcast logs. Lyra can overlay this on the operational map. The network's extent is larger than the party expected.

Character Advancement

9th level reached.

Downtime (Optional)

- Send the compound documents to resistance legal contacts (establishes fabrication evidence for court restoration in Chapter 13)
- Use the Minister's Research Seal for additional counter-messaging (one use per downtime activity; the seal's validity window is 2-3 chapters)
- Follow up with doubting Cultist Fanatics now at the safe house (DC 11 Insight to assess each individual's deprogramming progress; some will be ready to speak to others in their former networks within one chapter)
- Analyze the broadcast network map with Lyra (DC 13 Investigation; identifies which

districts have the highest New Truth penetration; useful for Chapter 13's public restoration strategy)

Future Hooks

- The former Believers who are now with the resistance have knowledge of the propaganda network's internal operation that no one else has. They also have beliefs that are still partially in the process of being examined. They are assets and liabilities simultaneously. Let them be both.
- The Hierophant reference: "the golden house that asks the right questions" is not a neutral description. The Fomorian knew of the Cathedral and its work. The ideological overlap between fabricated research and corrupted faith is the subject of Chapter 12.
- The Archmage's selection criteria and the Fomorian's research: the ideology preceded the policy. Someone designed a belief system that produced specific conclusions about which people were valuable, and then the Archmage implemented those conclusions operationally. Project Provenance is the operational layer on top of an ideological foundation the Fomorian was building for three years without knowing it.

Lead-in to the Next Chapter

Mira marks Chapter 10's target on the map. The Nycaloth's compound north of Oren, with the resource reallocation notations from the recovered documents alongside it.

Read or paraphrase the following:

"He has been spending money that used to flow through the Hezrou's enforcement budget." She taps the ledger notations.

"On what, the documents do not say directly. Talent acquisition. Building materials. Supply lines that do not route through standard garrison logistics."

She looks at the party.

"The Warmaster has been building something north of the city. And the Hezrou's collapse, which he probably does not know about yet, just cut his funding."

She adds the timeline estimate.

"We should get there before he figures that out and pivots to the next source."

Considerations

If the party chose not to broadcast anything from the Proclamation Platform: Mira notes that the window to use the Minister's Seal for counter-messaging is still open. One broadcast can still be sent through distribution channels before the network identifies the seal as unauthorized. This is a downtime action, not a lost opportunity.

If the party interrogated or harmed the Believers in Scene 3: the three Cultist Fanatics sitting in the courtyard in Scene 5 do not look at the party directly. The doubting Cultist Fanatic who was reached in Scene 3, if they survived, finds the resistance safe house in two days but asks, before anything else, what happened to the others. This is not confrontational. It is just what they ask.

If the Proclamation Platform was not destroyed before the encounter: the party has it intact for Scene 5 and the one-broadcast decision is fully available.

If the party never found the blank research journal: the defecting Cultist Fanatics, during their time at the safe house, mention that the Fomorian kept a research journal he was very proud of, and that it was always blank when they saw it. Mira notes it as a missed piece of evidence. It does not disappear from the narrative; it is simply discovered through testimony rather than physical recovery.

Chapter 10 The Warmaster's Last Stand



"He was hired to win wars. He has not won one. He has, however, attended a great many briefings about winning wars, and he has found this to be almost as satisfying."

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 10 takes the party north of Oren to the Studio of War: a military compound the Nycaloth has occupied and decorated with trophies from battles he did not fight and maps of campaigns he did not plan. He is a mercenary of genuine physical capability and genuine strategic mediocrity, a creature who has confused the performance of command with its substance for long enough that the distinction has become difficult for him to locate.

The party arrives expecting a military boss fight. That fight is available if they want it. But the chapter's real confrontation is not with the Nycaloth. It is with a room at the back of the compound that the Nycaloth has been paid to secure and has never looked inside.

Three months of resource reallocation from the Hezrou's budget. Supplies, labor, and something labeled only as "talent acquisition." The party has been following this thread for a while and this is where it becomes a room with people in it, and a name on the door that they have seen before, and the specific horror of understanding what Project Provenance actually does.

The Nycaloth did not design this. He did not select for it. He was paid to provide a secure secondary facility and a perimeter, and he did, and he has been collecting his fee, and he genuinely does not know or care what happens inside. He is a mercenary. The work was legal under the regime's authority. The check cleared. That is, in some ways, worse than if he had cared.

The chapter is built around three questions that resolve in sequence. What has the Nycaloth been building? What is Project Provenance actually doing to the people inside that room? And what does the party do with the Nycaloth once they know the answer to the second question?

The fight, if it happens, is almost an

afterthought. The discovery is the chapter.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Scene 1: A Thread is Pulled

Intelligence analysis and approach planning. The resource reallocation data from Chapter 7 becomes a specific set of questions with answers the party does not yet have. Scene 1 should feel investigative and slightly unsettling, as the data points toward something specific and the specific thing is not a weapons cache.

Scene 2: The Studio of War

Approaching and entering the Nycaloth's compound. He runs a genuinely competent perimeter, which makes this approach meaningfully different from the Hezrou's. Scene 2 should feel tense and methodical, since the Nycaloth is not a fool about security even if he is a fool about most other things.

Scene 3: The Secondary Facility

The chapter's center. The party finds and enters the Project Provenance operation. What they discover there is the Act II revelation that reframes everything they have done since Chapter 1.

Scene 3 should feel like a door opening onto something the party cannot close.

Scene 4: The Warmaster

The confrontation with the Nycaloth. The party now holds evidence of what he has been facilitating. He does not know they have it. That asymmetry is the encounter's most important feature.

Scene 4 should feel volatile but negotiable, as the Nycaloth's Coward's Calculus runs visibly against the party's leverage.

Scene 5: The Road Home

Extracting with the Project Provenance survivors and deciding what the resistance does with what they now know. Scene 5 should feel heavy and purposeful, since what the party carries out of this compound changes the shape of the rest of the campaign.

RUNNING THE CHAPTER

Designed for: 9th-level characters

Sessions: 2-3

Advancement: Reach 10th level at end

This chapter is structured around a discovery that escalates in stages. The party begins with a logistical puzzle, moves through a military infiltration, and arrives at an operation they were not fully prepared to find. The Nycaloth encounter follows from that discovery rather than preceding it, which means the party enters the fight knowing something he does not and with leverage that was not available to them in any previous chapter.

The primary goals are:

- Reveal Project Provenance as a physical, operational program with real people inside it
- Deliver the Act II revelation that connects the Archmage's ideology to the Fomorian's research to the Hezrou's unauthorized selections to this room
- Give the Nycaloth encounter a resolution path built on leverage rather than violence
- Advance the legal case against the Goristro by making Project Provenance documented and witnessed
- Set up the back half of Act II with the party fully understanding what they are fighting

Guidance

The Discovery Is the Chapter

Scene 3 is longer and more emotionally demanding than any single scene in the previous two chapters. Give it room. The party needs time inside the secondary facility to understand what they are looking at, and they need that understanding to land before the Nycaloth confrontation. If time is short, cut from Scene 2, not Scene 3.

The Nycaloth Is Not Villainous, He Just Is Indignant

This distinction matters for how the encounter plays. He did not design Project Provenance. He does not have opinions about it. He was paid to secure a facility and he did. The evil here is systemic and the Nycaloth is a component of it rather than its author. That does not make him innocent. It makes him useful, because a component can be removed without the ideology behind the system being

confronted. He can be paid to leave. He can be scared into leaving. He can be killed. All three are available. The chapter does not recommend one over the others.

The Evidence Changes Everything

The party leaves this compound knowing what Project Provenance does. That knowledge is a weapon, but it is also a weight. The Archmage designed this. The Goristro authorized it. The Fomorian provided the ideological scaffolding without knowing it. The Hezrou was selecting for it without understanding the criteria. Every act of resistance since Chapter 1 has been taking apart the machine from the outside. This chapter is the first time the party sees the machine's purpose from the inside.

Let the Survivors Speak

The people inside the secondary facility are the chapter's most important NPCs. They are not plot devices. They have been inside a program that treats people as research materials, and they have things to say about it. Give at least two of them specific voices and specific details about what they experienced. The party will carry those voices into the back half of Act II.

SCENE 1:

A THREAD IS PULLED

This scene occurs 1-2 days after the conclusion of Chapter 9. Lyra has spent the intervening time cross-referencing the resource reallocation data from the previous chapters against everything the resistance has accumulated so far. She has something to show the party.

Read or paraphrase the following:

Lyra has been at the map table since before anyone else woke up. There are three documents spread in front of her: the Rakshasa's operational ledger, the Hezrou's purge order cross-reference, and a page of her own notations in the precise, slightly anxious hand of someone who has found something she did not expect to find and has been checking it against itself for two hours.

She does not look up when the party enters.

"The Nycaloth has been receiving monthly resource transfers for three months," she says. "Supplies, building materials, and what the ledger calls talent acquisition. I assumed talent acquisition meant soldiers. Skilled fighters the Warmaster was recruiting for something." She sets her pen down. "It does not mean soldiers."

She turns the ledger page toward the party.

"The talent acquisition entries cross-reference a prisoner sorting code I found in the Hezrou's purge records. The code is the same one that appears next to the Project Provenance symbol in the garrison documents from Chapter 1. The Hezrou was selecting people from his detention lists and routing them north. Not to the Rakshasa. Not to a garrison. To the Nycaloth's compound."

She pauses.

"The Nycaloth's compound has a secondary facility that does not appear on any garrison map. It has its own supply line. It has its own staffing notation." She looks at the party. "The staffing notation lists one individual as the facility's administrator. The name is a title, not a person: the Architect's Representative."

She says the last two words the way you say something you have been hoping would mean

something innocuous and have finally accepted does not.

"The Archmage has a representative operating inside the Nycaloth's compound. He has been running something there for at least three months. And the Hezrou was feeding it people."

Features of the Area

The Analysis

Lyra's analysis connects four documents the party has accumulated across four previous chapters. Walk the party through the chain if they ask:

- The garrison documents from Chapter 1 contained the Project Provenance symbol and the phrase "Architect's Requirements" next to seven prisoner notations
- The Contract Halls documents from Chapter 5 included a reference to "Project Provenance administrative review" next to three vacant Council seats
- The Hezrou's purge records showed unauthorized detentions sorted by a code that matched the Chapter 1 symbol
- The Rakshasa's ledger showed the Nycaloth receiving monthly resource transfers labeled "talent acquisition"

Any party member who makes a DC 12 Investigation check while Lyra walks through this can identify the sorting criteria: the selected individuals share three characteristics. They are magic users, or have demonstrated unusual cognitive capability, or belong to species with particular neurological features. The program is not selecting for strength or military value. It is selecting for something the Archmage considers worth studying.

A DC 15 Investigation check identifies a fourth characteristic shared by a subset of the selected individuals: several of them are people who were publicly identified as having resisted regime propaganda. People who held onto accurate information under conditions designed to replace it. People who, in other words, passed a test they did not know they were taking.

The Fomorian's reality distortion was not just propaganda. It was a selection mechanism.

What Henrik Knows About the Studio of War: The former garrison guard has not been to the compound personally but has seen its resource requisitions in transfer records. He can provide:

- **Location:** 14 miles north of Oren on the main trade road, set back from the road behind a genuine military perimeter; the Nycaloth knows how to build a defensible position even if he does not know how to use one
- **Staffing:** 12-16 Merregons in rotating deployment; 4 as exterior perimeter, 4 as interior patrol, 4-8 in barracks
- **The Nycaloth's behavior:** he holds daily tactical briefings that he calls the Morning Assessment; they last 40 minutes and he is in the Studio of War's main hall for all of them; he does not leave the compound for any reason he can delegate
- **The secondary facility:** Henrik did not know it existed until Lyra found it in the ledger; he has no layout information; the supply line for it routes through a separate requisition channel that would have been invisible to standard garrison review

What the Party Does Not Know:

- What Project Provenance is doing to the people inside the secondary facility
- How many people are currently inside
- Whether the Architect's Representative is present or managing remotely
- How the Nycaloth would react if confronted with evidence of what his compound contains

The Encounter

No encounter in this scene.

Mira's Response

Read or paraphrase the following:

Mira reads Lyra's notes twice. She does not say anything for a moment.

"The Fomorian was selecting people who could resist his distortion field and not know it. The Hezrou was routing them north. The Archmage has been studying them."

She sets the notes down.

"We have been dismantling the regime's enforcement apparatus. We have been winning." She looks at the party. "We have not been looking at what the enforcement apparatus was built to protect."

She is quiet for another moment.

"I need to know what is in that building. Before we plan anything else, I need to know what is in that building."

What the Party Can Do

Work Through the Cross-Reference

Parties that engage with the document chain in detail will arrive at the secondary facility in Scene 3 with a framework for understanding what they find. Parties that skim it will arrive without one. Both work, but the discovery lands differently.

Ask About the Sorting Criteria

If the party identifies the selection characteristics, Mira adds one detail: three of the names on the Hezrou's unauthorized detention list that the party recovered in Chapter 7 match the sorting criteria. They have seen these names before. The party has been carrying a list of Project Provenance candidates since Chapter 7 without knowing it.

Plan the Approach

Unlike the Hezrou's compound, the Studio of War has a genuine military perimeter. The party needs a real approach plan. Three options are laid out below. Mira explicitly does not recommend one; she says she does not know enough about what is inside to know which approach protects it best.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

Lyra has already completed the full cross-reference and presents her findings without requiring any Investigation checks from the party. The information is complete and available. The party moves directly to approach planning.

Making it Harder

One of the resource transfer entries is coded differently from the others, using a cypher the Archmage applied to entries he considered sensitive. DC 16 Arcana or DC 17 Investigation to decode it. On a success, the party learns the secondary facility's approximate location within the compound before arrival. On a failure, they do not know where to look until they are inside.

Increasing Role Play

Let Mira name one of the seven prisoners from the Chapter 1 garrison document. Not as a plot point; just a name she recognized from somewhere. A teacher, maybe. Someone who was taken early and whose absence was noticed. She does not explain how she knows the name. She just says it and then moves on to the approach planning.

Treasure and Rewards

Reward

No direct rewards. Lyra's analysis itself is the reward. The party now knows what they are looking for and why it matters.

Development and Dial Impact

No dial changes from this scene.

SCENE 2:

THE STUDIO OF WAR

The party travels north and approaches the compound. Unlike the previous two chapters, the Nycaloth has built a genuinely competent military perimeter. This approach scene earns its difficulty.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The Studio of War sits back from the road on elevated ground, which is the first thing the Nycaloth did right. You can see it from half a mile away: a stone compound with a proper wall, proper watch positions, and proper sightlines covering every obvious approach. The banners are the Nycaloth's personal insignia, a crossed pair of greataxes over a field of gray, but beneath them the perimeter is real. Someone who knows what a defensible position looks like built this one.

The irony is that the person who built it has never had to defend it.

Tam lowers his spyglass.

"Four on the wall. Two at the gate. I count two exterior patrol routes that do not overlap." He marks them on Lyra's map. "The routes cover the north and west approaches. The east is a drainage gully. Not on the patrol schedule."

He marks the gully.

"There is a secondary building inside the compound, set back from the main hall and separated from the barracks. Separate entrance. The supply deliveries go there directly and do not pass through the main administrative post."

He looks at the map for a moment.

"It has its own lock. Different mechanism from the standard garrison hardware. I could not see the detail from this distance but it is not regime-issue."

Features of the Area

The Compound

- **Outer wall:** stone, 14 feet, properly maintained; DC 14 Athletics to scale, DC 12 at the drainage gully on the east side where the wall foundation is lower
- **Main gate:** iron-reinforced, guarded by 2 Merregons; DC 16 Deception to bluff through without military credentials; DC 13 with forged Nycaloth insignia documents

the party can produce using the Loyalty Enforcer's signet from Chapter 7 combined with Lyra's forgery skills

- **Watch positions:** 4 Merregons on the wall with overlapping sightlines on the north and west; the east gully approach has a 6-minute blind window between patrol passes
- **Interior patrol:** 4 Merregons on rotating interior routes; routes are coordinated and the Nycaloth reviews them personally each morning; there are no gaps in the interior coverage except during the Morning Address when all interior Merregons are required to attend as a formation audience

The Morning Address

The Nycaloth holds his daily briefing at dawn, 40 minutes long, in the Studio of War's main hall. During the Address:

- All interior Merregons are in the main hall as formation audience
- The secondary facility's dedicated guard, 1 Merregon, remains at their post
- The wall patrol continues normally
- The compound's interior is effectively unpatrolled for 40 minutes

This is the chapter's primary entry window. A party that identified the Morning Address through the ledger's supply schedule (DC 13 Investigation in Scene 1, or identified by Tam's observation here) has a clean 40-minute window to reach the secondary facility without encountering interior patrols.

The Secondary Facility

A 30 by 40 foot stone building set back from the Studio of War's main hall, separated from the barracks by a 20-foot gap. Features:

- Single exterior entrance with a non-standard lock (DC 17 Thieves' Tools; the mechanism is Archmage-issue, more sophisticated than standard garrison hardware; DC 14 Arcana to understand the mechanism before attempting to pick it, which reduces the Thieves' Tools DC to 14)
- Two barred windows, high on the south wall, not large enough to enter
- No signage
- A secondary supply entrance on the east face (DC 14 Athletics to access; opens from the inside; a supply delivery two days ago left it improperly latched; DC 13 Investigation while approaching from the east to notice the latch)

The Encounter

Approach Options

The Drainage Gully (Recommended):

DC 12 Athletics to enter, DC 11 Stealth to cross the 30-foot exposed ground between the gully exit and the secondary facility's east face during the Morning Address window. The improperly latched supply entrance removes the lock entirely if found.

The Main Gate (High Risk, High Access):

DC 13 Deception with forged credentials provides interior access as apparent military inspectors. The Nycaloth's personal staff will attempt to include the party in the Morning Address, which puts them in the main hall with the Nycaloth before they have reached the secondary facility. This is not a combat trigger; it is a complication that requires the party to sit through 40 minutes of tactical briefing without their cover breaking (DC 12 Deception per 10 minutes; 4 checks total).

Scale the Walls During the Morning Address (Moderate):

DC 14 Athletics on the north wall, DC 12 on the east gully section. Inside, the Address window provides 40 minutes of unpatrolled interior. DC 13 group Stealth to cross from the wall to the secondary facility without being visible from the main hall's windows.

Complications

One complication occurs regardless of approach. Roll 1d4:

1. A supply delivery arrives at the secondary facility's main entrance during the approach, 20 minutes into the Address window. Two civilian contractors with a cart. They knock, wait 3 minutes, and leave when no one answers. The dedicated guard does not open the door for them; they have instructions not to admit anyone without specific authorization. The contractors leave a crate outside the entrance and go. The party can use this as cover (DC 11 Deception to appear to be part of the delivery) or avoid the encounter entirely by holding position for the 3-minute window.
2. The Morning Address runs long today. The Nycaloth has opinions about a tactical diagram he produced yesterday and is explaining those opinions in detail. The window extends to 55 minutes. No mechanical effect; just more time.
3. A Merregon wall patrol passes the east

gully 4 minutes early, cutting the blind window from 6 minutes to 2. The party must move faster or wait for the next pass (DC 14 Stealth to cross in the 2-minute window, DC 11 to wait and cross in the full 6-minute window next pass).

4. The secondary facility's dedicated guard leaves their post briefly to use the latrine at the 20-minute mark of the Address. They are gone for 4 minutes. This is the only time the entrance is completely unguarded. A party that times their approach for this window removes the dedicated guard from the equation entirely.

What the Party Can Do

Use the Address Window

The optimal approach for all three entry methods. The 40-minute window is the chapter's most important logistical feature. Parties that identify and exploit it arrive at the secondary facility without contact. Parties that miss it face interior patrols.

Find the Improperly Latched Supply Entrance

DC 13 Investigation on approach from the east. On a success, the party enters the secondary facility without a lock check. This is the chapter's easiest entry point and should feel like a reward for approaching carefully rather than a guaranteed path.

Use the Morning Address as Cover

The most complex approach. Sitting through the Address as apparent military inspectors provides the deepest interior access and the most information about the Nycaloth's current tactical thinking, but requires sustained Deception checks and ends with the party in the main hall when they need to be at the secondary facility.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

The Address window runs 55 minutes today (complication 2 above applies automatically). The drainage gully approach is uncontested. The improperly latched supply entrance is visible without an Investigation check.

Making it Harder

The Nycaloth added a second dedicated guard to the secondary facility three days ago after a supply discrepancy he could not explain. Two Merregons are now posted at the entrance. The Address window still applies, but approaching the entrance without dealing with both guards requires DC 15 group Stealth.

Increasing Role Play

If the party uses the main gate approach and attends the Morning Address: let them see the Nycaloth in his element. He is presenting a tactical diagram of a campaign he did not participate in. The diagram is technically accurate. His analysis of it is not. The Merregons in formation watch without expression. He asks for questions. No one asks questions. He takes this as confirmation that his analysis was correct.

This is his every morning.

Treasure and Rewards

No direct rewards in this scene.
Gaining entry is the reward.

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Clean entry with no alarm	0	0	0
Entry with complications, resolved quietly	0	0	0
Alarm triggered during approach	0	+1	0
Party attends Morning Address as cover	0	0	0

SCENE 3:

THE SECONDARY FACILITY

The party is inside the secondary facility. This is the chapter's center and its longest scene. What the party finds here is the Act II revelation that the investigation thread has been building toward since the garrison documents in Chapter 1.

Take your time with this scene. It should not be rushed.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The interior of the secondary facility is clean. That is the first thing. After the Hezrou's compound with its trophy building and its smell of mold and self-importance, after the Fomorian's compound with its chalk diagrams and its contradictions, this room is simply clean. Organized. Clinical.

There are twelve workstations along the walls, each with a chair and a restraint harness and a set of instruments you do not immediately recognize. Seven of the workstations have been used recently; the restraint padding shows wear and the instruments on those stations have been cleaned but not stored. Five are untouched.

At the far end of the room, behind a partition that was not part of the original construction, you can hear breathing.

Seven people are on the other side of the partition. They are alive. They are sitting or lying on cots in a space that was allocated for storage and converted without particular care for comfort. They look at you when you come around the partition, and the way they look at you contains several things at once: fear that you are regime, hope that you are not, and something that is harder to name, a kind of careful blankness that people develop when they have learned that showing what they feel produces consequences.

One of them speaks first. Her voice is steady in the way that something is steady after it has been made steady through effort.

"Are you here to take more of us, or are you here for something else?"

Features of the Area

The Main Room

The workstations line the north and south walls.

Each contains:

- A padded chair with restraint points at the wrists, ankles, and head
- A set of instruments the party can examine (DC 13 Arcana or DC 14 Medicine to understand their purpose; see below)
- A logbook attached to the station with a chain (DC 12 Investigation to read; see below)

Between the workstations, three filing cabinets hold the facility's operational records (DC 13 Investigation to identify the most relevant documents; see below).

The Instruments

DC 13 Arcana or DC 14 Medicine: the instruments are designed to measure and stress-test specific cognitive and magical functions. They are not torture devices in the conventional sense. They are diagnostic tools applied to people under conditions that were not consensual. The distinction matters and should not be papered over.

DC 16 Arcana: the instrument design matches theoretical frameworks from the Archmage's published academic work from before the regime, work he produced as a court scholar on the subject of inherent magical aptitude and cognitive resistance to enchantment. He has been using the facility to test and refine those frameworks against real subjects.

The Logbooks

Each logbook is attached to a workstation and records sessions for the individual assigned to that station. The entries are clinical and precise. They record session duration, resistance measurements, applied stimuli, and outcome notations. The outcome notations use a three-tier classification:

- Category A: subjects who demonstrated measurable resistance to cognitive alteration above a specified threshold
- Category B: subjects who demonstrated partial resistance
- Category C: subjects who demonstrated no significant resistance

Category A and B subjects are notated for "continued study." Category C subjects have a single notation: "transferred." The party does not yet know what transferred means. Mira will know, or suspect, when they bring the logbooks back. It is not something that should be explained in this room.

The Operational Records

DC 13 Investigation to identify the most relevant documents in the filing cabinets:

- Subject intake records: names, origins, the sorting code from the Hezrou's purge list, and the date of transfer to the secondary facility; 23 people have passed through this facility in three months; 7 are currently present; 16 have been classified and transferred
- Correspondence from the Architect's Representative: written instructions for session protocols, threshold specifications, and transfer procedures; the correspondence is signed with a title rather than a name, but the writing style and theoretical framework are recognizable to any party member who has read the Archmage's pamphlets recovered from the Fomorian's compound (DC 11 to make the connection); the Architect's Representative is almost certainly the Archmage himself, or someone operating directly under his supervision
- A single letter, separate from the correspondence, addressed to the Nycaloth and bearing the Archmage's personal seal; it authorizes the secondary facility's establishment, confirms the Goristro's awareness of the program, and specifies that the Nycaloth's cooperation is required as a condition of his continued contract with the regime; the Nycaloth did not choose this facility; it was assigned

That last document matters for Scene 4. The Nycaloth was not a voluntary participant. He was coerced by contract. That does not make him innocent, but it changes the leverage available to the party.

DC 17 Investigation to review the supply requisition chain in full:

- A line-item in the secondary facility's operating expenses lists: "Brokerage: Contract facilitation, per standard terms (Dealmaker's Facility)"
No name. No address. No further reference

in these documents. The party may or may not connect this to anything at this stage. Note the detail for later.

The North Wall Door

A door in the north wall of the main room leads to a section the survivors have not accessed. DC 16 Thieves' Tools to open (DC 13 with the Arcana understanding of the mechanism from the main entrance). Inside is a 20 by 20 foot room containing:

- A sending stone on a bracket on the north wall, actively maintained; it connects to a corresponding stone in the Archmage's Heritage Institute; a DC 14 Arcana check confirms it is currently inactive but can be used to send a message or listen for incoming contact
- A record of all 23 subjects who have passed through the facility, with their Category classifications and transfer destinations; Category C subjects were transferred to "Heritage Institute, Sub-Level 3"; this is the Archmage's own facility and the first direct evidence connecting Project Provenance's field operation to its administrative center
- A sealed document bearing the Goristro's personal seal alongside the Archmage's, authorizing the program; this document is the most significant piece of evidence the party has found since the campaign began; it places the Goristro's direct knowledge and approval on a program that has been selecting, studying, and transferring people based on their cognitive characteristics; it is admissible before any court in Orenthis, restored or otherwise

The sending stone is exploitable. The party can use it to listen for the Archmage's next contact, send a false message to the Heritage Institute, or identify the channel's frequency for later use.

The Seven Survivors

The seven people in the holding area are the chapter's most important NPCs. Give at least two of them specific voices.

Senna, the woman who spoke first:

A human woman in her late thirties, formerly a librarian in Oren's civic district. She was taken eight weeks ago. She is Category A; she has been in the facility the longest and has had the most sessions. She is calm in the way of someone who decided, at some point, that calm was the only thing she could protect. She

knows more about the facility's operation than the other survivors because she has been paying attention. She knows the session schedule, the transfer criteria, and the fact that the last three people transferred did not leave through the main entrance. She will share this information if asked directly, without prompting, because she has been waiting for someone to ask.

If the party engages with Senna and succeeds on DC 10 Persuasion to establish basic trust, she provides the following without requiring additional checks:

- **The session schedule:** twice weekly, on a fixed schedule; the next session is in two days
- **The transfer process:** Category C subjects are collected by two Merregons and taken through a door in the north wall that the survivors have not been through; no one has come back; she does not know where it goes but the Merregons who collect them have a different routing document from the ones who run the facility's daily operations
- **The Architect's Representative:** she has seen him twice; he is not the Archmage himself; he is younger, with the specific manner of someone who has been given authority over a project and takes the authority seriously in the way that people take things seriously when the authority is the most significant thing that has ever happened to them; she can describe him in enough detail for Lyra to produce a sketch
- **The north wall door:** it is locked from the outside and the mechanism is different from the main entrance; she does not know what is behind it

Tavin, a young half-elf:
He is Category B. He has been here four weeks. He is not calm. He is barely holding a functional exterior over something that has not been given time to process. He was taken from a neighborhood the Hezrou's purge list never officially touched, which means his selection was either an error or the sorting criteria extend further than the party's cross-reference suggests. He will ask the party, before they ask him anything, whether anyone knows his sister is looking for him. He does not know whether she is. He is asking because he needs there to be a possibility.

The other five survivors should be named and briefly characterized but do not require the same depth. A dwarven clockmaker. An elderly gnomish scribe. A human teenager who does not speak. A tiefling musician. A half-orc scholar whose hands shake consistently. They are real people in a room that treated them as materials. Let that be visible.

The Encounter

No combat in this scene. The facility is unguarded except for the dedicated exterior Merregon (handled in Scene 2).

The encounter is with the room and the people in it. Give the party time. Ask what each character does when they enter. Ask who speaks to the survivors and what they say. Ask who reads the logbooks and what they do with the information.

What the Party Can Do

Speak With Senna

She is the most reliable source of operational intelligence in the facility. DC 10 Persuasion to establish trust; once established, she provides everything she knows without further checks. She will also ask two questions of the party: whether the resistance has the capacity to protect the survivors during extraction, and whether the party intends to come back for the people who were already transferred. The second question does not have a good answer. Let that be true.

Read the Logbooks

The logbooks are evidence. They document what was done to the survivors with clinical precision. A party that reads them will have a different quality of anger going into Scene 4 than a party that does not. That difference should be legible in how the Nycaloth confrontation plays.

Access the North Wall Room

The sending stone and the sealed dual-authorization document are the two most valuable items in the chapter. The document is the Goristro's direct fingerprint on Project Provenance. The sending stone is a communications channel into the Archmage's facility. Both require the Thieves' Tools check to access but the payoff is significant.

Use the Sending Stone

If the party attempts to listen on the channel: DC 14 Arcana to monitor without triggering a response; on a success, they intercept a routine status request from the Heritage Institute asking for the next session's subject count; the party can respond falsely (DC 15 Deception, Arcana as the check modifier since this is magical communication) and buy 1d4+1 days before the Archmage sends someone to investigate the silence. On a failure, the channel activates and the Heritage Institute becomes aware that someone unauthorized is at the sending stone; this accelerates the Chapter 16 timeline.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

The operational records are already sorted by date with the most relevant documents on top; a Lyra-equivalent has been organizing the facility's records obsessively, apparently as a coping mechanism, because one of the survivors is a former archivist who needed something to do. DC 10 Investigation to find the sealed dual-authorization document.

Making it Harder

The north wall room is protected by an additional ward the party did not detect at the main entrance: a glyph of warding that triggers on unauthorized entry (DC 17 Arcana to detect; on trigger, spell save DC 15 or the creature is Stunned until the end of their next turn and the sending stone activates, alerting the Heritage Institute). The glyph can be disarmed with DC 19 Thieves' Tools once detected.

Increasing Role Play

Tavin asks about his sister before the party gets to the investigation. He asks while they are still taking in the room, before anyone has made a decision about anything. Let that land before the party starts reading documents. The documents are important. So is Tavin asking about his sister before any of the documents exist for the party.

Give the party a moment after they finish reading the logbooks. Not a prompt, just a moment. Ask if anyone wants to say something. Some players will. Some will not. Both are responses to the same information.

Treasure and Rewards

From the Logbooks:

- Complete operational record of the facility's three-month operation (highest evidentiary value document recovered this chapter; documents what was done to 23 people by name; admissible before restored courts)

From the Filing Cabinets:

- Subject intake records (names of all 23 subjects; 16 have been transferred; 7 are present; the intake records connect to the Hezrou's sorting criteria and the garrison documents from Chapter 1)
- Correspondence from the Architect's Representative (establishes the Archmage's operational role in Project Provenance; DC 11 to identify his authorship from the Fomorian's pamphlet writing style)

From the North Wall Room (if accessed):

- Sealed dual-authorization document bearing both the Goristro's personal seal and the Archmage's seal (the most significant single piece of legal evidence in the campaign;)
 - Sending stone channel to Heritage Institute Sub-Level 3 (exploitable for intelligence, misdirection, or timeline manipulation of Chapter 16)
 - Transfer destination record connecting 16 Category C subjects to "Heritage Institute, Sub-Level 3"
-

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Seven survivors found and prepared for extraction	+1	0	0
Sealed dual-authorization document recovered	+1	0	-1
Logbooks recovered	+1	0	0
Sending stone used successfully false status report	0	0	-1
Sending stone triggers Heritage Institute alert	0	+1	0

SCENE 4:

THE WARMASTER

The confrontation with the Nycaloth. The party enters this scene having read the logbooks, spoken with the survivors, and possibly recovered the sealed dual-authorization document. They know what the Nycaloth's compound has been facilitating. He does not know they know.

That asymmetry is the encounter's most important feature.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The Morning Address is over. The Merregons have dispersed to their posts. The Studio of War's main hall is empty except for the Nycaloth, who is standing at a campaign map that covers an entire wall, making small adjustments to marker positions with one of his four arms while the other three hang relaxed at his sides.

He hears you before he sees you. His body language does not change.

"Unscheduled visitors," he says, to the map. "In a secured facility." He turns. He is larger than most depictions of Yugoloths suggest and his armor is better maintained than his tactical judgment. He looks at the party with the specific expression of a creature who has been waiting for something to go wrong and is mildly relieved to finally have something concrete to address.

"You are not regime," he says. "You are dressed wrong and you came in through the wrong entrance." He glances toward the east wall. "The gully. I have been meaning to address that." He sounds genuinely annoyed at himself. "So. What are you here for?"

He does not reach for his weapon. Not yet.

Features of the Area

The Studio of War Main Hall

60 by 40 feet. The campaign map covers the entire north wall. Trophy displays line the east and west walls; the trophies are from campaigns the Nycaloth did not participate in, which the party may recognize from the logbooks or from Lyra's briefing. Tactical diagrams on standing frames throughout the

room. A raised command platform at the south end where the Nycaloth conducts the Morning Address.

Exits: main entrance south, service corridor east, a door north that connects to the secondary facility's exterior.

Merregon Contingent

4 Merregons are in the barracks on rotation. They will arrive in 3 rounds if a signal is given. 4 are on exterior wall duty and will arrive in 5 rounds. The dedicated secondary facility Merregon is at their post outside. The Nycaloth has 1 Merregon within immediate call distance in the service corridor; this Merregon appears at the start of Round 2 if combat begins.

The Nycaloth's Tactical Address

He reads the party quickly. He notes their number, their equipment, and the fact that they came in through a blind spot he has been meaning to address. He does not underestimate them. He is not the Hezrou.

His Coward's Calculus is running from the moment he sees them, and he is already doing the math.

The Encounter

Before Initiative

The Nycaloth is willing to talk. He is not stalling; he is genuinely assessing. He asks three questions in sequence if the party does not immediately attack:

- "What are you here for?" He wants to know if this is an assassination attempt, a rescue operation, or something more complicated.
- "How many of you are there?" He is counting exits and response time.
- "Did you go into the back building?" His voice does not change when he asks this. His posture does not change. But the question is specific and he asked it third, not first, which means he has been thinking about it since he turned around.

If the party answers the third question honestly: he does not react visibly. He says "I see" and is quiet for a moment.

Then he says: "I was not given a choice about that building. I want to be clear about that before we discuss anything else."

He is not apologizing. He is establishing a negotiating position.

The Leverage

If the party has recovered the sealed dual-authorization document: they know the Nycaloth was coerced into hosting the facility by contract. They also know the Goristro's seal is on that document, which means the Nycaloth can claim, with some legitimacy, that he was following orders from the highest authority in the regime.

This is leverage in both directions. The party can use the document to threaten him (his contract with the regime required him to host a program that is now documented as crimes against persons; his name is adjacent to that documentation) or to offer him a path out (his coercion is documented; testimony about how the program operated from the inside has legal value; a mercenary with no ideological commitment to the regime has very little reason to go down with it).

The Nycaloth understands both angles the moment the document appears. DC 13 Insight to notice that his posture changes when he sees it; not fear, but a rapid recalibration.

The Three Resolution Paths

Negotiated Withdrawal:

The party offers the Nycaloth a version of the following: his testimony about the secondary facility, his cooperation with the survivors' extraction, and his departure from the compound in exchange for the resistance not pursuing him specifically as the facility's administrator. He is not being offered immunity; he is being offered the specific and limited protection of not being a resistance target. He accepts this more readily than the party might expect. He was never committed to the regime, simply employed by it.

DC 14 Persuasion to initiate the negotiation; DC 12 if the party shows the dual-authorization document and frames it as establishing his coercion; DC 10 if the party additionally notes that the regime he was employed by is actively collapsing around him and the fee he was promised is unlikely to clear.

On a success, he accepts and orders his Merregons to stand down via the garrison-wide signal. The Merregons comply; their contracts run through him.

On a failure, he decides the negotiation is not in his interest and combat begins, but his opening position is Stand Down at one quarter HP rather than fighting to the death.

Combat with Stand Down:

If combat begins, the Nycaloth fights competently but with visible reserve. He uses Tactical Withdrawal aggressively, positions Merregons as a buffer, and avoids taking unnecessary damage. His Coward's Calculus triggers at half HP; at one quarter HP, Stand Down is available to any party member who succeeds on DC 15 Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion).

On a success, he disengages, orders his Merregons to stand down, and invokes a contractual clause. He does not cite fear. He cites operational parameters. He leaves.

The Evidence Gambit:

A party that shows the Nycaloth the logbooks rather than the dual-authorization document gets a different response. He looks at them for a long moment. He says: *"I knew it was a research program. I did not know what the research was."* Whether this is true is impossible to verify. DC 17 Insight to assess; on a success, the party determines he is probably telling the truth about not knowing the specifics but is definitely lying about not having suspected something was wrong. He knew something was wrong. He chose not to look. The distinction matters and the party should be left to decide what to do with it.

If the Nycaloth Fights to the Death:

This is possible but unlikely. He is a mercenary with no cause. A party that gives him no out and fights him to zero HP has removed him from the board. His Merregons, whose contracts run through his authority, must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or immediately disengage as his delegation collapses. Most will fail.

What the Party Can Do

Negotiate from Evidence

The optimal path and the most interesting one. The dual-authorization document changes the Nycaloth's calculus fundamentally; he is coerced, documented, and now facing a resistance that has demonstrably dismantled five of his colleagues in the past several chapters. He is smart enough to do the math.

Use the Logbooks as a Moral Argument

Less effective mechanically but worth attempting for players who want to make the case directly. DC 16 Persuasion with the logbooks as evidence; on a success, the Nycaloth agrees to withdraw but does not offer testimony; he simply leaves and does not contact the regime about the facility's status; this buys the party 48 hours before the Archmage's next check-in reveals the secondary facility is unresponsive.

Fight Straight

Valid, harder, winnable at 9th level. Four Arms and Teleport make him a mobile and difficult opponent. The Merregon contingent is the primary pressure. A party that fights straight without using the evidence is fighting a harder version of an encounter that did not need to be hard.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

The Nycaloth has already begun his own Coward's Calculus before the party arrives; the missing Hezrou funding, the silence from the Mezzoloth's Council office, the absence of regime communication for the past week have all registered as bad signs. He opens the conversation at DC 12 Persuasion for the negotiated withdrawal rather than DC 14.

Making it Harder

The Nycaloth received a communication from the Rakshasa two days ago warning him that resistance activity was escalating. He has had time to prepare: a darkness spell pre-cast into a vial (bonus action to release, no slot expended), one additional Merregon already positioned in the main hall, and his four arms include one holding his greataxe ready at all times. The negotiation DC increases by 2.

Increasing Role Play

If the party negotiated successfully and the Nycaloth is departing: let him look at the campaign map on the north wall before he goes. He has been adjusting those markers every morning for six months. He does not say anything about the map. He just looks at it for a moment. Then he leaves.

It is the closest he will come to acknowledging that the war he was supposedly commanding never actually existed.

Treasure and Rewards

From Negotiated Withdrawal:

- The Nycaloth's testimony (written, signed; documents the secondary facility's existence and his coerced role in hosting it; admissible before restored courts)
- Compound access (the party can use the Studio of War as a resistance safe house for one chapter before the regime reassigns it)
- Merregon contract dissolution (the Nycaloth's departure voids his Merregon contracts; 12 Merregons disengage and leave the compound; no combat required)

From the Studio of War (if the party searches):

- Campaign maps and tactical diagrams (no direct value, but Lyra can extract regional patrol intelligence from them; DC 13 Investigation; advantage on planning checks for Chapter 12)
- Nycaloth's contract with the regime (documents his employment terms and the secondary facility coercion clause; supports his testimony's credibility)
- 90 gp in stored fees he has not yet forwarded to his agent

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Negotiated withdrawal achieved	+1	0	-1
Nycaloth provides written testimony	+1	0	-1
Nycaloth defeated in combat	0	+1	-1
Merregon contracts dissolved via withdrawal	0	0	-1
Studio of War secured as resistance safe house	+1	0	0

SCENE 5:

THE ROAD HOME

The Nycaloth is gone or defeated. The secondary facility is open. Seven people need to leave the compound, and the party is carrying more documented evidence against the Goristro than they have accumulated in any previous chapter.

Read or paraphrase the following:

Senna is the last one out of the secondary facility. She stops at the door and looks back at the room once. Not at the workstations. At the cots in the holding area.

"The ones who were transferred," she says. "The Category C people. You found where they went?"

She is asking because she already suspects the answer and she needs someone to either confirm it or give her a reason to believe otherwise. Heritage Institute, Sub-Level 3. That is what the record says. That is all the party knows.

She nods when they tell her. She does not ask follow-up questions. She walks out.

Features of the Area

Compound Status

If negotiated withdrawal:

The compound is empty of Merregions. The exterior wall positions are unoccupied. The gate is unguarded. Tam's wagons can approach the main entrance directly. Extraction takes 20 minutes and is uncontested.

If the Nycaloth was defeated in combat: 3-5 Merregions remain, disoriented by contract collapse. Standard DC 14 Wisdom save; failures disengage, successes hold position but accept the party's authority documents without resistance. The extraction window is 30 minutes before any regional garrison receives a status query.

The Survivors

Seven people. Some can walk unaided. Tavin needs support for the first quarter mile. The elderly gnome scribe uses a cane and sets the group's pace. The teenager who does not speak walks between two other survivors and does not look back at the compound.

If the party asks Senna about the transfer destination during extraction: she says she knew three of the sixteen who were transferred. A clockmaker named Bram. A woman named Isla who used to teach at a civic school. A man whose name she never learned but who had a habit of humming while he waited. She says their names carefully, the way you say the names of people you are afraid of forgetting.

The Evidence Package

By the time the party reaches Tam's wagons, they are carrying:

- The operational logbooks
- The subject intake records
- The Architect's Representative correspondence
- The sealed dual-authorization document (if recovered)
- The transfer destination record
- The Nycaloth's testimony (if negotiated)

This is the most significant evidence package the resistance has assembled. Mira will need time with it. Lyra will need time with it. The legal contacts who have been accumulating the party's previous evidence will need to integrate it. This is not a chapter-end debriefing. This is the moment the campaign's evidentiary case reaches critical mass.

The Encounter

No combat in this scene under normal circumstances.

If the Nycaloth was defeated in combat and a Merregon succeeded on its Wisdom save: it will not block the extraction but will attempt to follow the wagons at a distance to determine their destination. DC 13 group Stealth or DC 14 Survival to detect and lose the tail before it reports back.

What the Party Can Do

Speak With the Survivors During Extraction

Each survivor has something they want to say or ask. Let the party choose who to speak with. Senna will provide operational intelligence if asked further questions. Tavin will ask about his sister again. The tiefling musician will ask, quietly and seriously, whether any of this will actually matter. The party should answer that question from wherever they are.

Decide About the Sending Stone

If the party left the sending stone active or sent a false status report in Scene 3: they have a window before the Archmage's next check-in. They need to decide whether to use that window to prepare for Chapter 16 or to let the silence trigger an accelerated investigation. Both are valid choices with different downstream consequences.

Bring the Evidence to Mira

She reads the dual-authorization document three times. She does not say anything for a long moment. When she does speak, it is not about the document. It is about Senna's question, the one about the Category C subjects, the ones who were transferred.

Read or paraphrase the following:

"Sub-Level 3." She sets the document down. "We are going to find out what Sub-Level 3 is. Before the end of this."

She means it. It is not a campaign promise. It is a personal one.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

The extraction is completely uncontested regardless of how the Nycaloth encounter resolved. All Merregons have disengaged. The road south is clear. The party has an uninterrupted wagon ride to process what they found.

Making it Harder

A Rakshasa-contract patrol was routing through the compound on a regional circuit and arrives at the main gate 15 minutes into the extraction. They are not specifically hunting the party but they have valid contracts and operational directives. The party must either talk their way through (DC 15 Deception with any legitimate-appearing document), avoid them (DC 13 group Stealth to exit through the east gully before the patrol completes its circuit), or engage (2 standard Merregons; not a difficult fight at this level, but it costs time and raises the alarm).

Increasing Role Play

The wagon ride south takes an hour. Twelve miles of road that the party has traveled before, in the other direction, without knowing what was at the end of it.

Let there be a scene on the wagon where nothing plot-relevant happens. Someone asks Tavin what his sister's name is. He says it. Someone makes sure the elderly gnomish scribe is warm enough. The teenager who does not speak falls asleep against the side of the wagon, finally.

Let it be quiet for a few minutes. The chapter has earned quiet.

Treasure and Rewards

From the Extraction:

- Seven survivors (each one is a witness; their collective testimony about the secondary facility is legally significant and personally significant; they are people who are alive because the party came north)
- Complete evidence package described above

From Mira's Response:

- Heritage Institute, Sub-Level 3 is now a named target; Lyra adds it to the map; the thread is pulled and the party knows where it leads
-

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Seven survivors extracted safely	+1	0	0
Evidence package delivered to resistance legal contacts	+1	0	-1
Sending stone false report bought additional time	0	0	-1
Sending stone alert triggered Heritage Institute	0	+1	0
Rakshasa patrol engaged during extraction	0	+1	0
Quiet wagon ride home, survivors safe	+1	0	0

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

What the Party Should Know

- Project Provenance is a program that selects, studies, and transfers people based on their cognitive resistance to magical alteration. It has been running for at least three months and has processed 23 people. Sixteen of them were transferred to Heritage Institute, Sub-Level 3. The program was authorized by the Goristro and administered by the Archmage.
- The Fomorian's reality distortion field was a selection mechanism. People who resisted it were flagged. The resistance thought they were dismantling propaganda. They were also, without knowing it, passing people through a filter.
- The sealed dual-authorization document is the most significant piece of evidence the resistance has assembled. It places the Goristro's direct knowledge on a program that constitutes crimes against persons under any legal framework Orenthis has ever maintained. The legal case is no longer circumstantial.
- Heritage Institute, Sub-Level 3 is a destination. The party knows where the sixteen transferred people went. They do not know what happens there.
- The Nycaloth is gone. His compound is either a resistance safe house for one chapter or an empty facility that the regime will eventually notice. The military command structure north of Oren is dismantled.
- The Archmage is the next primary target. The party has been building toward him since Chapter 1. They now know what he has been building too.

Character Advancement

10th level reached.

Downtime (Optional)

- Integrate the evidence package with resistance legal contacts (DC 12 Investigation; surfaces two additional names in the intake records that match names the party has encountered previously in other contexts; DC 15 to identify the connection)
- Use the sending stone channel to monitor Heritage Institute communications (requires the stone to be active; DC 14

Arcana per session to monitor without detection; each successful session provides one piece of operational intelligence about Sub-Level 3)

- Debrief Senna formally (DC 10 Persuasion; she provides a complete account of everything she observed about the Architect's Representative; Lyra produces a detailed sketch; the sketch is recognizable to any party member who succeeds on DC 13 History as a known associate of the Archmage from his pre-regime academic career)
- Support the survivors' transition to the resistance community (no check required; each survivor integrated into the resistance provides one specific capability based on their background; Senna becomes a research asset, Tavin becomes a potential field operative once he has had time, the gnomish scribe offers archival expertise)

Future Hooks

- **Heritage Institute, Sub-Level 3:** sixteen people were transferred there. The party is going there. Chapter 15 is no longer a boss fight against the Archmage; it is a mission to find out what he has done with sixteen people, combined with the boss fight against the Archmage. The stakes are different now.
- **The Architect's Representative:** Senna's description and Lyra's sketch point to a specific individual from the Archmage's pre-regime research circle. He is not the Archmage. He is someone the Archmage trusted with operational authority. He may still be at the Heritage Institute. He may be someone the party can reach before the Archmage.
- **The Fomorian as selection mechanism:** the resistance destroyed the Ministry of New Truths in Chapter 8. They have now learned, retroactively, that the Ministry was doing double duty. Every person who passed through the Fomorian's distortion field and held onto accurate information was flagged. The resistance's own members were in that field during their approach to Chapter 9. DC 15 Investigation to realize the implication: any resistance member who entered the distortion radius during Chapter 9 reconnaissance may have been flagged. The party does not know whether that information reached the Archmage before the Fomorian died.

Lead-in to the Next Chapter

Mira marks Chapter 10's target on the map. The Yagnoloth's diplomatic compound, back inside Oren, in the embassy district.

Read or paraphrase the following:

"The Yagnoloth has been conducting foreign relations for the regime since before we existed as a resistance. He knows which external entities the regime has made deals with, what leverage is being used against them, and which of those entities would stop supporting the regime if the leverage was removed."

She taps the dual-authorization document.

"He also knows who signed things. He was present at several of the Goristro's early authorization meetings. He has been in every room where decisions were made."

She looks at the party.

"He is a Yugoloth. He serves whoever is currently winning. We need him to believe that is us."

"The good news is that after this week, it might actually be true."

Considerations

If the sending stone alert was triggered in Scene 3: the Archmage knows the secondary facility has been compromised. He does not know the full extent of what the party found, but he knows someone unauthorized was at the sending stone. Chapter 15's timeline accelerates; Mira notes this as a factor in planning and suggests the Yagnoloth and Hierophant chapters be completed as quickly as possible before the Archmage has time to move Sub-Level 3's contents.

If the party did not recover the dual-authorization document: Mira works with what they have. The logbooks and intake records are still significant evidence. The dual-authorization document remains in the north wall room of the secondary facility, which the resistance now controls. Mira sends Tam back with specific instructions to retrieve it within 48 hours before the regime reassigns the compound.

If Tavin never got an answer about his sister: Mira assigns someone from the resistance's city network to find her. She does this without being asked. If the party notices, she says: *"He asked a specific question. We should try to answer it."*

If the party is shaken by what they found in the secondary facility: let that be true going into the next session. The Yagnoloth chapter is built around negotiation and intelligence, and a party that is carrying the weight of Scene 3 into a diplomatic encounter will play that encounter differently than they would have before this chapter. That difference is correct. Let it show.

Chapter 11 Silver Tongue, Forked Words



"He has never believed in anything. He has, however, believed in everyone's belief in things, which turns out to be more useful."

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 11 brings the party back inside Oren into the embassy district: a carefully maintained corridor of diplomatic facades where the regime conducts its relationships with the outside world and the outside world conducts its calculations about the regime. The banners are pressed. The stonework is clean. The people moving through it are performing a version of normalcy that costs more effort than it looks like.

The Yagnoloth is here. He has been here since before the regime, cultivating relationships and accumulating leverage and positioning himself as the indispensable connector between the Goristro's authority and the entities that do business with it. He manages twelve active diplomatic relationships on the regime's behalf. He holds the leverage documents for nine of them. He has been in every room where decisions were made and has taken careful

notes in the kind of memory that a creature develops when it has learned that information stored properly is worth more than any single transaction.

He has also been watching the party's progress with the professional attention of someone updating a risk assessment in real time.

By now the assessment has produced a conclusion he has not shared with anyone: the resistance is winning. Not certainly, not inevitably, but the probability curve has shifted enough that a prudent Yagnoloth should be thinking about the next arrangement. He has been thinking about it for three weeks. He has not yet acted on it because acting requires a counterparty, and the resistance has not yet been in a position to be a credible one. They are now.

The chapter is built around a negotiation that both sides know is a negotiation from the moment it begins. The Yagnoloth is not the antagonist of this chapter in any conventional sense. He is a transaction waiting to be structured. The party's job is to structure it in a way that costs them as little as possible while

extracting as much as possible, and to do so while simultaneously managing a second relationship the Yagnoloth is not supposed to know about.

That second relationship is with Councillor Adris Veth, the diplomatic representative of the Merchant Federation of the Outer Reaches, who has been held in the embassy district by a regime leverage document for fourteen months and has been quietly, carefully signaling that he would like someone to come and remove it.

The party has two negotiations running simultaneously in the same district. Each one affects the other. The chapter rewards parties that play them in the right order.

The small arm is visible from the moment the Yagnoloth enters any scene. It is never mentioned. His large arm is simply a Yagnoloth's arm. His small arm is the thing in the room that everyone has decided, by some unspoken collective agreement, to treat as not being in the room. He knows they have seen it. This arrangement has been in place for his entire career and all parties have elected to continue it indefinitely.

Scene 3: The Diplomatic Corps

Entering the Yagnoloth's territory and the opening of the negotiation. He knows why they are here. He has been expecting something like this.

Scene 3 should feel like a chess game where both players can see the board clearly and the question is who blinks first.

Scene 4: The Deal

The negotiation reaches its resolution.

Restructured Arrangement triggers or the party pushes past it into combat. Either way, the chapter ends with a significantly altered diplomatic landscape.

Scene 4 should feel high-stakes and precise, as every word carries weight and the small arm is always visible.

Scene 5: The Leverage

Extracting from the district with the negotiated outcomes and delivering the Merchant Federation's formal break from the regime to the resistance.

Scene 5 should feel like a door opening outward, as for the first time since the Mists sealed Orenthis, something beyond its borders is paying attention.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Scene 1: The District and Its Occupants

Arrival in the embassy district, reconnaissance, and the identification of Councillor Veth as a secondary diplomatic target.

Scene 1 should feel politically textured and quietly exciting, as the district is dense with information and the party has enough context now to read it.

Scene 2: Councillor Veth

The party makes contact with the Merchant Federation representative and learns the nature of his leverage situation and what he is willing to offer in exchange for its removal.

Scene 2 should feel careful and mutually cautious, as two parties who need each other are establishing whether they can trust each other enough to proceed.

RUNNING THE CHAPTER

Designed for: 10th-level characters

Sessions: 2-3

Advancement: Reach 11th level at end

This chapter is the campaign's first pure diplomacy chapter with no combat encounter as the primary resolution path. The Yagnoloth's Restructured Arrangement mechanic is explicitly designed to produce a negotiated outcome, and the Councillor Veth thread provides a second payoff that does not exist in any previous chapter: an external relationship that weakens the regime's international standing and opens a potential supply channel for the resistance.

The primary goals are:

- Deliver the Yagnoloth's cooperation as a diplomatic victory built on leverage and credibility
- Introduce Councillor Veth and the Merchant Federation as an external relationship that survives into Act III
- Demonstrate that the regime's international position is as fragile as its internal one
- Extract intelligence about remaining leverage documents that will matter in Chapter 12 and Act III
- Give the party a chapter that rewards social investment and careful sequencing over combat capability

Guidance

The District Has Witnesses

The embassy district is populated. Diplomats, functionaries, clerks, and representatives from multiple external entities move through it daily. Anything that happens in the district happens in front of people who are professionally skilled at remembering what they saw. This is a constraint on combat and a resource for social play.

Sequence Matters

The party should approach Councillor Veth before the Yagnoloth, not after. If they go to the Yagnoloth first, the negotiation is harder: they have less leverage and the Yagnoloth has no reason to believe his cooperation would accelerate his own exit from a losing position. If they approach Veth first and secure his conditional cooperation, they arrive at the Yagnoloth's table with evidence that the regime's diplomatic relationships are already unraveling without his participation. That changes his calculus significantly. The chapter does not tell the party this. It should become apparent from how the negotiations feel.

The Yagnoloth Is Not Hostile

He will not initiate combat. He is performing legitimacy until that performance stops being useful, and it stops being useful the moment Restructured Arrangement triggers. A party that attacks him unprovoked gets a genuine fight with a CR 11 Yagoloth who will use every tool available. A party that negotiates gets something worth more than his defeat.

The Small Arm

It is present in every scene description. It holds the wine glass. It rests on the chair back. It manages small documents with the precise, practiced control of a limb that has spent decades over-performing in order not to be discussed. It is never explained, acknowledged, or referenced by anyone in the room including the Yagnoloth. If a party member asks about it, he says something brief and adjacent to an acknowledgment and immediately redirects to the matter at hand. The large arm is simply his arm. The small arm is the thing in the room.

SCENE 1:

THE DISTRICT AND ITS OCCUPANTS

The party arrives in the embassy district for reconnaissance and initial contact. This scene establishes the district's geography, identifies its key occupants, and surfaces Councillor Veth as a secondary target the party may not have known to look for.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The embassy district occupies six blocks of Oren's western quarter, bounded by the civic archive on the north and the merchant exchange on the south. It is the only part of the city where the regime's banners share wall space with other sigils: the Merchant Federation's scales, the Mountain Compact's hammer, the Tidal League's wave. The external entities that maintain diplomatic presence here are not allies of the regime. They are arrangements. The distinction is visible in how their representatives move through the streets: correctly, carefully, and with the specific posture of people who are aware that their status is conditional.

The Yagnoloth's offices occupy the largest building in the district's center. His sigil is not posted outside it. The building is labeled, in small letters above the entrance, as the Office of External Relations. He does not need a sigil. Everyone who comes here knows whose building it is.

Tam has been in the district for two days. He meets the party at a tea house on the district's southern edge and spreads a handwritten summary on the table between the cups.

"Twelve active diplomatic arrangements, nine with leverage documents currently held by the Yagnoloth. Three entities whose representatives are present in the district right now." He taps the summary. "One of them has been trying to get a message out of the district for six weeks. The message keeps not arriving." He slides a separate note across the table.

"His name is Adris Veth. Merchant Federation of the Outer Reaches. His leverage document is a trade agreement that contains a clause the regime inserted after signature. The clause commits the Federation to neutrality in any internal Orenthis conflict in exchange for continued border access. He signed it

before the Mists sealed everything. He did not read it carefully enough."

Tam pauses.

"The message he has been trying to send is addressed to the Federation's home council. It describes the clause. It asks for authorization to repudiate the agreement." He looks at the party. "It has not arrived because the Yagnoloth intercepts all outgoing correspondence from the district. He has been holding it for six weeks."

He picks up his tea.

"Veth knows the message has not arrived. He does not know why. He has been waiting."

Features of the Area

The Embassy District

Six blocks, navigable on foot.

Key locations:

- **Office of External Relations:** the Yagnoloth's building, center of the district; two-story, stone, no exterior guards; his Performed Legitimacy trait functions as better protection than Merregons in this context
- **Merchant Federation Legation:** a modest building on the district's east side; two staff members, Veth, and a small private reception room; Veth receives visitors during standard diplomatic hours without requiring an appointment
- **Mountain Compact Mission:** currently unstaffed; their representative returned home six months ago and has not been replaced; the building is maintained by a single caretaker
- **Tidal League Consulate:** staffed by two representatives who are present but uninvolved in the district's current dynamics; they are aware that something is changing but have not committed to a position

The Twelve Arrangements

Tam's summary identifies the twelve active diplomatic relationships the Yagnoloth manages.

Three are relevant to the chapter:

- **The Merchant Federation agreement:** the inserted neutrality clause; Veth wants it repudiated; the leverage document is in the Yagnoloth's files

- **The Mountain Compact suspension:** the Compact suspended their mission six months ago in response to a specific regime action; the leverage here is not a document but a piece of information about the Compact's primary trade route that the Yagnoloth has been holding as a contingency
- **The Tidal League observation:** the League's representatives have been instructed by their home council to observe and not engage; the Yagnoloth has been interpreting "observe and not engage" as implied support for the regime; this interpretation is incorrect; the Tidal League representatives know it; they have not corrected it because no one has asked them directly

Tam's Additional Intelligence

If the party asks follow-up questions:

- **Veth's daily schedule:** he takes a midday walk in the district's small public garden, alone, for 30 minutes; this is the easiest contact window
- **The Yagnoloth's office hours:** he receives visitors by appointment only in the morning; afternoons are reserved for what his staff calls internal correspondence
- **The intercepted message:** Tam has seen a copy of the seal on the outgoing correspondence pouch; it is Federation-standard and unopened; the Yagnoloth is holding it intact, which means he has not needed to open it, which means he already knows what it says

The Encounter

No encounter in this scene.

What Lyra's Map Shows

The district's layout is clean and navigable. Lyra has added three notations based on Tam's two-day observation:

- A dotted line showing Veth's midday walk route through the garden
- A small mark on the Yagnoloth's building indicating which second-floor window corresponds to his private office
- A question mark over the Mountain Compact mission's caretaker, whose movements do not match standard building maintenance schedules

The question mark is not a plot point. It is Lyra being thorough. The caretaker is simply a very dedicated cleaner. But it is the kind of detail a careful DM can develop if the campaign needs a thread.

What the Party Can Do

Approach Veth First

The optimal sequence. The midday garden walk is the natural contact window. DC 11 Persuasion to initiate conversation without triggering his diplomatic caution; DC 9 if the party identifies themselves as resistance members, since Veth has been hoping for exactly this contact and is not going to waste the opportunity.

Approach the Yagnoloth First

Available but harder. Without the Veth leverage, the negotiation DCs in Scenes 3 and 4 increase by 3 across the board and the Yagnoloth's opening position is less flexible.

Speak With the Tidal League Representatives

DC 13 Persuasion to open a genuine conversation about their actual position; on a success, the Tidal League representatives confirm that their observation mandate does not constitute support and that they have been waiting for an opportunity to clarify this formally; this adds a Tidal League formal neutrality declaration to the chapter's diplomatic outcomes and reduces one of the Yagnoloth's negotiating assets in Scene 4.

Investigate the Yagnoloth's Afternoon Correspondence

DC 16 Stealth to observe the Office of External Relations' second-floor window from an adjacent rooftop during the afternoon session; on a success, the party can see the Yagnoloth working through correspondence at his desk; the small arm holds a document flat while the large arm writes; DC 14 Perception from that position to identify one document by its seal: the Merchant Federation correspondence pouch, unopened, on the corner of his desk.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

Veth has already identified the party from the resistance's public actions and approaches them in the tea house before Tam finishes his briefing. He is not subtle about it. He says: "You are the people who have been taking the regime apart. I have been waiting for you to get to this district." He sits down without being invited. He orders tea. He is extremely ready to have this conversation.

Making it Harder

The district has an additional presence the party was not aware of: a Rakshasa-contract Merregon administrative unit assigned specifically to the embassy district whose contract includes monitoring unusual contact between district occupants and external visitors. The party must succeed on a DC 13 group Stealth check to conduct Scene 1's reconnaissance without being logged as an anomaly in the district's visitor records. A failed check does not trigger combat; it means the Yagnoloth knows the party was in the district before they schedule a meeting.

Increasing Role Play

Let the party read Tam's summary in full and ask him questions. He has been in this district for two days and he has opinions. He finds the Yagnoloth professionally impressive in a way that makes him slightly uncomfortable. He finds Veth sympathetic in a way that makes him want the negotiation to go well for reasons beyond strategy. He says both of these things if asked. He is not usually this forthcoming about his assessments. The district has gotten to him slightly.

Treasure and Rewards

No direct rewards. Intelligence gathered here shapes every subsequent scene's difficulty and available options.

Development and Dial Impact

No dial changes from this scene.

SCENE 2:

COUNCILLOR VETH

The party makes contact with Adris Veth during his midday garden walk, or at the Federation Legation if they prefer a more formal approach. This scene is a careful, mutually cautious negotiation between two parties who need each other and are not yet sure they trust each other enough to say so directly.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The garden is small and maintained with the specific care of something that is not allowed to be neglected. Three benches. A fountain that still runs. Two ornamental trees that are slightly too large for the space they occupy.

Adris Veth is on the middle bench, eating a midday meal from a wrapped cloth and looking at the fountain with the expression of someone who has been looking at the same fountain for fourteen months and has run out of things to think about it.

He is a compact human man in his mid-fifties, dressed in the Merchant Federation's standard diplomatic gray. His hands are the hands of someone who used to work with them before he became someone who works with words instead.

He does not look up when the party approaches. He says, to the fountain: "I was beginning to think no one was coming."

He unwraps another section of his meal. On his left hand, a Federation signet ring. On the bench beside him, a leather document folio that he does not try to conceal or move when the party sits.

"I have fourteen months of observations about this district," he says. "Some of them are about the Yagnoloth. Some of them are about the other arrangements he manages. Some of them are about the regime's external relationships more generally." He looks at the party for the first time. "I have been keeping them because I expected, eventually, to need them. I would like to discuss what they are worth."

Features of the Area

The Garden

Public space, lightly trafficked during midday. The fountain provides ambient sound that makes conversation difficult to overhear from more than 10 feet. Three entrances, all visible from the middle bench. Veth chose this location deliberately.

Veth's Position

He has been in the embassy district since before the party began their campaign. During that time he has observed the following, which he will share in exchange for the right conversation:

- The leverage document: the neutrality clause in the Federation's trade agreement was inserted after Veth signed; he has copies of both the original agreement and the amended version; the inserted clause is the Archmage's work, not the Yagnoloth's; the Yagnoloth managed its implementation but did not draft it; this distinction matters for the legal case
- Fourteen months of diplomatic traffic: Veth has observed every entity that entered and left the Office of External Relations; he has catalogued what he could identify about the nature of each visit; several visits correlate with events the party has witnessed directly, including a visit three months ago that preceded the secondary facility's establishment
- The Yagnoloth's actual position: Veth's professional assessment is that the Yagnoloth stopped believing in the regime's longevity approximately six weeks ago and has been waiting for a credible counterparty since then

What Veth Wants

He is direct about this if the party creates a space for directness. He wants three things:

First, the neutrality clause removed from the Federation's trade agreement, either by recovering the leverage document from the Yagnoloth's files or by having the party witness a formal repudiation he can send home with the resistance's endorsement. The Federation's home council will act on a witnessed repudiation. They have been waiting for one.

Second, a channel out of the district. Not physically; he is not imprisoned. But his outgoing correspondence is intercepted. He

needs a reliable communication channel that does not route through the Yagnoloth.

Third, assurance that when the regime falls, the Federation's trade interests in Orenthis will be represented fairly in whatever governance replaces it. He is not asking for favoritism. He is asking for a seat at the table.

The Encounter

No formal encounter. This is a social negotiation. Veth is a professional diplomat. He does not require persuasion in the conventional sense; he requires evidence that the party is capable of delivering what they are proposing:

- **DC 10 Persuasion** to open a genuine exchange:
The party presents themselves credibly and Veth responds in kind. On a success, he shares his three requests and his fourteen months of observations. On a failure, he is polite but guarded; a second attempt is available after the party provides one specific piece of evidence of their capability.
- **DC 13 Persuasion** to secure his conditional cooperation:
Veth agrees to formal Federation repudiation of the neutrality clause, contingent on the resistance recovering or neutralizing the leverage document from the Yagnoloth's files. On a success, he produces a signed Federation repudiation affidavit from the document folio on the bench beside him. He has had it ready for six weeks.
- **DC 15 Persuasion** to secure his full cooperation package:
In addition to the repudiation affidavit, Veth provides his fourteen months of diplomatic observations in written form, agrees to serve as the Federation's formal liaison to the resistance government-in-waiting, and identifies by name two other external entities whose leverage documents could be similarly challenged. On a success, he also shares the detail he considers most significant: a visit to the Office of External Relations seven months ago by a figure he did not recognize, accompanied by the Archmage, who spent four hours in a closed meeting with the Yagnoloth and left with a document portfolio he did not arrive with. Veth does not know what was in the portfolio.

What Veth Can Tell the Party About the Yagnoloth

If asked directly, Veth offers his professional assessment without requiring a check:

"He is the most capable diplomat I have met in thirty years of trade negotiation. He is also the most completely amoral one. He does not dislike the regime. He does not like it. He made an arrangement with it and has honored that arrangement because honoring arrangements is how arrangements remain profitable. If you can offer him a better arrangement, he will take it. He will do this without guilt, without hesitation, and without any of the internal negotiation that humans go through when they change sides. He will simply update his position and proceed."

He pauses.

"Do not mention the small arm. He finds it professionally embarrassing for reasons he has never explained and you will get more out of him if you treat it as invisible."

What the Party Can Do

Secure the Repudiation Affidavit

The most important item in this scene. A signed Federation repudiation affidavit, delivered to the Yagnoloth as evidence that the regime's diplomatic relationships are already in motion without his participation, is the most significant piece of leverage available in Scene 3. It costs DC 13 Persuasion to obtain.

Share the Dual-Authorization Document

If the party shows Veth the sealed document from Chapter 9 bearing the Goristro's personal seal: his professional assessment updates visibly. He reads it carefully. He says: *"This is admissible in Federation commercial arbitration. I did not expect to have access to something this clean."* He adds a fourth item to his cooperation package without being asked: a formal Federation declaration of support for a legitimate post-regime Orenthis government, to be released publicly upon the Goristro's fall. This declaration has no immediate effect but is significant for Act III's epilogue content.

Approach the Tidal League

(If Not Done in Scene 1)

Veth can facilitate an introduction to the Tidal League representatives. DC 13 Persuasion; on a success, the Tidal League's formal neutrality declaration becomes an additional Chapter 10 outcome.

Ask About the Archmage Visit

The four-hour meeting between the Archmage and the Yagnoloth seven months ago is the chapter's most significant intelligence thread. DC 13 Investigation to connect the timing of that meeting to the secondary facility's establishment in Chapter 9: the meeting occurred exactly two weeks before the first supply transfer appeared in the Rakshasa's ledger. The party can ask the Yagnoloth about it directly in Scene 4.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

Veth provides his full fourteen months of observations without requiring the DC 15 check. He has decided that full cooperation is in the Federation's interest and the party's credibility is sufficient. The DC 15 outcome is available automatically on a DC 10 success.

Making it Harder

A district functionary passes through the garden twice during the conversation, slowing at the bench on the second pass. DC 13 Insight to notice she is noting the contact. DC 15 Persuasion or DC 14 Deception to manage the interaction without it being logged. On a failure, the Yagnoloth knows the party met with Veth before they arrive at his offices, which he uses as an opening move in Scene 3.

Increasing Role Play

Veth eats his midday meal throughout the negotiation. He does not stop eating because the party arrived. He offers to share it. If a party member accepts, he treats this as a gesture of good faith and the first Persuasion DC drops to 8. He has been eating alone in this garden for fourteen months. The offer is genuine.

At some point during the conversation, if it goes well, he says:

"I want to tell you something that is not strategic. I came here to manage a trade relationship. I have watched what this regime does to people for fourteen months from two hundred feet away and I have not been able to do anything about it because of a clause I did not read carefully enough."

He pauses.

"I am very glad you are here. That is all. Back to business."

Treasure and Rewards

From Veth at DC 13 Persuasion:

- Signed Federation repudiation affidavit (primary leverage for Scene 3; reduces Yagnoloth negotiation DCs by 3; documents the regime's diplomatic isolation)
- Fourteen months of diplomatic observations (DC 13 Investigation to extract two specific details relevant to Chapters 11 and 12)

From Veth at DC 15 Persuasion:

- Two additional leverage document identifications (names entities whose agreements could be similarly challenged; two additional diplomatic threads for Act III)
- Veth's formal liaison role with the resistance (narrative; long-term external relationship established)

From Veth with dual-authorization document shared:

- Federation declaration of support for post-regime government (Act III significance)

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Veth's conditional cooperation secured	+1	0	-1
Repudiation affidavit obtained	+1	0	-1
Tidal League neutrality declaration secured	+1	0	-1
Contact logged as suspicious by district functionary	0	+1	0

SCENE 3:

THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS

The party arrives at the Office of External Relations and enters the Yagnoloth's territory. This scene covers arrival, the building's interior, and the opening of the negotiation before it reaches its critical resolution.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The Office of External Relations has no reception desk. It has a waiting room with four chairs and a small table bearing a water carafe, and a staff member, a young half-elf woman in diplomatic gray, who appears from a side door when the party enters and says, without surprise:

*"He is expecting you. Please follow me."
The interior of the building is exactly as maintained as the exterior. Clean lines, neutral furnishings, nothing decorative that was not chosen to communicate something specific. She opens the door to the Yagnoloth's office and steps back without announcing them.*

He is standing at the window when they enter, looking into the district's small garden. He turns when they enter. He is larger than most diplomatic settings are designed to accommodate, and his left arm, his large arm, rests along the back of his chair. His right arm, the small one, is held slightly away from his body with the specific posture of a limb that has learned not to draw attention to itself by trying too hard not to draw attention to itself.

On his desk: the Merchant Federation correspondence pouch, still sealed, on the left corner. A wine service on the right. The small arm reaches across, takes a glass, and holds it out toward the party with the precise, practiced movement of something that has been performing competence in formal settings for decades.

"I have been watching your work since the Council Halls," he says. "You are more thorough than I expected and considerably faster." He gestures to the chairs across his desk.

"Sit. I have opened a wine that is better than this meeting probably deserves, but pessimism about wine is its own kind of waste."

He pours. The small arm manages the glass. The large arm uncorks the bottle. He does this without comment.

"Now. What are you here to offer me?"

Features of the Area

The Office

A well-proportioned room on the second floor, 30 by 25 feet. The window overlooks the garden. The desk is large and uncluttered. The filing cabinets along the east wall are locked (DC 18 Thieves' Tools; the Yagnoloth is watching; attempting this during the negotiation requires DC 16 Sleight of Hand to go unnoticed).

The Correspondence Pouch

The Merchant Federation's intercepted outgoing correspondence is visible on the desk. The Yagnoloth has not opened it. He has not needed to because he already knows what it says. He is using it as a signal: he wants the party to notice it is there and understand what it represents.

DC 13 Insight to read this correctly: he is demonstrating that he holds leverage and that he knows they know he holds it. He is not threatening them with it. He is acknowledging the board.

Performed Legitimacy

The trait is active. While the party is in this building, attack rolls against the Yagnoloth have disadvantage. Any creature that openly asserts his diplomatic authority is a mere performance must succeed on a DC 16 Insight check to do so convincingly. On a failure, his composure holds and he gains advantage on his next Charisma check against that creature.

The Encounter

The Opening

The Yagnoloth speaks first and frames the negotiation before the party does. He has been doing this longer than any of them have been alive.

His opening positions:

"I am going to assume you have spoken with Veth. He is thorough and he has been ready for this conversation for six weeks. Whatever he told you about my position is probably accurate." He sips his wine. The small arm sets the glass down. "What he

cannot tell you is what I want, because he does not know. You are the first people I have told."

He sets down his glass.

"I want to leave. Not the district. Orenthis. I want a route out of the Mists and I want assurance that what I carry with me is not pursued by whatever government replaces the Goristro's. I have done things in this role that a restored court might find interesting. I would prefer they not find me interesting."

He is asking for immunity and exit. Both are things the resistance cannot currently provide and both parties know this. This is his opening position, not his real position. He is waiting to see how the party responds to an impossible ask before he moves to something achievable. DC 13 Insight to recognize this as an opening gambit: on a success, the party understands he does not actually expect exit from the Mists; he is establishing the scope of his cooperation by starting at the ceiling.

Possible Opening Responses

Call the gambit:

DC 14 Persuasion to name what he is doing without insulting his intelligence.

On a success, he produces a small, precise smile and says:

"Good. Then we can skip the part where we both pretend and move to the part where we are honest about what is available." He abandons the opening position and moves to his real terms.

Match the gambit:

DC 15 Deception to respond as if exit from the Mists is potentially negotiable.

On a success, he plays along for one exchange before calling it himself:

"We are both wasting time. Let me tell you what I actually want." He moves to his real terms.

Produce the repudiation affidavit:

If the party places Veth's signed Federation repudiation affidavit on the desk without speaking, the Yagnoloth looks at it for a long moment. The small arm reaches out and picks it up. He reads it carefully. He sets it down. He says:

"The Federation has already moved." He refills his own glass. "Then we are negotiating about speed, not direction. Sit down."

The repudiation affidavit, if produced before Scene 4, reduces all subsequent negotiation DCs by 3 and triggers Survival Arithmetic immediately.

His Real Terms

Once past the opening gambit, the Yagnoloth's actual negotiating position is straightforward:

First, non-prosecution from the resistance government for his diplomatic activities during the regime. He wants this in writing, witnessed, and filed with the resistance's legal contacts. He knows about the accumulating evidence case. He wants to be outside its scope before it closes.

Second, his files. He wants to be the one who releases his leverage documents, not the one from whom they are seized. He built those relationships. He managed them. He wants the exit to be his.

Third, continued operation. He does not want to stop doing diplomatic work. He wants to do it for a government worth doing it for. This surprises the party. It is genuine.

What the Party Can Do

Produce the Repudiation Affidavit Early

The optimal tactical move for this scene. It demonstrates the party has been working the district before this meeting and that the regime's diplomatic relationships are already in motion without the Yagnoloth's participation. It triggers Survival Arithmetic and moves the negotiation toward Scene 4's resolution faster and at lower DCs.

Ask About the Archmage Visit

If the party asks directly about the four-hour meeting Veth observed: the Yagnoloth pauses. He does not deny it. He says:

"I brokered an arrangement. Between the Archmage and an external entity whose name I will not share today. That arrangement produced resources that went north."

He is describing the secondary facility's establishment. DC 14 Persuasion to get the external entity's name now rather than as part of Scene 4's deal; on a success, he names the Mountain Compact, whose trade route intelligence the Yagnoloth provided to the Archmage in exchange for the Compact's continued neutrality. The Compact did not

know their route intelligence was being used to establish a human experimentation facility. They would like to know now.

Challenge Performed Legitimacy

A party member who successfully challenges the Yagnoloth's diplomatic authority (DC 16 Insight check) ends the Performed Legitimacy trait for the remainder of the encounter and reduces all subsequent negotiation DCs by 2. He does not react with hostility. He says:
"There it is. Yes. Sit down and let us be direct."

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

The Yagnoloth abandons the opening gambit immediately when the party sits down. He has decided to skip the performance:

"I know why you are here. I know what I have. Let me tell you what it costs."

He moves directly to his real terms.

Making it Harder

The district functionary logged the party's meeting with Veth and the Yagnoloth received the report. He knows the party met with Veth before coming here. He uses this as an opening move:

"You spoke with Veth first. That tells me you understand the value of sequencing."

He says it as a compliment. But it means he knows the party's hand before the negotiation begins, which adds 2 to all DC checks until the repudiation affidavit is produced.

Increasing Role Play

Let the wine be good. If a party member comments on it, he tells them what it is and where it came from and why he chose it for this meeting. He is not performing warmth. He genuinely likes wine and has opinions about it and sees no reason to conceal this simply because it is a negotiation. The small arm holds his glass between exchanges. When he sets it down it does so with complete precision, always in the same spot, which is the kind of detail that accumulates.

At some point he says, without particular emphasis:

"I have been doing this for a long time. Most of the arrangements I have managed have been between entities that deserved each other. This one was not."
He does not elaborate. He refills the glasses.

Treasure and Rewards

No new items in this scene. The negotiation's outcomes are delivered in Scene 4.

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Repudiation affidavit produced in Scene 3	0	0	-1
Opening gambit called successfully	0	0	0
Performed Legitimacy challenged and ended	0	0	0
District functionary report changes opening position	0	+1	0

SCENE 4: THE DEAL

The negotiation reaches its resolution. Restructured Arrangement triggers, either through the party's leverage or the Yagnoloth's own Survival Arithmetic, and the deal is structured. If combat occurs, it follows the conditions described below. The chapter does not recommend combat but does not preclude it.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The wine is half gone. The correspondence pouch is still on the desk. The party has been in this room for thirty minutes and the negotiation has moved, point by point, through positions that both sides knew were positions, toward something that both sides have been approaching since the party walked in. The Yagnoloth sets down his glass. The small arm rests on the desk. The large arm rests along the chair back.

"Let me tell you what I am going to do," he says. "And then you can tell me whether that is acceptable. And then we can stop negotiating." He stands. Both arms come off the chair and desk and settle at his sides, large and small, in the specific posture of someone who has just finished performing and is about to be direct.

"I am going to give you my files. All of them. Every leverage document, every signed arrangement, every piece of correspondence I have been holding on the regime's behalf. You will take them to your legal contacts and do with them what is appropriate." He pauses. "In exchange, I want a non-prosecution affidavit in writing before I hand over the first document. And I want to continue working. For you, or for whatever government follows. I am very good at this and I would prefer not to waste that."

*He looks at the party.
"Is that acceptable?"*

Features of the Area The Filing Cabinets

The east wall filing cabinets contain the complete archive of the Yagnoloth's diplomatic work: twelve active arrangements, nine leverage documents, correspondence spanning four years, and three items he marks separately as personally significant.

Access requires the Yagnoloth's cooperation or DC 18 Thieves' Tools. If he cooperates, he opens them himself with a key from his inner pocket. The small arm holds the cabinet door. The large arm retrieves the files.

The Encounter

Restructured Arrangement

When Survival Arithmetic triggers and the Yagnoloth accepts the deal, read or paraphrase the following:

He moves to the center of the room. Both arms are raised, large and small, in a gesture of diplomatic openness that he has clearly made before in other rooms with other parties and that lands differently here because of what the small arm looks like raised at shoulder height.

"I have always admired the resistance's commitment to Orenthis," he says. "I have been looking for the appropriate moment to formalize that admiration."

It is the most formal surrender the party has seen. It is also completely sincere, in the way that a Yagnoloth who has decided the math no longer supports the previous arrangement is always sincere about the next one.

What the Deal Produces

The Yagnoloth's full cooperation includes, in order of delivery:

- **The leverage documents:**
Nine documents holding nine external entities in constrained diplomatic positions. With these released or neutralized, the Merchant Federation's repudiation becomes the first of several breaks in the regime's international arrangements. Six of the nine entities will formally withdraw from their regime arrangements within a week of the documents being returned. Two will need direct contact before acting. One will not act regardless; they are committed to the regime for reasons that have nothing to do with leverage.
- **The Merchant Federation correspondence:**
He slides the intercepted pouch across the desk. Still sealed.
He says: *"I was holding it because the moment it arrived, the Federation's home council would act on it, and I was not ready for that to happen yet." He pauses. "I am ready now."*

- **The Mountain Compact intelligence:**
He tells the party about the four-hour meeting with the Archmage. He names the Mountain Compact. He describes what the Archmage received and what it was used for. He does this without being asked, because it is part of the full cooperation package and because withholding it would be bad faith and he is, in his way, a professional.
He says: *"The Compact did not know what their route intelligence was being used for. I knew. I facilitated it anyway."*
He does not apologize. He states it as a fact that belongs in the record.
- **Written testimony:**
His personal account of the regime's external arrangements, signed and notarized with his diplomatic seal. Which seal he uses: the large arm holds the document flat while the small arm applies the seal with the precision of something that has been doing this for a very long time. He does not comment on this process. Neither does anyone else.
- **The three personally significant items:**
He retrieves these last and sets them on the desk separately.
They are:
A copy of his original contract with the Goristro predating the regime's consolidation
A correspondence chain between the Goristro and two external entities discussing the Mists' arrival as an opportunity rather than a catastrophe
A document that he describes simply as:
"Something the Archmage asked me to hold. I do not know what it contains. I have been holding it because destroying it seemed worse than keeping it and keeping it seemed worse than eventually giving it to someone who could use it."
The document is sealed with a wax impression the party has not seen before. DC 15 Arcana to identify the impression: it matches theoretical notation from the Archmage's pre-regime academic publications on cognitive resistance. Whatever is in the document relates to Project Provenance at a theoretical level that predates the program's operational existence by years.

The Non-Prosecution Affidavit

The party must produce this before receiving the files. Mira cannot provide it retroactively; the party either came prepared to offer it or they did not.

Options:

- If the party came prepared:
Mira drafted a conditional non-prosecution agreement before they left, contingent on full cooperation and verified by the resistance's legal contacts. It is not immunity. It is a specific, bounded agreement that covers his diplomatic activities during the regime and does not extend to any future conduct. He reads it carefully. The small arm turns the page. He signs it.
- If the party did not come prepared:
The Yagnoloth is patient. He says he will wait while they send for it. He suggests they use the time to finish the wine. He means this genuinely. The delay is 4-6 hours and during that time he continues the conversation in a more relaxed register, sharing observations about the district and the regime's decline that are informative and occasionally funny in the specific dry way of someone who has watched powerful things become less powerful for a very long time.

What Happens If the Party Attacks

If the party initiates combat rather than accepting the deal: the Yagnoloth does not appear surprised. He says: *"I see. That is unfortunate."* He uses Tactical Repositioning immediately and begins combat from the far side of the desk. He fights to survive, not to win, using every defensive option available and triggering Restructured Arrangement at half HP. Even in combat, he would prefer to deal.

If Restructured Arrangement triggers during combat: he raises both arms, large and small, and says: *"I believe we have established that neither of us benefits from this continuing."* He offers the same terms he would have offered without the fight. The terms do not change because there was a fight. He is not punishing them. He is closing the transaction.

A party that kills the Yagnoloth after Restructured Arrangement triggers loses all

nine leverage documents, his testimony, the Mountain Compact intelligence, the personally significant items, and the non-prosecution framework. They can access the filing cabinets (DC 18 Thieves' Tools) but without the Yagnoloth's organizational knowledge they can only recover 4-5 of the nine leverage documents before the regime sends someone to secure the building (approximately 90 minutes after the fight ends).

The witnesses in the district saw something happen. The chapter's diplomatic outcomes are significantly reduced.

What the Party Can Do

Accept the Full Deal

The optimal outcome. The complete package of leverage documents, testimony, intelligence, and the sealed Archmage document is worth more than any combat outcome. Come prepared with the non-prosecution affidavit and the deal closes cleanly.

Negotiate Individual Terms

The Yagnoloth is willing to discuss each term separately. Reducing the non-prosecution scope (DC 14 Persuasion), adding conditions to his continued service (DC 12 Persuasion), or requesting additional items from the personally significant category (DC 16 Persuasion) are all available as sub-negotiations. He enjoys this. He is very good at it. So, at 10th level, is the party.

Ask What Is in the Sealed Document

He says: *"I genuinely do not know. I was told not to open it and I did not. I have had it for four years."* DC 17 Insight to assess whether he is telling the truth (he is). He held a sealed document for four years without opening it. This tells the party something about his professional ethics that is both reassuring and slightly unsettling.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

The non-prosecution affidavit is not required before file transfer; the Yagnoloth accepts a verbal commitment from the party on the understanding that the written affidavit follows within 48 hours. He trusts the party's word at this point because he has been watching their work and they have not lied to anyone they did not need to lie to. He notes this distinction.

Making it Harder

A Rakshasa-contract Merregon administrative unit arrives at the Office of External Relations during the negotiation, delivering a routine compliance check. The party must either hide (DC 14 Stealth), bluff the Merregon (DC 16 Deception), or allow the Yagnoloth to handle it. If he handles it, he does so competently and without apparent stress, routing the Merregon away in under three minutes.

After it leaves he says: *"That will be the last one of those I handle on the regime's behalf."* He sounds entirely satisfied with this.

Increasing Role Play

When the files come out, give the Yagnoloth a moment with them before he hands them over. He has been managing these relationships for years. Some of them are from before the regime. He does not hesitate. But he looks at the first folder for a moment before he places it on the desk between them, and the small arm stays on top of it for just a second after the large arm has let go.

He does not say anything about this. Neither does anyone else.

Treasure and Rewards

From the Full Deal:

- Nine leverage documents (six produce immediate external diplomatic breaks; two require direct contact; one is inactive)
- Merchant Federation correspondence pouch, sealed and intact (delivered to Veth; the Federation's home council acts within 48 hours of receipt; formal Federation support for the resistance becomes public)
- Mountain Compact intelligence (the Compact was deceived; they will want to know this; a direct contact opportunity in Act III is established)
- Written testimony, signed and notarized (admissible before restored courts;)
- Three personally significant items including the sealed Archmage document (the correspondence chain is immediately useful for Chapter 13; the Archmage document is a Chapter 16 revelation)
- Non-prosecution framework (establishes the resistance as a government capable of offering legal assurances)

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Full deal accepted	+1	0	-1
Yagnoloth's written testimony delivered	+1	0	-1
Nine leverage documents recovered	0	0	-1
Yagnoloth killed after Restructured Arrangement	-1	+2	0
Mountain Compact contact established	+1	0	-1

SCENE 5:

THE LEVERAGE

The deal is done. The party leaves the Office of External Relations with the Yagnoloth's files, his testimony, and the sealed Archmage document. This scene covers the immediate aftermath in the district and the delivery of outcomes to the resistance.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The correspondence pouch crosses the district in twenty minutes. Veth is waiting at the Federation Legation's front door when the party arrives with it. He does not say anything when they hand it to him. He looks at it for a moment. Then he takes it inside.

Through the Legation's front window, the party can see him sit down at his desk. He takes out a pen. He is writing. He has been waiting fourteen months to write this letter and he does not waste the moment on ceremony. He simply writes.

In two days, the Federation's home council will receive the message and act on it. In four days, the first formal break in the regime's external diplomatic arrangements will be public knowledge inside Orenthis. In a week, five more arrangements will follow.

The Yagnoloth was right about the speed.

Features of the Area

The District's Response

The party's visit to the Office of External Relations will not go unnoticed. The regime will know something happened here. What it knows depends on the district functionary's earlier log and the Merregon compliance check:

- If neither triggered: the regime knows the party was in the district but not what transpired; 48-72 hours before a follow-up check is sent.
- If one triggered: the regime knows the party met with both Veth and the Yagnoloth; 24 hours before the Rakshasa sends a dedicated investigator.
- If both triggered: the regime is already aware that something significant occurred; the investigator arrives before the party leaves the district if they spend more than 2 hours on Scene 5.

The Encounter

Veth's Final Exchange

After sending his letter, Veth comes back to the door.

Read or paraphrase the following:

"I want to tell you something," he says. "The regime inserted that clause after I signed. I have thought about it every day for fourteen months. Whether I should have read more carefully, whether I should have pushed back earlier, whether there was a point at which I could have done something and did not."

He looks at the correspondence pouch in his hand.

"There probably was. I am going to have to live with that." He pauses. "But not in this district. Not anymore."

He goes back inside.

The Sealed Document

The sealed Archmage document should be delivered to Mira with the rest of the files.

Read or paraphrase the following:

She does not open it immediately.

She holds it for a moment and says:

"I know what this seal is. I have seen it in the Fomorian's pamphlets. In the notation." She sets it on the table. "I am going to need someone who understands theoretical Arcane notation to open this safely. It may be warded." She marks it for the resistance's arcane contact and sets it aside.

The document is a Chapter 16 revelation. Do not open it here. Its existence and the fact that the Yagnoloth held it for four years without opening it is enough for now.

The Tidal League Formal Declaration

If the party secured the Tidal League's neutrality declaration in Scene 1 or 2: it is delivered to Mira alongside the Yagnoloth's files. Read or paraphrase the following:

She reads it carefully and says: "This is the first formal document from an external entity acknowledging that the regime does not represent Orenthis's legitimate interests." She adds it to the legal case. "The Justiciars will want to see this."

She means the Nine Justiciars of Chapter 12. The Tidal League declaration is the first piece of external legal support for the court restoration.

Mira's Response to the Files

Read or paraphrase the following:

*Mira spends two hours with the Yagnoloth's files at the planning table. By the end of it she has separated them into four categories: Immediate legal use
Court restoration*

*Diplomatic relationships
and one unlabeled folder she sets apart from the others entirely. This folder contains the correspondence chain between the Goristro and two external entities discussing the Mists' arrival as an opportunity. She reads it twice.*

Then she looks at the party.

"The Goristro did not cause the Mists. We knew that. But someone knew they were coming before they arrived." She taps the correspondence. "Two entities outside Orenthis knew this domain was about to be sealed. They discussed it as a business opportunity. They made arrangements."

She sets the folder down.

"I do not know what to do with this yet. But I am going to need to."

This is not a Chapter 11 resolution. It is a thread that runs through Act III and into the epilogue. Let it sit.

What the Party Can Do

Deliver the Correspondence Pouch to Veth

The primary Scene 5 action. The delivery is straightforward and its consequences are immediate and lasting.

Ask Mira About the Sealed Document

She will examine it, determine it is likely warded, and set it aside for the arcane contact. The party can push for immediate opening (DC 15 Persuasion to convince her the risk is worth it; on a success, the warding is carefully removed by the resistance's arcane specialist and the document is read; its contents are a Chapter 15 revelation delivered early, which accelerates the Archmage chapter's stakes).

Follow Up on the Mountain Compact

Mira flags this as a priority. The Compact was deceived by the Archmage's arrangement through the Yagnoloth. They can be told. What they do with the information is uncertain, but they are currently uninvolved in Orenthis's conflict and an entity that was deceived by the regime is an entity with a grievance. Grievances are useful.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

The regime's response is delayed by an administrative backlog in the Rakshasa's investigator assignment process. The party has 72 hours before anyone is sent to the district regardless of what the functionary or compliance check logged.

Making it Harder

The Rakshasa's investigator is already in Oren on a separate assignment and is redirected to the embassy district within 4 hours of the compliance check. The party encounters them on the way out of the district: a Rakshasa-contract Merregon unit of 3 plus one plainclothes regime official who is clearly conducting interviews with district functionaries. DC 14 group Stealth to exit without being logged as persons of interest, DC 16 if the functionary already filed a report.

Increasing Role Play

On the wagon ride back to the resistance safe house, give the party a moment with what they accomplished. They have just broken the regime's external diplomatic isolation. Six foreign entities will formally withdraw from their arrangements within the week. The Mists have not parted. Nothing has materially changed about Orenthis's sealed status. But something beyond the borders now knows what is happening inside.

That is not nothing. For a kingdom that has been sealed since the beginning of the campaign, it is the first time something outside has acknowledged that it is paying attention.

Let that land quietly before the chapter closes.

Treasure and Rewards

From Scene 5 deliveries:

- Merchant Federation formal support activated (the Federation's home council acts; public break from regime within 48 hours)
- Tidal League neutrality declaration delivered to legal case (strengthens Chapter 13 court restoration)
- Yagnoloth's testimony and files integrated into evidence case

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Correspondence pouch delivered to Veth	+1	0	0
Federation formal break announced publicly	+1	+1	-1
Sealed Archmage document opened early	0	0	0
Regime investigator encountered on exit	0	+1	0
Mists correspondence flagged for Act III	0	0	0

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

What the Party Should Know

- The regime's external diplomatic position is dissolving. Six of nine leverage arrangements will formally collapse within the week. The Goristro holds Orenthis by internal authority alone. The outside world is no longer neutral.
- The Yagnoloth is now working for the resistance. This is strange for everyone involved, including him. He is, as far as anyone can tell, genuinely committed to the arrangement. He is very good at his work. The resistance now has a diplomat.
- The Mountain Compact was deceived by the Archmage's arrangement. They provided trade route intelligence that funded and enabled the secondary facility. They did not know this. They are going to want to know this, and when they do they will want to do something about it.
- Two external entities knew the Mists were coming before they arrived and discussed it as an opportunity. The Yagnoloth's correspondence chain establishes this. What it means is not yet clear. Mira does not know what to do with it. Neither does anyone else. It belongs to Act III.
- The sealed Archmage document exists. It was held by the Yagnoloth for four years. It relates to Project Provenance at a theoretical level. It is either a Chapter 15 revelation or a later one depending on whether the party opened it in Scene 5.
- The Hierophant is next. She is east of the city, in the Cathedral of Gold, and she has been there since before the party existed as a resistance. She will not negotiate. She will not surrender. She will die certain she was right.

Character Advancement

11th level reached.

Downtime (Optional)

- Deliver the leverage documents to affected external entities (each delivery is a separate downtime action; each successful delivery produces one formal break in the regime's arrangements and one potential Act III diplomatic relationship)
- Brief the Mountain Compact through the Yagnoloth's established channels (DC 12 Persuasion via Yagnoloth as intermediary;

the Compact's response arrives within one chapter; it is not hostile toward the resistance)

- Integrate the Yagnoloth's testimony with the legal case (DC 11 Investigation; identifies two additional points of connection between the testimony and the dual-authorization document from Chapter 10)
- Research the Mists correspondence with Mira (DC 16 History or Arcana; surfaces one additional detail about the two external entities; does not resolve the thread; makes it more specific)

Future Hooks

- The Yagnoloth as a resistance diplomat: he is now available as an NPC resource in Act III's governance and restoration arc; he is very good at his work and moderately trustworthy within the scope of the non-prosecution agreement; outside that scope he remains a Yugoloth
- The Mountain Compact grievance: a deceived external entity with a grievance and a trade route the Archmage used as leverage is a specific kind of resource; what the resistance does with the Compact will matter in Act III
- The Mists correspondence: two entities knew the domain was sealing; they discussed it as an opportunity; they made arrangements; this thread does not resolve in Act II; it resolves in the epilogue or not at all
- The sealed Archmage document: if not yet opened, it sits in the resistance's archive awaiting the arcane specialist's assessment; if opened, its contents are already in play
- The Hierophant: the Cathedral of Gold is east. She has been waiting, in her way, for this confrontation for a long time. She will fight to the last breath. She will die certain she was right. The party should go in knowing that.

Lead-in to the Next Chapter

Mira pins the last marker on Lyra's map. East of Oren. The Cathedral of Gold.

Read or paraphrase the following:

"She took everything the old faith was and rebuilt it as a loyalty ceremony. The temples, the clergy, the centuries of accumulated trust. She did not replace any of it. She colonized it."

She looks at the party.

"The people who follow her genuinely believe. That is what makes this different from the Mezzoloth's empty authority or the Nycaloth's paid compliance. She has built a congregation. They will fight for her not because they are contracted to but because they think they are fighting for something real."

Mira picks up the marker and sets it precisely on the Cathedral's location.

"She has no doubts. I want you to understand what that means before you walk in there." She pauses. "It means she cannot be talked out of anything. It means there is no deal available. It means she will die in that building completely certain that she was right."

She looks at the party for a long moment.

"I want you to be ready for what it feels like to fight someone who is not pretending."

Considerations

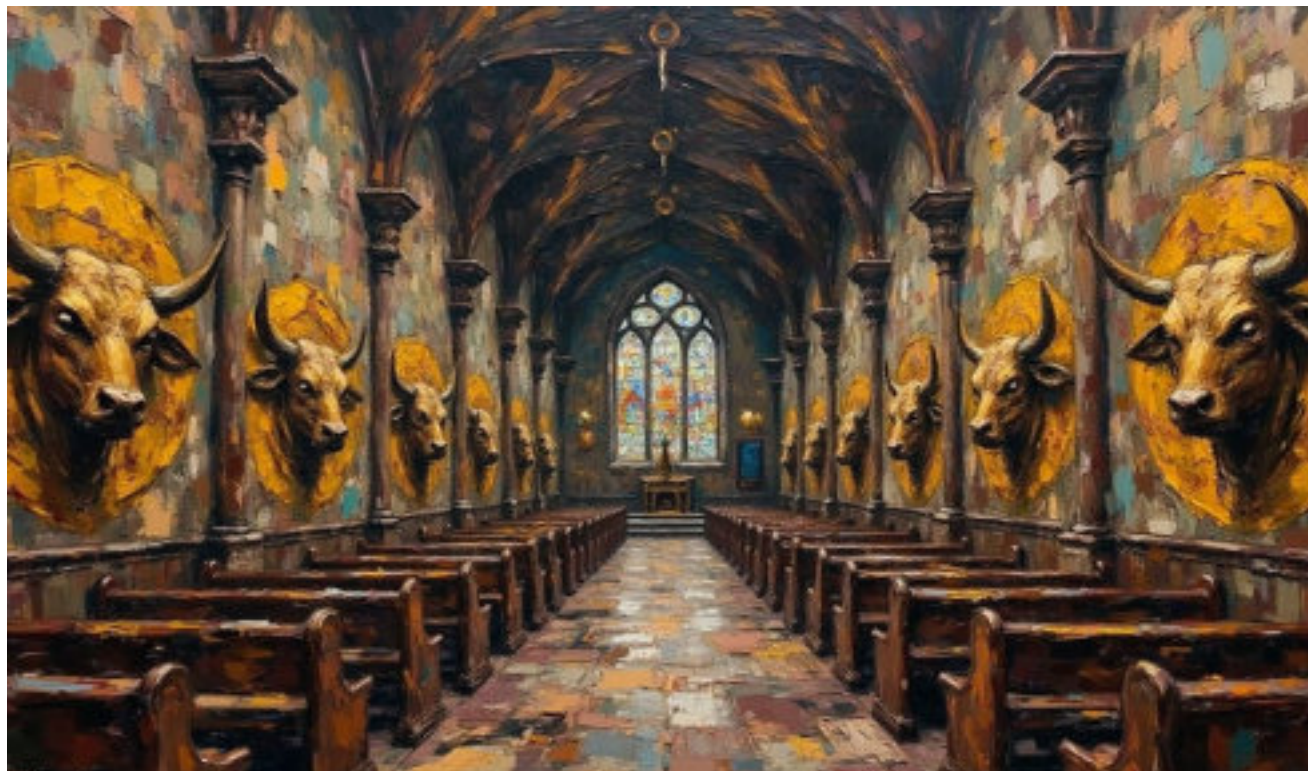
If the party opened the sealed Archmage document in Scene 5: Mira's Chapter 12 briefing includes an additional detail surfaced from its contents. The document references the Hierophant's Cathedral of Gold specifically as a "candidate site for Phase 2 implementation." The party does not yet know what Phase 2 means. They know the Archmage was thinking about the Cathedral in the context of Project Provenance. They carry that into Chapter 12.

If the Tidal League declaration was not secured: Mira notes it as unfinished business. The Tidal League representatives are still in the district. After the Hierophant chapter, if the party returns and makes contact, the declaration is still available. The Yagnoloth can facilitate the introduction now that he is working for the resistance.

If the party did not come prepared with the non-prosecution affidavit and the deal closed on a verbal commitment: Mira produces the written affidavit within 24 hours and sends it to the Yagnoloth's office. He signs it and returns it without comment. The arrangement stands.

If Veth's comment about the clause sat with a party member: let it come up in a quiet moment before Chapter 12. The question of when people could have done something and did not is not just about Veth. It applies to every lieutenant the party has encountered and to Orenthis itself. It is the question the campaign has been asking since Chapter 1. It does not have a clean answer.

Chapter 12 Faith Corrupted



"She did not destroy the old faith. She wore it. And after long enough, she forgot she was wearing anything at all."

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 12 takes the party east of Oren to the Cathedral of Gold: the Hierophant's seat of power and the most architecturally significant building in Orenthis outside the Gilded Tower itself. It was built three centuries ago as a house of genuine devotion. Its stones remember that. Its congregation does not.

The Hierophant took the existing religious infrastructure of Orenthis, its temples, its clergy, its centuries of accumulated trust, and redirected it toward worship of the Goristro as a divine figure. She did not replace the old faith. She colonized it. The ceremonies she leads are rituals of loyalty dressed in the language of devotion. The heresies she roots out are acts of dissent dressed in the language of sin. And the Cathedral that once stood as a symbol of something genuine now stands as the regime's most effective tool for making people feel that their compliance is not just

politically necessary but cosmically ordained.

This chapter is the campaign's closest approach to a dungeon crawl. The Cathedral is a multilayered building full of believers who will fight with the ferocity of people defending something they have built their identity around, Cultist Fanatics in the inner chambers, Xvarts in the outer nave who turned out for the Hierophant's morning service and have not left, and at the building's heart, the Hierophant herself: fanatical, genuinely powerful, and completely certain that what she is doing is right.

She cannot be negotiated with. She cannot be turned. She will not surrender. She will die in the Cathedral completely certain she was right, and the party needs to be prepared for what it feels like to fight someone who is not pretending.

Sister Kara should be here if the party will allow it. She trained under genuine clerics whose healing work was real and whose faith was real, and she watched the regime contort both toward its own purposes. Walking through what the Hierophant did to their

institutions will cost Sister Kara something visible. But her presence in the final room activates the Exposed Faith mechanic and changes the fight in ways that matter. She knows this. She is coming regardless of what the party says.

The Cathedral is not just rooms full of enemies. It is a corrupted sacred space where every room is a theological statement. The dungeon crawl structure reflects the Hierophant's character: the further in the party goes, the more completely the old faith has been replaced, until the innermost sanctum is unrecognizable as anything that was ever meant to be holy.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Scene 1: The Approach

Intelligence gathering and approach to the Cathedral. The building's exterior, its congregation schedule, and the specific geography of a corrupted sacred space. Scene 1 should feel reverent and wrong simultaneously, as the Cathedral is genuinely beautiful and genuinely desecrated and both things are visible at once.

Scene 2: The Outer Nave

The Cathedral's public space, full of Xvart faithful and lower-tier Cultist Fanatics who attended the morning service and have not left. The first and loudest layer of the dungeon. Scene 2 should feel chaotic and morally uncomfortable, as the party is fighting people who genuinely believe they are defending something sacred.

Scene 3: The Hidden Passages

The Cathedral's secondary architecture: the maintenance corridors, the confession chambers, the reliquary, and the choir loft. Intelligence and stealth reward parties that find these before committing to the nave. Scene 3 should feel like peeling back a surface to find what is underneath, since the hidden passages reveal what the Cathedral was before and what was done to it.

Scene 4: The Inner Sanctum

The Cathedral's heart. The Hierophant's most devoted Cultist Fanatics, the corrupted altar, and the final approach to the confrontation. Scene 4 should feel like pressure building toward an inevitable collision, as every step closer to the Hierophant is a step deeper into her absolute certainty.

Scene 5: The Hierophant

The confrontation. A spicy, depleted-party boss fight against a CR 12 warlock with legendary resistances, a full spellcasting suite, and the specific danger of someone who has never doubted anything. Scene 5 should feel earned and genuinely dangerous, as the Hierophant is the hardest fight in Act II and the party should feel that before it is over.

Scene 6: What Remains

The aftermath. What the Cathedral becomes without the Hierophant, what Sister Kara does in the empty sanctum, and what the resistance does with a reclaimed house of faith. Scene 6 should feel like something being given back, quiet and specific and real.

RUNNING THE CHAPTER

Designed for: 11th-level characters

Sessions: 3-4

Advancement: Reach 12th level at end

This chapter is the longest and most combat-dense chapter in Act II. The dungeon crawl structure means the party will be managing resources across multiple encounters before reaching the Hierophant, which is intentional. She should be fought by a party that has spent something getting to her. The chapter is designed to produce that expenditure without being a grind.

The primary goals are:

- Deliver the Act II dungeon crawl as a full, layered experience with meaningful geography
- Use the Cathedral's architecture to tell the story of what the Hierophant did to the old faith
- Give Sister Kara her chapter, the one where her specific history with the corrupted institutions becomes mechanically and narratively significant
- Make the Hierophant the hardest fight in Act II by the time the party reaches her
- Set up Chapter 13 by establishing that both the corrupted faith and the corrupted courts have now fallen

Guidance

The Cathedral Is a Theological Statement

Every room the party moves through should reflect the Hierophant's project. The nave has been redecorated with Goristro iconography layered over the original devotional artwork; the original faces are still visible underneath if anyone looks. The confession chambers have been repurposed as loyalty assessment rooms; the confessional screens are still there. The reliquary holds genuine artifacts from the old faith that have been reclassified as regime property. The choir loft has been converted to a propaganda broadcast station. The innermost sanctum has been so thoroughly transformed that only Sister Kara, looking at specific architectural details, can identify what it used to be.

The Encounters Are Not All Equal

The Xvarts in the outer nave are loud, numerous, and dangerous in the way that mobs are dangerous. The Cultist Fanatics in the inner chambers are more capable and the Cultist Fanatics in the innermost sanctum are the most dangerous non-boss enemies in the chapter. Structure the party's resource expenditure accordingly: the nave costs action economy and some spell slots, the inner chambers cost more, the sanctum costs the most before the Hierophant arrives.

Sister Kara's Arc

She should be present for every scene. She does not fight in the nave if there is any alternative; she is a healer and her job is keeping the party functional for the sanctum. But she should speak in every scene. What she says should shift as the party moves deeper. In the nave she

is controlled. In the hidden passages, seeing what was done to the relics, she is angry in a specific, quiet way. In the sanctum, before the Hierophant arrives, she says something she has not said before in the campaign. In the final room, after the Hierophant falls, she does something. What she does is described in Scene 6.

The Exposed Faith Mechanic

The Hierophant's stat block specifies that characters with genuine divine authority, Cleric or Paladin class features, or an established devotion the DM deems sincere, activate Exposed Faith against her. Sister Kara is not a Cleric. But she trained under genuine clerics. She has thirty years of herbalist knowledge acquired in service of genuine healing. She has, in the language of the stat block, a sincere established devotion. She activates Exposed Faith.

The DM should establish this before the fight, not during it.

If no party member has divine class features, Sister Kara's presence is mandatory for the mechanic to function.

If a party member does have divine features, Sister Kara's presence doubles the effect, applying the Exposed Faith penalty before the Hierophant has even acted.

SCENE 1: THE APPROACH

This scene occurs the morning of the Cathedral assault. The party has intelligence from multiple sources and must plan their entry into a building that is simultaneously a public place of worship and a fortified regime installation.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The Cathedral of Gold has been visible from inside Oren since before anyone in the resistance was born. It sits on a rise a half mile outside the city walls, close enough that the morning bells reach the residential quarter on still days, but far enough that the regime can describe it as a place of pilgrimage rather than a civic institution. The distinction is useful to them at times because people travel to a pilgrimage site but they are compelled to attend a civic institution. The reality is that the Cathedral has always been both, only their framing changes.

From their observation position on the road outside, the party can see the morning service letting out. Congregation members file through the main doors: a mix of genuine faithful who have nowhere else to go, regime functionaries attending because attendance is logged, and a substantial Xvart presence clustered near the entrance who did not leave when the service ended.

Tam has the numbers. "Three hundred in the morning service. Most left. About forty Xvarts still inside, near the entrance. I count at least ten Cultist Fanatics at the side entrance used by the clergy. The Cultist Fanatics are further in; I cannot get an accurate count without going inside and I am not going inside."

He closes his notebook.

"The Hierophant conducts a private devotional in the inner sanctum every day after the morning service. She is in there now. She will be in there for two hours." He looks at the party.

"That is our window."

Features of the Area

The Cathedral Exterior

The Cathedral of Gold sits on a rise a half mile east of Oren's walls, positioned with specific intention by someone who understood that visibility is a form of authority. From inside the city's eastern gates it dominates the skyline.

Key exterior features:

- **Main entrance:** three sets of double doors, currently partially open; the Xvart congregation is clustered here; the most visible and loudest entry point
- **Clergy entrance:** south side, currently used by 10 Cultist Fanatics moving between the Cathedral and the adjacent clergy house; DC 14 Deception with any clerical-appearing equipment or documentation to enter as apparent clergy; DC 12 with Sister Kara present and speaking first
- **Maintenance entrance:** north side, accessed via a locked iron door (DC 13 Thieves' Tools); connects directly to the Cathedral's maintenance corridors and bypasses the nave entirely
- **Choir loft access:** an external staircase on the east face, originally used for separate choir entry; currently unguarded; leads directly to the choir loft in Scene 3

The Cathedral's Architecture

The building is organized on a traditional sacred axis: nave running east to west, transepts extending north and south at the crossing, inner sanctum at the eastern end behind the altar. Key rooms:

- **Outer nave** (Scene 2): the public worship space; long, high-ceilinged, with eight side chapels and the main altar at the far end
- **North transept:** connects to the reliquary and the maintenance corridors
- **South transept:** connects to the confession chambers and the clergy house
- **Choir loft** (Scene 3): elevated above the nave's western end, accessible from the nave stairs or the external staircase
- **Crossing:** the intersection of nave and transepts, beneath the central spire; the Cathedral's most architecturally significant space
- **Inner sanctum antechamber** (Scene 4): immediately east of the crossing, behind the altar screen
- **Inner sanctum** (Scene 5): the Hierophant's private worship space and the chapter's final room
- **Hidden passage** (Scene 3): behind the main altar, connecting the sacristy to the inner sanctum; narrow, unlit, and potentially unknown to the Hierophant

The Congregation Schedule

The morning service has ended. The Cathedral's population at assault time:

- **Outer nave:** approximately 40 Xvarts clustered near the entrance; 4 Cultist Fanatics stationed at the nave's four side chapels
- **Maintenance corridors:** 2 Cultist Fanatics on routine maintenance duty
- **Confession chambers:** 3 Cultist Fanatics conducting loyalty assessment sessions with civilian congregants; 6-10 civilians who should be removed from the combat zone
- **Choir loft:** 4 Cultist Fanatics operating the propaganda broadcast station
- **Inner sanctum antechamber:** 4 Cultist Fanatics as honor guard
- **Inner sanctum:** the Hierophant, 2 Cultist Fanatics, and whatever she has prepared

The Encounter

Sister Kara has been to this Cathedral before. Not recently, but before the regime. Read or paraphrase the following:

"There is a passage behind the main altar," she says. She is looking at the Cathedral's spires, not at the party. "It was used by the senior clergy for private prayer before services. It connects the sacristy to the inner sanctum without going through the nave. It is narrow and it was never on any public map." She pauses. "I do not know if they have found it."

She looks at the party.

"The reliquary is off the north transept. The artifacts inside were genuine. If they are still there, I need to see them. If they are not still there, I need to know that too."

She does not explain further. She picks up her staff. "I am ready when you are."

What the Party Can Do

Plan Entry Points

The party can use any combination of the four entry points. The maintenance entrance bypasses the nave entirely but requires Thieves' Tools. The choir loft entrance provides elevated access to Scene 3 before Scene 2. The clergy entrance puts the party inside the building in a position to reach the confession chambers without the nave. The main entrance is the noisiest, most direct, and most combat-heavy path.

Ask Sister Kara About the Hidden Passage

She knows it exists. She does not know its current state. DC 12 Investigation once inside to locate the passage behind the altar; DC 10 with Sister Kara's guidance. If it is intact, it bypasses the inner sanctum antechamber entirely and puts the party behind the Hierophant's honor guard.

Establish a Triage Point

Sister Kara requests a designated triage point, a room where she can stabilize injured party members between scenes without entering the next room unprepared. The north transept, once cleared, is the ideal location. Let the party designate it before Scene 2 begins.

Remove the Civilians

The confession chambers hold 6-10 civilians attending loyalty assessment sessions. These are ordinary Orenthis residents who came to the Cathedral under social pressure and are now inside a building the party is about to assault. Getting them out before Scene 4 requires accessing the confession chambers early, which means the south transept before the nave is fully cleared. This is achievable but costs time and requires managing the 3 Cultist Fanatics conducting the sessions.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

The Xvart congregation is thinner today; only 20 remain inside rather than 40. The morning service ran long and most of them left when it ended. The nave is less chaotic but the Cultist Fanatics are the same.

Making it Harder

The Hierophant received intelligence about resistance activity in the city from an informant. She does not know the Cathedral is the specific target, but she has placed the Cathedral on a heightened devotional alert, which adds 4 Cultist Fanatics to the inner sanctum antechamber and moves the civilian loyalty assessments to a side room with a locked door. The civilians are harder to reach and the final rooms are more dangerous.

Increasing Role Play

Give Sister Kara a moment with the Cathedral's exterior before the party goes in. She is looking at the stained glass, at the specific colors chosen three centuries ago for what they meant. Let a player ask her what she is thinking.

She says: "I am thinking about the people who built this. What they believed when they put those windows in." She picks up her staff. "I am thinking that the windows are still there." She goes in.

Treasure and Rewards

No direct rewards in this scene. Planning advantages carry into Scene 2.

Development and Dial Impact

No dial changes from this scene.

SCENE 2:

THE OUTER NAVE

The party enters the Cathedral's public worship space. This is the dungeon crawl's first and noisiest layer: a high-ceilinged stone nave full of Xvart faithful and stationed Cultist Fanatics, with eight side chapels that complicate the sightlines and a mob dynamic that rewards crowd management over straight combat.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The nave is 120 feet long and 40 feet wide, with a vaulted ceiling 50 feet above the stone floor. It was designed to make the people inside it feel small in the presence of something larger than themselves. It still does that. The something it currently asks them to feel small before is different.

The original devotional murals are still on the walls. The Goristro's image has been painted over them in gold, the same pose repeated at intervals: the bull-headed figure with one fist raised, surrounded by people in postures of supplication.

Underneath the gold, if anyone looks at the right angle in the right light, the original faces are still there. The artists who painted the original murals were good. The people who painted over them were fast.

Forty Xvarts are clustered near the entrance. Some of them notice the party immediately. Some of them are arguing about something that is clearly not going to resolve. All of them are wearing the Goristro's red sash.

At the far end of the nave, 120 feet away, the main altar is visible: a stone table that was once plain and dignified and is now covered in gold-painted iconography and a large framed portrait of the Goristro that is not as good a painting as the murals it replaced.

Eight side chapels open off the nave, four on each side. A Cultist Fanatic is stationed in each one.

Features of the Area

The Nave

120 by 40 feet. Stone floor, difficult terrain near the entrance where discarded service materials have not been cleared. The pews have been pushed to the sides to create an open processional aisle. Eight stone pillars run the length of the nave, providing three-quarters cover. The vaulted ceiling creates significant echo; any loud noise carries throughout the building.

The Xvart Mob

40 Xvarts using mob rules: treat groups of 4 as a single creature (28 HP, AC 13, +4 to hit, 2d6+2 damage). Ten mob units total.

They have a designated leader: a Xvart named Rax the Devout, standing on a pew near the entrance with a painted bull-head medallion around his neck.

Mob Collapse applies when Rax the Devout falls.

Standard Mob mechanics apply:

Confident Confrontation (DC 11 Charisma check), Remove the Leader (targeting Rax the Devout), Invoke a Higher Authority (DC 13 Deception with any official-looking document), or Wait for the Merregons to Leave (no Merregons here; this option is not available).

Additionally: the nave's echo means that any loud confrontation with the mob carries to the inner rooms. If the party does not resolve the mob quickly (within 3 rounds of initiative) or quietly (before initiative), the Cultist Fanatics in the confession chambers are alerted and begin moving toward the crossing. They arrive at the nave entrance in 4 rounds.

The Eight Side Chapels

Each chapel is a 15 by 15 foot alcove with a small altar. The original devotional objects have been replaced with Goristro iconography. One Cultist Fanatic per chapel.

They will not immediately join the mob fight unless the party enters their chapel or a mob unit is driven into the chapel space.

The north chapels (1-4) connect via a short corridor to the north transept and the reliquary. The south chapels (5-8) connect via a short corridor to the south transept and the confession chambers. A party that bypasses the mob by moving through the chapels can reach the transepts without triggering the mob, at the

cost of dealing with individual Cultist Fanatic encounters in each chapel they pass through.

The Chapel Contents (if searched)

Chapel 1:

Original devotional texts, partially burned, the remainder stacked neatly in the corner as if someone could not decide whether to finish the job. DC 12 Investigation to find one intact text; Sister Kara will want it.

Chapel 3:

A loyalty ledger listing the names of congregation members and their attendance records. DC 13 Investigation to identify three names that match the Hezrou's unauthorized detention list; these individuals were flagged for the Hezrou based on their attendance irregularities. The ledger is admissible evidence.

Chapel 5:

The confession chamber corridor entrance. Locked (DC 12 Thieves' Tools). Behind it, the sound of a Cultist Fanatic conducting a loyalty assessment session is audible; DC 11 Perception to hear the specific language being used, which is lifted directly from the New Truth pamphlets recovered earlier.

Chapel 7:

A hidden cache of pre-regime devotional items wrapped in cloth: three silver prayer tokens, a carved wooden icon, and a handwritten prayer in a script that predates the Goristro's rule by at least a century. Sister Kara identifies these immediately if she sees them. Her expression when she unwraps them is not described here. Let the player playing Sister Kara describe it, or let it be silent.

The Encounter

Initiative and Opening

If the party enters through the main entrance: the Xvarts notice them within one round. Rax the Devout begins shouting before the party has taken two steps. Roll initiative.

If the party enters through the maintenance entrance or the clergy entrance and has not triggered an alarm: they can reach the side chapels without entering the nave. They observe the mob from a chapel alcove without being seen; DC 13 Stealth to maintain position for up to 3 rounds of observation.

If the party enters through the choir loft

external staircase: they are above the nave, overlooking it from 30 feet up. They can observe the full layout before committing to action. See Scene 3 for choir loft details.

Running the Mob

The Xvart mob is dangerous primarily through action economy and noise. Ten mob units with Pack Tactics in a confined space can put significant pressure on a 11th-level party if they are not managed efficiently.

Crowd management options that do not require initiative:

- **Confident Confrontation:** DC 11 Charisma; on a success 2 mob units peel away per round until Rax the Devout reasserts control (1 round delay); on a failure, initiative
- **Remove Rax the Devout:** targeting him with any disabling effect or reducing him to 0 HP triggers Mob Collapse; surviving mob units make DC 10 Wisdom save or flee; successes lose Mob Courage and Pack Tactics
- **Invoke a Higher Authority:** DC 13 Deception with any official document; the mob hesitates for 1 round while Rax the Devout challenges the document's legitimacy; this buys time but does not resolve the situation
- **Collapse a Sightline:** upending a pew (Athletics DC 12) creates difficult terrain and breaks Pack Tactics for any mob unit separated from its adjacent allies

The Eight Cultist Fanatics

Each chapel Cultist Fanatic acts independently. They will not join the mob fight spontaneously but will engage if the party enters their chapel or if a mob unit is destroyed adjacent to their chapel entrance. If the alarm carries to the inner rooms and additional Cultist Fanatics are inbound, the chapel Cultist Fanatics begin moving toward the nave entrance to reinforce in 2 rounds.

Sister Kara in the Nave

She does not fight in the nave. She stays near the entrance or in the first cleared chapel, watching. If a party member drops to 0 HP in the nave, she uses Triage immediately (bonus action, stabilize without a Medicine check). If the party is managing well, she moves through the south chapels toward the confession chambers on her own initiative, checking on the civilians. She reports back if she finds anything.

If the party asks her what she thinks of the nave: she says, without looking at the murals:

"They painted over everything. They used gold. Gold covers a lot." She pauses. "It does not cover all of it."

Victory Conditions

The nave is cleared when Rax the Devout is defeated or the mob collapses, and the eight chapel Cultist Fanatics are neutralized or bypassed. The party does not need to clear every Cultist Fanatic before moving deeper; they need to ensure the nave cannot reinforce the inner rooms. A party that defeats Rax and collapses the mob but leaves 3-4 chapel Cultist Fanatics intact is taking a risk. Those Fanatics will make noise if they hear combat from deeper in the Cathedral.

What the Party Can Do

Collapse the Mob Quickly

The most efficient approach. Target Rax the Devout first; mob collapse removes ten units simultaneously and ends the nave's primary threat. The chapel Cultist Fanatics can then be handled individually or bypassed.

Move Through the Chapels

A slower approach that avoids the mob entirely. Eight individual Cultist Fanatic encounters are easier than a mob fight but produce more rounds of potential noise. Effective if the party wants to search the chapels for intelligence before committing to the transepts.

Use the Sightline

A party that entered through the choir loft can rain area attacks down on the mob before entering the nave, softening the encounter before initiative. This costs spell resources but significantly reduces the mob's action economy in the first round.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

The mob is split into two groups: 20 Xvarts clustered near the entrance and 20 near the altar, with Rax the Devout at the entrance group. Defeating Rax collapses the entrance group but not the altar group, which must be handled separately. However the altar group has no leader and applies Mob Collapse rules at DC 8 rather than DC 10.

Making it Harder

Rax the Devout has been given a regime communication device by the Hierophant: a small crystal that, if activated, sends an alert to the inner sanctum. He attempts to activate it on his first turn in combat. DC 14 Perception to notice the attempt; any action that prevents him from using his bonus action on his first turn stops the activation.

If the alert fires, the Hierophant enters Scene 5 with spirit guardians already cast (her opening round becomes free for attacks), and all lair actions are available from Round 1. However, do not also add Scene 4's antechamber lair actions to Round 1 of Scene 5 (the intention is that this alert affects Scene 5 preparation, not the Scene 4 encounter), run Scene 4 normally.

Increasing Role Play

Let the party see the murals clearly during the nave fight. The gold paint is thick but the original faces show through at certain angles, particularly when a torch swings or a spell flashes. During a combat lull, if a player pauses to look, describe one face specifically: a painted figure of a healer with their hands raised in a gesture of blessing. Under the gold paint, the original healer is still there. The hands are exactly the same. Only the face around them has changed.

Treasure and Rewards

From Chapel 1:

- One intact pre-regime devotional text (narrative and legal value; documents the old faith's genuine theology; useful for Chapter 13's court restoration)

From Chapel 3:

- Loyalty attendance ledger (admissible evidence; connects congregation monitoring to the Hezrou's detention selections)

From Chapel 7:

- Pre-regime devotional cache: three silver prayer tokens (25 gp each), carved wooden icon (narrative value to Sister Kara), handwritten prayer (historical document; DC 14 Religion to identify as genuinely pre-regime; Sister Kara does not need the check)
-

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Mob collapsed before Fanatic reinforcement arrives	+1	0	0
Cultist Fanatics alerted from nave noise	0	0	+1
Communication crystal activated by Rax the Devout	0	0	+1
Civilians in confession chambers reached and secured	+1	0	0

SCENE 3:

THE HIDDEN PASSAGES

The nave is cleared. The party moves into the Cathedral's secondary architecture: the maintenance corridors, the confession chambers, the reliquary, and the choir loft.

This scene is not a single room but a layer of the Cathedral that reveals what the building was before and what was done to it. It also contains the hidden passage that Sister Kara remembered and the party's most significant intelligence find in the chapter.

This scene can be approached in any order. Let the party choose which space to explore first.

Read or paraphrase the following:

Past the nave, the Cathedral becomes itself again. Not restored; the iconography is still here, the gold is still on the walls, the Goristro's face still appears at regular intervals above the original stonework. But the proportions change.

The corridors are narrower. The ceilings are lower. The spaces were not designed for services.

They were designed for the people who maintained the services, the clergy, the choir, the sacristans who kept the candles lit and the prayer books sorted and the relics cleaned once a week with the specific cloth kept in the specific cabinet that was always in the same place because that was how things were done.

The Hierophant replaced the people. She did not entirely replace the spaces. They still remember what they were for.

Features of the Area

The Maintenance Corridors

A network of narrow passages (5 feet wide, 10-foot ceilings) connecting the major spaces of the Cathedral. Two Cultist Fanatics are on routine maintenance duty; they are not combat-ready and will attempt to flee and raise an alarm rather than fight if encountered. DC 13 Stealth to move through the corridor network without alerting them; DC 11 if the party has already collapsed the mob and the corridors are quieter than usual.

The corridors connect: nave to north transept, north transept to sacristy, sacristy to inner sanctum antechamber. The hidden passage begins in the sacristy.

The Hidden Passage

Behind a false panel in the sacristy's east wall: DC 12 Investigation to locate, DC 10 with Sister Kara's guidance. The passage is 3 feet wide, unlit, and runs 40 feet from the sacristy to a small door that opens into the inner sanctum directly, bypassing the antechamber and its 4 Cultist Fanatic honor guard entirely.

The door from the passage into the sanctum opens inward (from the passage side). DC 14 Thieves' Tools to open quietly, or DC 10 Athletics to force it loudly. If opened quietly, the party can enter the inner sanctum before the Hierophant is aware of their presence, provided the Hierophant has not been alerted by the communication crystal.

The passage is narrow enough that Large creatures cannot enter and Medium creatures must move at half speed. It is also completely dark. The party needs a light source that does not show under the sanctum door (DC 12 Arcana to muffle a light spell, or any non-light-emitting vision such as darkvision).

The Reliquary

Off the north transept: a 20 by 15 foot room that was, before the regime, a carefully maintained display of artifacts from the old faith's history. Each artifact was catalogued, dated, and accompanied by a written description of its origin and significance. The catalogues are still on the shelf. The descriptions are still on the wall plaques. The artifacts are not what the descriptions say they are. Read or paraphrase the following, for Sister Kara and the party together:

The plaques are still there. Each one says what the artifact is supposed to be: the healer's bowl from the Third Accord, the blessing stones from the northern shrine, the prayer cord used during the last great gathering before the first Mists came. Each plaque is accurate. Each artifact in the display case beneath the plaque is a painted replica. The originals are gone.

One case is different. The fourth case from the left holds an artifact that is not on any plaque: a small, plain wooden box with a lock the Hierophant's team apparently could not open and eventually stopped trying. The box is still there. The lock is regime-issue, installed over the original, which means someone found the box, could not open it, and locked it further.

Sister Kara looks at the fourth case for a long time.

"That box," she says finally, "was in this reliquary when I was a student here. Before everything." She looks at the party. "My teachers would not tell me what was in it. They said it was older than the Cathedral."

The Box

AC 14, 15 HP; the regime-issue lock is DC 16 Thieves' Tools; the original lock beneath it is DC 20 Thieves' Tools or requires a specific key that does not appear in this chapter. The box cannot be forced open without destroying the contents. The party can take it with them. What is inside is a Chapter 13 revelation: when the Nine Justiciars are restored and the courts are operating under legitimate authority again, one of the Justiciars recognizes the box and provides the key. The contents predate the Cathedral and constitute the oldest piece of legal documentation in Orenthis. The party does not need to know this now. They just need to take the box.

The Confession Chambers

Off the south transept: three small rooms, each with a confessional screen of carved wood separating a priest's side from a penitent's side. The screens are original and intact. The process happening behind them is not.

Three Cultist Fanatics are conducting loyalty assessment sessions. Each one has 2-3 civilians in the penitent's chair, answering questions from a standardized list visible through the screen. The questions are about neighbors, family members, attendance at non-Cathedral gatherings, and opinions about the resistance.

The civilians are not combatants. They are frightened people who came to the Cathedral under social pressure and are now being questioned about their loyalty. Getting them out requires:

- Neutralizing all 3 Cultist Fanatics without the civilians panicking (DC 13 Persuasion to keep civilians calm during or after combat; DC 10 with anyone who has previously demonstrated they are not regime-aligned)
- Escorting them to the maintenance corridor and toward the choir loft exterior staircase, which is the safest exit route

If the party does not reach the confession chambers before Scene 4: the civilians are still there when the inner sanctum fight triggers. They are not in immediate danger but they will hear everything and some of them will panic. DC 14 Persuasion after the chapter to prevent their accounts from producing Heat on a failure (from their testimony to regime informants)

The Choir Loft

Elevated above the nave's western end, accessible from the nave stairs or the external staircase. 4 Cultist Fanatics are operating the propaganda broadcast station: a crystal amplifier system connected to the Kenku's network and currently broadcasting the Hierophant's morning sermon on a loop.

The broadcast station: AC 13, 40 HP. Destroying it disrupts the Hierophant's propaganda network in Oren's eastern district for 1d4+1 days. It also makes noise that carries through the Cathedral.

The Cultist Fanatics will not leave the loft voluntarily; their instructions are to maintain the broadcast regardless. They are not equipped for melee and will use the loft's elevated position to throw improvised projectiles if the party ascends the stairs.

From the choir loft, the party has a clear view of the entire nave below and can observe anyone moving through the crossing toward the inner sanctum antechamber.

The Encounter

Sister Kara at the Reliquary

This is her scene. Let it resonate.

After the party has cleared the reliquary and Sister Kara has examined the display cases, give her a moment alone in the room if any party member steps back to let her have it.

She does not cry. She does not make a speech. She stands in front of the fourth case with the locked box for a long moment. Then she picks up the regime-issue lock with two fingers, holding it away from herself the way you hold something that should not have been allowed to exist, and sets it on the display case beside the box. Then she picks up the box carefully, with both hands, and puts it in her pack.

She comes back out of the reliquary and says:

"Ready."

That is all.

What the Party Can Do

Use the Hidden Passage

The highest-value action in this scene. The passage bypasses the antechamber entirely and gives the party a positioning advantage going into Scene 5. It requires Thieves' Tools and darkness discipline but is entirely achievable.

Clear the Confession Chambers

The good-aligned action and mechanically beneficial in Scene 6. Civilian casualties in the Cathedral produce Heat and reduce the post-chapter Hope gain. Getting them out costs time and a Cultist Fanatic encounter but removes a complication from the later scenes.

Destroy the Broadcast Station

Effective but noisy. The Cultist Fanatics in the loft can be handled quietly, but the destruction of the crystal amplifier produces a sound that carries. If the hidden passage has not yet been used, destroying the broadcast station alerts the antechamber Cultist Fanatics that something is happening. If the hidden passage has already been used and the party is committed to the sanctum approach, destroying it is free.

Take the Box

Sister Kara has already done this. But if she has not had the opportunity, any party member can take it.

Do not tell the party what is inside.

Tell them it is old and locked and that Sister Kara asked for it specifically.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

The maintenance corridor Cultist Fanatics have already left their post; a supply delivery distracted them and they are in the north transept sorting boxes. The corridors are empty and movement through them requires no check.

Making it Harder

The reliquary has a Cultist Fanatic stationed inside as a guard, assigned specifically because the Hierophant is aware the reliquary contains something she has not been able to open. The Cultist Fanatic will fight to prevent access to the fourth case; she has been told the box is a holy relic of the New Order and believes this completely.

Increasing Role Play

In the confession chambers, let the party hear part of a loyalty assessment session before they intervene. One of the Cultist Fanatics is asking a middle-aged human man whether he has heard anyone in his household express doubt about the Goristro's divine mandate. The man says no. The Cultist Fanatic asks again, differently. The man says no again. The Cultist Fanatic makes a note.

The man has said nothing wrong. He will be flagged anyway. The note is already written.

Treasure and Rewards

From the Reliquary:

- The locked box (Chapter 13 revelation; do not open now)
- Evidence of systematic artifact replacement (admissible documentation that the Hierophant deliberately destroyed or displaced pre-regime religious property; useful for the restoration narrative)

From the Confession Chambers:

- Loyalty assessment ledgers from 3 Cultist Fanatics (documents the names of congregation members flagged for loyalty concerns; cross-references with the nave's attendance ledger; DC 14 Investigation to identify 5 names that appear on both lists and on the Hezrou's detention records)

From the Choir Loft:

- Broadcast station components (if intact: usable to send one false Hierophant broadcast; if destroyed: disrupts eastern district propaganda for 1d4+1 days)
 - Broadcast schedule and content logs (documents what the Hierophant has been broadcasting and when; evidence of systematic propaganda production)
-

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Hidden passage located and used	0	0	0
Civilians extracted from confession chambers	+1	0	0
Broadcast station destroyed	+1	+1	-1
Box retrieved from reliquary	0	0	0
Cultist Fanatics in confession chambers neutralized quietly	0	0	0

SCENE 4:

THE INNER SANCTUM

The antechamber is the Cathedral's final defensive layer before the Hierophant. Four Cultist Fanatics serve as honor guard in a space that was designed as a transitional room between the public Cathedral and the sacred interior, a place for clergy to compose themselves before entering the innermost space. It is now a guardroom. It is the hardest non-boss encounter in the chapter.

If the party used the hidden passage: they bypass this scene entirely and enter Scene 5 from the passage door. The antechamber Cultist Fanatics are never encountered. This is the passage's primary reward.

If the party did not use the hidden passage: read or paraphrase the following:

The antechamber is 30 by 20 feet, with the altar screen to the east and the transept crossing to the west. Four Cultist Fanatics in the Hierophant's ceremonial vestments stand at the cardinal points of the room: one at each wall.

They are not patrolling. They are waiting. There is a difference between a creature that is alert and a creature that is ready, and these four are the second thing.

The one nearest the altar screen speaks first.

"The sanctum is closed to visitors," she says. Her voice is entirely level. "The Hierophant is in private devotion. You will leave."

She does not expect the party to leave. She is giving them the opportunity to prove they will not.

Features of the Area

The Antechamber

30 by 20 feet. Stone floor, unobstructed. Four devotional alcoves in the corners, each containing a golden idol bearing the Goristro's face. The idols are lair features of the Hierophant; while she is in the inner sanctum, within 30 feet, the idols pulse with corrupted divine energy once per round (see Lair Actions; antechamber counts as within lair range).

The altar screen separates the antechamber from the inner sanctum. It is carved wood, 10 feet high, with a central door (DC 13 Thieves' Tools, or 1 action to force with DC 15 Athletics). The screen provides three-quarters cover to anyone standing directly behind it.

The Four Cultist Fanatics

CR 2 each. At 11th level, four Cultist Fanatics is a manageable encounter made harder by the Hierophant's proximity triggering lair actions. The Golden Idols lair action (see Hierophant stat block) fires on initiative count 20 while she is within range.

The Cultist Fanatics fight as a coordinated unit, not as individuals: two engage in melee while two maintain range, casting hold person and using fanatical spellcasting to lock down spell-casters.

They will not retreat even when reduced below half HP. They believe they are in a holy place and that their deaths in defense of it are sacred. This belief is genuine. It does not make them less dangerous. It makes them more so.

The Lair Action

While the Hierophant is in the inner sanctum conducting her private devotional, her Golden Idols lair action fires at initiative count 20. Each creature in the antechamber that is not allied with the Hierophant must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or be Frightened of the Hierophant until initiative count 20 of the next round. The party cannot see the Hierophant. They are being Frightened by her presence through a wall.

This is not an accident. The antechamber was designed to make people feel the weight of what was on the other side of the altar screen.

The Encounter

Sister Kara in the Antechamber

If the party is fighting through the antechamber, Sister Kara stays at the entrance and manages triage. But before the fight begins, if the party pauses at the antechamber threshold, she says something she has not said in the campaign before.

Read or paraphrase the following:

"I need to tell you something before we go in." She is looking at the golden idols in the alcoves, not at the party. "My teachers are dead. Most of them. The ones who would not perform the new ceremonies were removed in the first year." She pauses. "I have been carrying that since before you found me. I did not say it before because it was not useful." She looks at the party. "It is not useful now either. But I wanted you to know before we finish this."

*She raises her staff.
"Ready."*

What the Party Can Do

Bypass via the Hidden Passage

If the passage was found and used in Scene 3, the party is not in this scene. They are already in Scene 5. This is the passage's payoff. The antechamber Cultist Fanatics are never encountered and the party arrives at the Hierophant with full resources rather than depleted resources from a Cultist Fanatic fight.

Manage the Lair Action

The Golden Idols lair action fires at initiative count 20. A party that goes first can destroy one or more idols before the lair action fires (each idol: AC 12, 15 HP). Destroying an idol removes it as a lair action source for the Golden Idols specifically; with all four destroyed, the lair action cannot trigger in this room.

Coordinate Against the Fanatics

The Cultist Fanatics are vulnerable to concentration disruption. Two of them maintain hold person while two melee. Disrupting the concentration holders changes the encounter's difficulty significantly. Identify the concentration holders (DC 12 Perception to notice which ones are casting versus which are attacking) and prioritize them.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

Two of the four Cultist Fanatics are in the north transept when the party enters the antechamber, having heard the noise from the nave and moved to investigate. They return after 3 rounds, arriving at the antechamber from the north entrance. The party faces 2 Fanatics initially, then 4 after 3 rounds. The resource expenditure is the same but the opening rounds are more manageable.

Making it Harder

The Hierophant has been alerted by the communication crystal or the broadcast station's destruction. She is no longer in private devotional. She is in the inner sanctum preparing. The lair actions begin on Round 1 of Scene 4, not just the Golden Idols; all four antechamber lair actions are available from the moment the party engages the Cultist Fanatics, including The Hierophant using Contemn from across the altar screen.

Increasing Role Play

Let the Cultist Fanatic honor guard speak during the fight. Not tactical commands to each other; they are coordinated enough not to need those. But they pray while they fight. Fragments of the corrupted liturgy, the Hierophant's rewrites of the old faith's ceremonies, spoken under their breath between attacks. Sister Kara, in the doorway, can hear the words. The party can hear that she recognizes them. She does not say what they used to mean. That silence is the information.

Treasure and Rewards

From the Antechamber:

- Vestments of the Honor Guard (ceremonial; no mechanical value; Sister Kara does not want them in the Cathedral but asks that they not be destroyed; she says nothing further about this)
- Key to the altar screen door (on the lead Fanatic; removes the Thieves' Tools check)

Development and Dial Impact

No dial changes from this scene.

SCENE 5: THE HIEROPHANT

The confrontation with the Hierophant. This is the chapter's boss encounter and its most mechanically demanding scene. The reality distortion is at maximum intensity in the Ministry Chamber, the Evil Eye fires before combat even formally begins, and the Hierophant's absolute certainty makes standard intimidation and persuasion useless while creating specific exploitable vulnerabilities through Delusional Certainty.

The confrontation with the Hierophant. This is the chapter's boss encounter and its most mechanically demanding scene. The inner sanctum has been so thoroughly transformed by the Hierophant's presence that only Sister Kara, looking at specific architectural details, can identify what it used to be. Her spellcasting suite is genuine divine power twisted to dark purposes. Her legendary resistances make her difficult to lock down. And her absolute certainty means she will not stop until she is stopped.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The inner sanctum is 40 by 30 feet. It was, once, a plain stone room with a single window and a small altar and enough space for a senior cleric to pray in private. It is no longer plain and it is no longer small-feeling.

The walls are covered in the Hierophant's theological writings, floor to ceiling, in a handwriting that has been trained to look monumental. The window has been filled with gold-painted glass that lets in colored light but not clear sight. The small altar has been replaced with a structure three times its original size, covered in golden idols bearing the Goristro's face, and behind the altar, the Hierophant stands with her hands raised and her eyes closed, in a posture of devotion that is either prayer or performance and may have stopped being distinguishable from the inside some time ago.

She does not open her eyes when the party enters.

"I knew you were coming," she says. "I have known since the nave." She lowers her hands.

She opens her eyes. "I have been preparing."

She looks at Sister Kara last.

"And I see you brought someone who remembers the old words."

She does not say this with contempt. She says it with something that is closer to recognition. She knew Kara's teachers. She was there when the institutions were redirected. She remembers what she replaced.

"Good," she says. "Then this will mean something."

She raises her Pact Blade.

Features of the Area

The Inner Sanctum

40 by 30 feet. Stone floor with no cover except the altar structure (three-quarters cover, AC 15, 60 HP). The walls covered in text (difficult terrain adjacent to walls as the text seems to press outward; DC 12 Wisdom save when first entering or disadvantage on the first saving throw made in the room). The gold-filled window blocks external light; the room is lit by magical sources the Hierophant controls.

Two Cultist Fanatics are present: stationed at the altar's flanks. They engage immediately on initiative. While within 30 feet of the Hierophant, both Fanatics are immune to the Frightened condition per their True Believer trait; the Hierophant's Sermon legendary action does not affect them and should not be directed at them. If one Fanatic falls, the other must succeed on a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw or have disadvantage on attack rolls until the end of its next turn per the Lay Down the Faith trait. The Hierophant does not react to this; she does not acknowledge the loss of her flanking guards.

Exposed Faith

Sister Kara activates Exposed Faith. The Hierophant has disadvantage on attack rolls against Sister Kara and any party member within 5 feet of Sister Kara, and her spell save DC is reduced by 3 (to DC 14) for the duration of the encounter. When Sister Kara or another Exposed Faith character succeeds on a saving throw against one of the Hierophant's spells, the Hierophant takes 7 (2d6) radiant damage as genuine divine power recoils against her corruption.

If a party member also has Cleric or Paladin class features: Exposed Faith is doubled; the Hierophant has disadvantage on all attack rolls and her spell save DC is reduced to DC 11.

The Encounter

Combat Structure

The Hierophant is CR 12 with Legendary Resistance (3/day), Martyr's Resolve at half HP, and a full spellcasting suite. She is the hardest fight so far. The party should feel it.

She opens with Condemn targeting whoever she assesses as the primary threat, then uses spirit guardians (manifesting as golden idols bearing the Goristro's face, which move with her) and Radiant Ray at range. She does not move from behind the altar in the first two rounds; the altar provides cover and the spirit guardians provide area denial.

Round 1

Hierophant uses Condemn (bonus action) on the party's primary damage dealer. She casts spirit guardians (concentration) and uses Radiant Ray against the Exposed Faith character if one is present: "The false faith is the most offensive thing in this room." She means it.

The two Cultist Fanatics act on their own initiatives. Each uses **command** (2/day) targeting different party members: one targets the party's primary melee fighter ("Kneel"), one targets whoever is closest to Sister Kara ("Flee"). Each also deploys Spiritual Weapon as a bonus action: two golden bull-head weapons enter the combat space as persistent bonus action attacks.

The Cultist Fanatics do not coordinate with the Hierophant tactically. They are defending the altar. That is their entire directive.

Round 2

She uses Twisted Blessing on a Cultist Fanatic to heal them (22 HP). She uses Radiant Ray twice via Multi-attack. She holds her position behind the altar.

Round 3

If the altar is destroyed or the party has forced her out of position: she advances. She uses Sermon (2 legendary actions) targeting the full party. The Frightened condition from Sermon is

resisted automatically by Sister Kara and any Cleric or Paladin; those characters gain advantage on their next attack against her when they resist.

Half HP: Martyr's Resolve

When reduced to half HP, she does not flinch.

Read or paraphrase the following:

She stops. Not in retreat. In stillness. She looks at her own hands for a moment with an expression that is not doubt but is the shape that doubt leaves behind when someone has spent thirty years building certainty over it.

Then she recharges her most recently used spell slot of 3rd level or lower and has advantage on all saving throws until the end of her next turn.

She does not say anything during this. The silence is worse than if she did.

She Does Not Surrender

She has no Institutional Withdrawal equivalent. She has no deal available. She does not know how to want one. If reduced to 0 HP, she falls. Her last action, whatever it is, she completes fully if she has the action available. She does not hedge. She does not stop.

If the party has used Exposed Faith consistently and Sister Kara has been positioned close to multiple party members: the radiant damage she takes from each failed spell lands repeatedly in the back half of the fight, and the Hierophant's final rounds should feel like someone being worn down not by force but by the specific weight of genuine devotion pushing back against corruption.

Her last words, if she has the action to speak them, are not a curse or a threat. She looks at Sister Kara and says:

"I remember what I replaced."

She means it as a confession. She means it as a defense. After many years, she may not be able to tell the difference.

Then she falls.

Any surviving Cultist Fanatics must immediately succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw per the compendium note on Believers following their authority figure's death. On a success: they lower their weapons.

They do not flee. They stand in the sanctum with the expression of people who built their identity around a certainty that just ended. On a failure: they continue fighting until incapacitated. They have nothing outside the certainty. They do not know how to stop.

The party can interact with any surviving Fanatics after the fight. They may have testimony. They may have nothing. Both are correct outcomes.

What the Party Can Do

Exploit Exposed Faith Positioning

Sister Kara should be centrally positioned and near as many party members as possible. Her presence extends the Exposed Faith disadvantage to anyone within 5 feet.

A party that clusters around her is maximizing the mechanic's reach. The Hierophant will target Kara specifically to break the clustering; protecting Kara is both a tactical and narrative priority.

Destroy the Altar

The altar (AC 15, 60 HP) removes the Hierophant's primary cover and forces her out of her opening position. A party that commits significant resources to destroying the altar in Round 1 pays an action economy cost but gains positional advantage for every subsequent round.

Target the Cultist Fanatics First

The flanking Cultist Fanatics are action economy problems.

Each has **command** (2/day) for action denial and **hold person** (1/day) for concentration lock.

Their Spiritual Weapons persist as bonus action damage sources every round they remain standing. Removing them in Round 1 frees the party to focus exclusively on the Hierophant from Round 2 onward.

A coordinated Round 1 that eliminates both Cultist Fanatics before the Hierophant's first full action is the optimal opening.

Note that both Fanatics are immune to Frightened near the Hierophant; effects that would clear melee fighters from the altar area do not work on them.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

The party entered via the hidden passage (bypassing Scene 4) and arrives before the Hierophant has completed her preparation. She is mid-devotional, not combat-ready; she does not have spirit guardians pre-cast and must spend her first action casting it rather than attacking. Her first round is a setup round rather than an opening assault.

Making it Harder

The Hierophant was alerted by the communication crystal or the broadcast station's destruction. She has had time to cast spirit guardians before the party enters, the room already contains manifested golden idols when the doors open, and she has positioned the two Cultist Fanatics at the door to greet the party's entry rather than at the altar. The party walks into a room that is already hostile.

Increasing Role Play

The walls covered in her theological writings should be readable during the fight. Let a player ask what they say. Pick one section near wherever they are standing and read it aloud: a declaration that the Goristro's rule is divinely ordained, written in the specific language of the old faith's most beloved texts, substituting the Goristro's name where the original text named something else. The theology is internally coherent. The substitution is exact. She was very good at this.

Sister Kara hears it. She does not comment. She keeps fighting.

Treasure and Rewards

From the Hierophant's Body:

- Her Pact Blade (attuned; 1d6+5 slashing plus 4d8 radiant damage; requires attunement by a Warlock or Cleric; if used by a Cleric, the radiant damage increases to 5d8 as the blade responds to genuine divine authority)
- Her holy symbol (the corrupted version; DC 14 Religion to identify it as a modified version of a pre-regime symbol with specific alterations; the modifications document the specific changes she made to the old faith's iconography; admissible as evidence)
- Personal theological notes (her private writings, separate from the wall text;

documents the specific decisions she made about which elements of the old faith to preserve and which to replace; this is the most complete record of her project that exists; it is disturbing and thorough and useful for Chapter 13)

From the Sanctum:

- The theological wall writings (not removable physically, but Lyra can produce a complete transcription in 2 hours; the transcription documents the full scope of doctrinal corruption and is significant for any faith restoration effort)
 - The Hierophant's correspondence with the Goristro (in a locked drawer in the altar structure, DC 14 Thieves' Tools; confirms the Goristro's explicit approval of the faith colonization program)
-

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Hierophant defeated	+1	+1	-1
Exposed Faith mechanic activated by Sister Kara	+1	0	0
Hierophant's correspondence recovered	+1	0	-1
Two Cultist Fanatics eliminated in Round 1	0	0	0

SCENE 6: WHAT REMAINS

The Hierophant is dead. The Cathedral is quiet for the first time since before the regime. This scene covers the immediate aftermath, what Sister Kara does in the empty sanctum, and what the resistance does with a reclaimed house of faith.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The spirit guardians dissolve when she falls. The golden light goes with them. What is left is the room as it is: stone walls covered in text, a gold-filled window, an altar structure that is too large for the space.

And Sister Kara, who is standing at the center of the room, looking at the wall text, with her staff held at her side and her expression doing several things at once that the party has not seen it do before.

She sets her staff against the wall. She reaches into her pack and takes out the carved wooden icon from Chapel 7. She sets it on the altar, on top of a golden idol bearing the Goristro's face, and she stands in front of it for a long moment.

Then she says something in a language the party may or may not recognize. It is not Common. It is not Infernal. It is something older than either, and she says it quietly, with the rhythm of someone reciting something they have not said out loud in a very long time. She finishes. She picks up her staff. She looks at the party.

"The building is still here," she says. "That matters."

She walks out of the sanctum. In the doorway she pauses.

"I am going to need some time in here. Not today. But before we leave Oren. There are things that should be done properly." She does not explain what things. She goes back to the nave to check on the injured.

Features of the Area

The Cathedral's State

The building is no longer under the Hierophant's authority. The regional effects end:

- **The corrupted divine authority:** divination spells seeking information about the old faith's genuine practices no longer return distorted results
- **The psychic weight:** creatures within 1 mile of the Cathedral no longer need to make Wisdom saves to publicly express non-regime religious sentiment
- **The congregation:** civilians who attended the Cathedral under social pressure but did not genuinely believe the new doctrine will notice, within 24-48 hours, that the compulsion they felt toward attendance has lifted; they will not immediately understand why; over the following week, the Cathedral's forced attendance figures will collapse visibly

The Cultist Fanatics

The surviving Believers in the Cathedral have the same disposition as the Fomorian's Believers: some have fled, some are processing, some are sitting in the nave looking at the walls with expressions that suggest they are calculating something they have been prevented from calculating for a long time.

The Xvarts have scattered. They left when the noise got close. They will return when whoever is loudest tells them to. That is their nature.

The Sealed Document

If the party has not yet opened the sealed Archmage document from earlier: Sister Kara, when she comes back from the nave, looks at it in the party's possession and says:

"That seal. I have seen that notation. My teachers used it for certain kinds of protected documents." She examines it carefully.

"It is warded. But the ward is a specific kind; it requires a divine authority to remove it safely, not an arcane one."

She looks at the party.

"I can open it. Here. In this building. After what just happened in that room, I think I have enough."

She is offering to open the document now, in the restored sanctum, using whatever divine authority she has accumulated in thirty years of genuine healing work. The DM decides whether this produces the Chapter 16 revelation now or whether the document reveals something different when opened in this specific context: a framing document for Project Provenance that, when read in a place where genuine faith just overcame corrupted faith, reads differently than it would have read elsewhere. Let the players feel that the where of the reading matters.

The Encounter

What to Do With the Cathedral

Mira has not been here. She sends the party with authority to make an immediate assessment and a provisional decision. The Cathedral cannot be left unoccupied; it will be claimed by whoever arrives first.

Three options are available:

- **Resistance Occupation:** The Cathedral becomes a resistance-controlled space. Sister Kara is the de facto authority. The building provides a safe gathering point for the eastern district and a visible symbol that the regime's institutional control of the city is collapsing. Hope and Heat increase as the regime moves to contest the claim.
- **Sealed and Monitored:** The party secures the building and leaves a small resistance presence to prevent regime reoccupation while Sister Kara prepares for a proper restoration ceremony. No immediate Hope gain but the building is secured without triggering an immediate regime response.
- **Returned to the Community:** The party opens the Cathedral to the eastern district's residents and lets the community decide what to do with it. No resistance authority, but maximum Hope gain: the sight of the community walking into the Cathedral that compelled their attendance and finding it empty of the regime's authority is the most visible sign of change the eastern district has experienced.

What the Party Can Do

Give Sister Kara Time

She asked for it. She will use it well. If the party gives her an hour in the sanctum before the debriefing: she emerges with a specific, practical request about the locked box from the reliquary. She wants it opened in the presence of the Nine Justiciars. She does not explain why. She says: *"Trust me."*

Make the Cathedral Decision

The three options have different trade-offs. Let the party discuss. If they cannot agree, Sister Kara, asked for her preference, says:

"Open it. Give it back to the people. We can secure it afterward. The first thing it should be is theirs again."

Search the Altar Structure

The locked drawer (DC 14 Thieves' Tools) contains the Hierophant's correspondence with the Goristro. If not yet retrieved, it is available now.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

The regime does not respond to the Cathedral's change of status for 48 hours; an administrative confusion about jurisdiction means no one is immediately dispatched to contest it. The party has time to make the Cathedral decision without pressure.

Making it Harder

A regime loyalist who was in the morning service and escaped the nave fight has already sent a message to the Rakshasa's nearest contact. A response force of 4 Merregons arrives at the Cathedral 30 minutes after the Hierophant's death. The Cathedral decision must be made and the building prepared for defense or evacuation before they arrive.

Increasing Role Play

Let the party walk back through the nave on the way out. The murals are still there with the gold paint over them. In the places where the fighting happened, the gold has chipped and cracked. In one section near the third pillar on the south side, where a spell or a weapon struck the wall, the original mural is exposed in a patch roughly the size of a person's hand. One original face, looking out from under three centuries of stone and three years of gold.

Sister Kara stops in front of it. She does not say anything. She walks on.

Treasure and Rewards

From Scene 6 decisions:

- Sealed document opened by Sister Kara (Chapter 16 revelation or contextual variant; DM's determination)
 - Sister Kara's relationship with the locked box established
-

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Cathedral returned to community	+2	+1	-1
Cathedral occupied by resistance	+1	+1	-1
Cathedral sealed and monitored	0	0	-1
Regime response force contested the Cathedral	0	+1	0

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

What the Party Should Know

- The corrupted faith infrastructure is dismantled. The Hierophant is gone. The Cathedral is no longer a loyalty apparatus. The eastern district of Oren will feel this within 48 hours as the compelled attendance pressure lifts and people who came because they were afraid realize they are not afraid of this building anymore.
- Sister Kara's teachers are being given something back. It is not the same as having them alive. But the building is still there, and she said that matters, and she knows what things matter.
- The locked box is going to Chapter 13. Sister Kara asked the party to trust her about it. They should. What is inside it is the oldest piece of legal documentation in Orenthis and it belongs in the Justiciars' restored court.
- The Hierophant's correspondence with the Goristro confirms explicit approval of the faith colonization program. Combined with the dual-authorization document from Chapter 10 and the Mezzoloth's testimony from Chapter 6, the Goristro's personal fingerprints are now on three separate institutional crimes. The legal case is complete enough to proceed.
- The Nine Justiciars are next. The Cathedral fell. The courts follow. Both of the regime's institutional pillars, the corrupted faith and the corrupted law, will have fallen before the party confronts the Goristro's inner circle.

Character Advancement

12th level reached.

Downtime (Optional)

- Sister Kara's restoration ceremony (she needs 3 days in the Cathedral to perform what she considers the minimum required; during this time she is unavailable for field operations; when she returns, her Steady Presence ability gains one additional use per short rest as a consequence of something that happened in the sanctum that she has not described and will not describe)
- Deliver the Hierophant's correspondence to resistance legal contacts (completes the third major evidence thread)

- Transcribe the sanctum wall writings with Lyra (2 hours; produces a document useful for Chapter 13's faith restoration framework)
- Research the locked box (DC 18 Religion or History; no result; the box predates every reference available; Sister Kara, if asked, says:
"Some things are not meant to be researched. They are meant to be opened at the right time.")

Future Hooks

- The locked box and the Justiciars: Sister Kara knows something about this box that she has not said. The Chapter 13 revelation, when it comes, should feel earned by the party's trust in her request to wait.
- The former Believers: the surviving Cultist Fanatics who did not flee are in various states of processing. Some of them will find the resistance in the weeks after this chapter. Some will not. The ones who do will have things to say about the Hierophant's operation that even her personal notes do not capture, because they experienced it from the inside.
- The Goristro's explicit approval: three institutional crimes now have his personal seal. The legal case does not need more evidence. It needs a court. Chapter 13 is the court.
- The eastern district's response: within a week, the Cathedral's forced attendance will visibly collapse. People who attended because they were afraid will stop attending. The Kenku's broadcasts will explain this as a technical disruption. The people of the eastern district will know what it actually is. Hope rises faster than anytime since the Chapter 2 wagon rescue.

Lead-in to the Next Chapter

Mira receives the party's full debrief at the resistance safe house. She listens to everything. Then she goes to Lyra's map and looks at it for a long moment without speaking.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The Mezzoloth is gone. The Hezrou is gone. The Fomorian is gone. The Nycaloth is gone. The Yagnoloth is working for the resistance. The Hierophant is gone.

She traces the markers on the map one by one. Then she looks at the last marker inside the city: the Supreme Hall, where nine heads sit behind a corrupted altar of law.

"The Nine Justiciars," she says. "The last thing standing between the Goristro's personal power and a legitimate legal challenge to it." She pauses. "We free the gagged heads. We end the corruption. The court reconvenes under its own authority with the legal record that we hand them."

She looks at the party.

"And then we have a document signed by the Goristro authorizing the detention, study, and transfer of persons selected on the basis of their cognitive characteristics. We have testimony from four former regime officials. We have correspondence confirming explicit approval of faith colonization and loyalty purges." She taps the Supreme Hall marker. "And we have a restored court to present it to."

She straightens up.

"For the first time since this started, the law is on our side. Let us go use it."

Considerations

If the Cathedral was returned to the community: the approach to Chapter 12 through the eastern district is noticeably different. People look at the party differently. The Cathedral's doors are open as they pass and the sound coming from inside is not a loyalty hymn.

If the Cathedral was occupied by the resistance: Mira notes it as a secure fallback position for the Chapter 13 approach. The Supreme Hall is in the civic district; having a resistance-controlled building in the eastern district provides a staging point.

If the sealed Archmage document was opened by Sister Kara: its contents are already in play for Chapter 13. Mira has integrated whatever it revealed into the legal strategy. The Justiciars will hear it as part of the case.

If Sister Kara did not get her three days in the Cathedral: she is quieter than usual in the Chapter 13 briefing. She is still present and still functional. But she is carrying something she has not put down yet. Let that be visible.

Chapter 13 The Nine Justiciars



"The law did not fail Orenthis. The law was used against it. There is a difference, and the difference is everything."

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 13 is a climax that the campaign has been building toward since the garrison documents in Chapter 1 named a symbol and two words that did not fit the pattern. Since the Mezzoloth surrendered a termination clause. Since the Hezrou's purge orders connected to selection criteria the party did not yet understand. Since the Yagnoloth handed over nine leverage documents and a sealed Archmage correspondence that predated the program it described. Since Sister Kara carried a locked box out of a reliquary and asked the party to trust her about it.

All of it has been building toward this room.

The Supreme Hall is the seat of Orenthian law. Three centuries of legal precedent, institutional memory, and civic authority are encoded in its architecture, its procedures, and its

nine-headed guardian: the Hydra of the High Court, whose nine heads were the living embodiment of legal legitimacy until six were corrupted and three were gagged and the whole apparatus was turned into an instrument of the Goristro's will.

The party's job is to free the three gagged heads, destroy the six corrupted ones, and restore the court to its own authority. What the restored court does with twelve chapters of accumulated evidence is then the court's decision, not the party's. That distinction matters and the party should feel it: they have been fighting for a system that operates independently of them, not for a system they control.

When the court reconvenes and the Merregon contracts void across the city and the legal challenge to the Goristro's authority is formally issued, it will be the greatest institutional victory the resistance has achieved.

And then Bowman walks in.

He has been waiting for this. Not for the resistance to win, exactly. For the resistance to win enough that aligning with them is no longer the most advantageous position available to him. He has been building toward this moment since Chapter 1. He has been helpful because helpfulness builds dependency. He has been accurate because accuracy builds trust. He has been present at every key moment because presence builds indispensability.

He waited until the resistance was worth betraying.

The chapter ends on the specific quality of triumph that has just become complicated. The party exits Act II having achieved a major milestone victory but the moment is tempered with intrigue.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Scene 1: The Case for the Court

Final preparation and approach. The party assembles the full evidence package and receives Mira's assessment of what the court restoration requires.

Scene 1 should feel like the morning before something that cannot be undone, weighty and purposeful and slightly unreal.

Scene 2: The Supreme Hall

Approaching and entering the Supreme Hall. The building's geography, its corrupted state, and the specific horror of a legal institution that has been turned into a weapon.

Scene 2 should feel like walking into the gravity of three centuries of law and feeling the corruption that has been layered over it.

Scene 3: The Gagged Heads

The first objective: reaching and freeing the three bound Justiciars without triggering the Hydra's full combat mode. Investigation, careful movement, and the specific puzzle of how the gags work and what removing them does.

Scene 3 should feel like defusing something, precise and consequential and slightly terrifying.

Scene 4: The Corrupted Court

The combat encounter. The six Corrupted Heads, the Hydra's full mechanical suite, and the specific challenge of a boss fight where the victory condition is not simply killing the target but restoring what it was before it became what it is.

Scene 4 should feel epic and earned, the hardest fight the party has faced since the campaign began.

Scene 5: The Restoration

The court reconvenes. The evidence is presented. The Merregon contracts void. The legal challenge is issued. The Act II triumph. Scene 5 should feel like something clicking into place after twelve chapters of work, specific and institutional and genuinely moving.

Scene 6: Bowman

He walks in. He has a proposal. He has documentation. He has external support he has been quietly cultivating in parallel with the party's work. He has been waiting for exactly this.

Scene 6 should feel like the floor dropping out from under a victory that was real and is still real and has just become insufficient.

RUNNING THE CHAPTER

Designed for: 12th-level characters

Sessions: 3-4

Advancement: Reach 13th level at end

This chapter is the longest in Act II and contains the campaign's most mechanically complex encounter alongside its most emotionally significant betrayal. The Hydra fight is designed to reward the party's accumulated knowledge of the contract system, the court's specific corruption mechanics, and the strategic value of the gagged heads. The Changeling's gambit is designed to reward twelve chapters of paying attention to someone who was always slightly off if players paid attention.

The primary goals are:

- Deliver the Nine Justiciars fight as the Act II combat climax
- Restore the court as a genuine institutional victory with real mechanical consequences
- Present the full evidence package as a legal case that the restored court evaluates on its own terms
- Make the Changeling's gambit land with the weight of something that was always true about him
- Set up Act III with the party understanding that they won Act II and that winning was the setup

Guidance

The Court Is Not the Party's Tool

When the court reconvenes, the Justiciars evaluate the evidence independently. They do not simply rubber-stamp the resistance's case. They ask questions. They identify gaps. They note where the evidence is strong and where it is circumstantial. They are judges, not allies, and the party should feel the difference. The evidence the party has accumulated across twelve chapters is sufficient for a formal charge and a legal challenge to the Goristro's authority. It is not a guaranteed conviction. That distinction matters for Act III.

The Gagged Heads Are the Key

The Hydra's regeneration mechanic is driven by the six Corrupted Heads. Freeing the three Gagged Heads reduces regeneration by 18 HP per head freed (total elimination at three freed). A party that frees all three before or during the combat is fighting a winnable encounter. A party that ignores the Gagged Heads is fighting an encounter that trends toward attrition defeat regardless of damage output.

The Locked Box

Sister Kara has been carrying it with her. The Justiciars will recognize it. What is inside is the oldest piece of legal documentation in Orenthis and it is the chapter's most significant discovery. It does not change the legal case. It contextualizes it. Let it land after the evidence presentation, not before.

The Changeling's Gambit Timing

He enters at the end of Scene 5, not the beginning of Scene 6. He walks in while the party is still standing in the restored court, still processing the victory, before anyone has had a chance to sit down. The timing is deliberate. He has been watching from outside and he chose the moment of maximum institutional legitimacy to make his move, because maximum institutional legitimacy is the environment he needs for his proposal to be credible.

SCENE 1:

THE CASE FOR THE COURT

This scene occurs in the resistance safe house the morning before the assault on the Supreme Hall. Mira has assembled the complete evidence package and is walking the party through what the court restoration requires. The locked box is on the table. The full document archive is laid out.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The table has not been this covered since the beginning. Lyra's operational map is still in the center but it has been pushed to one side to make room for all of the documentation you have accumulated: the garrison records, the purge orders, the Mezzoloth's testimony, the Nycaloth's signed cooperation, the Yagnoloth's leverage files, the Hierophant's correspondence, the dual-authorization document from Chapter 9, and the Fomorian's blank research journal. Mira has been awake since before the party. She looks at the table and then at the party with the expression of someone who has been building something for a long time and is now looking at what they built.

"This is the legal case against the Goristro," she says. "It is not complete in the sense of being without gaps. But it is complete in the sense that a restored court has enough to issue a formal charge and a legal challenge to his authority." She touches the dual-authorization document. "This is the centerpiece. His seal on a program that constitutes crimes against persons under every legal framework Orenthis has ever maintained."

She looks at the party.

"The Justiciars need to see it from us, not from an empty room. Someone needs to present this case in person. Someone needs to be standing in that court when it reconvenes and speak to what was found and how." She pauses. "I am going to be honest with you about something. I am not a lawyer. Neither are any of you. But the Justiciars are not looking for legal perfection. They are looking for legal standing. And we have that."

*She picks up the locked box.
"Sister Kara asked me to put this on the table. She said the Justiciars will know what it is."*

She sets it in the center of the document archive. "I believe her."

Features of the Area

The Evidence Package

Twelve chapters of accumulated documentation, organized by Lyra into four categories:

Direct authorization:

The dual-authorization document from Chapter 9 bearing the Goristro's personal seal and the Archmage's seal, the Hierophant's correspondence confirming explicit approval of the faith colonization program, and the Goristro's personal letters to the Hezrou authorizing the loyalty purges.

Operational documentation:

The Project Provenance logbooks from Chapter 9, the subject intake records, the secondary facility's transfer destination record connecting 16 individuals to Heritage Institute Sub-Level 3, and the Fomorian's blank research journal proving the ideological scaffolding was fabricated.

Testimony:

The Mezzoloth's written testimony, the Nycaloth's signed cooperation document, and the Yagnoloth's notarized account of the regime's external arrangements. Three former regime officials on record.

External recognition:

Veth's Federation repudiation affidavit, the Tidal League's formal neutrality declaration, and the Mountain Compact's pending response to the Archmage's deception.

What the Court Restoration Requires

Mira's assessment, drawn from Henrik's knowledge of the old court protocols and Lyra's research into pre-regime legal procedure:

The court reconvenes under its own authority when at least one Justiciar is freed and capable of speech. The court's authority is institutional, not dependent on the number of active heads; a single freed Justiciar can reconvene the court under emergency provisions.

The court requires a petitioner with legal standing to present a case. Legal standing is established by one of three things: being a named subject of the regime's documented crimes, being a representative of a recognized external entity, or being an officer of a resistance organization that has been formally recognized by at least one external entity.

The Merchant Federation's formal support from Chapter 10 established the last category. The party has legal standing.

The court requires a witness to the reconvening. Any living Orenthis citizen of majority age who is present and not under documented coercion qualifies. The party needs at least one witness present who is not a party member. Sister Kara qualifies. Several freed prisoners from Chapter 9 qualify. Veth qualifies if present.

Sister Kara's Preparation

She has spent three days in the Cathedral. She is quieter than before but steadier than she has been since the campaign began. She sits at the table's edge and does not speak during Mira's briefing.

When Mira sets the locked box on the table, Sister Kara looks at it for a moment and then looks at the party.

"I know what is inside it now," she says. "I did not know when I took it. I know now." She does not explain how she knows. "When the Justiciars see it, they will know what to do. Let me handle that part."

She picks up her staff.

"I am ready when you are."

The Encounter

The Changeling's Morning Visit

Bowman arrives at the safe house before the party leaves. He is carrying supplies: healing potions, a forged route document for the civic district, and a small wrapped package he describes as a gift from a contact who wanted to remain anonymous.

He knows about the Supreme Hall assault. Of course he does. He has been paying attention since Chapter 1. He is warm, helpful, and specific in his assistance. He identifies one patrol route the party had not accounted for.

He notes a maintenance window in the Supreme Hall's guard rotation that gives the party a cleaner approach.

Everything he provides is accurate. It is also, in retrospect, the last piece of positioning he needed to do. He needs the party to get into the Supreme Hall and restore the court successfully. He needs the Justiciars operational. He needs the legal challenge issued.

He is not helping the party in spite of his agenda. He is helping them because of it. DC 19 Insight to notice, in his demeanor this morning, something that is not quite warmth and not quite anticipation and is specifically the expression of someone who is very close to the end of a long project. On a success, the party has a sense that something about today is different for him in a way they cannot name. On a failure, he is simply Bowman: helpful, specific, and slightly too convenient.

He leaves before the party does. He says he will be nearby if they need him. He means this literally.

What the Party Can Do

Review the Evidence Package

Let the party decide who presents the case. This is a role-play decision with mechanical weight: the presenting party member makes the primary Persuasion or History check in Scene 5. A party member who spent downtime studying the legal case makes this check with advantage.

Ask Sister Kara About the Box

She says:

"It is a founding document. Not of the Cathedral. Of the court. The Cathedral was built later."

She pauses.

"The box was in the Cathedral for safekeeping because the court did not trust its own security for something that old."

She looks at the party.

"That was wise. The Cathedral has been through three occupations. The box survived all of them."

Ask About Bowman

If the party raises concerns about Bowman's morning visit: Mira considers it carefully.

She says:

"He has been accurate about everything so far. I do not know what to do with that except use what he gives us and stay aware that accurate does not mean unconflicted."

She pauses.

"Today, specifically, stay aware."

She does not know what she is warning them about. She is warning them because something in her experience of people who are that consistently helpful in that specific way tells her to.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

Lyra's pre-organization of the evidence package reduces the Scene 5 presentation check DC by 2. The package is clearly structured and the strongest evidence is positioned at the front.

Making it Harder

One of the documents in the package has a potential authenticity challenge: the Mezzoloth's testimony was produced under duress in the sense that he was surrendering when he offered it. DC 15 Investigation to identify this vulnerability before the Justiciars do. On a success, the party can prepare a response. On a failure, the Justiciars raise it during Scene 5 and the party must address it in the moment.

Increasing Role Play

Give every NPC at the table a moment before the party leaves. Mira says something she would not normally say; let the player at the table who knows Mira best suggest what it is. Tam checks his equipment three times. Henrik straightens something on the table that does not need straightening. Lyra rolls up the operational map and hands it to whoever is leading the assault; she has been working on this map since Chapter 2 and giving it to the party to carry into the final chapter is the closest she comes to a speech.

Sister Kara is already at the door when the party gathers. She waited until everyone else was ready before she moved, which means she has been ready for a while.

Treasure and Rewards

No direct rewards in this scene. The evidence package itself is the reward for twelve chapters of work.

Development and Dial Impact

No dial changes from this scene.

SCENE 2:

THE SUPREME HALL

The party approaches and enters the Supreme Hall. This scene establishes the building's geography, its corrupted state, and the specific mechanical setup for the Hydra encounter.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The Supreme Hall sits at the center of Oren's civic district like something that was there before everything else and will be there after. Three centuries of legal precedent have been conducted in this building. Births registered, estates settled, crimes adjudicated, contracts authenticated. The stonework is the particular gray of something that has been maintained because its maintenance is considered a civic duty rather than a choice.

The golden idols are visible from a block away. They line the building's exterior colonnade, each one bearing the Goristro's face, each one installed over an original carved figure that is still visible at the base where the installation team ran out of material. The original figures were blindfolded, which is the traditional representation of impartial justice. The golden idols have no blindfolds. They are watching everything.

The building is not guarded by Merregons. The Hydra's regional effects make conventional guarding unnecessary. The Exhausting Effect has been pressing down on every person who has tried to publicly resist the regime within a mile of this building for as long as the corruption has been active. The building does its own guarding.

Features of the Area

The Supreme Hall Exterior

The building occupies half a city block.

Key exterior features:

- **Main Entrance:** three sets of double doors, heavy bronze, currently closed; no exterior guard; the building's lair effects make conventional security unnecessary
- **Side Entrance:** east face, used by court clerks; lighter door (DC 12 Athletics to force, DC 10 Thieves' Tools); connects to the clerk's corridor that runs along the north wall of the main chamber
- **Maintenance Access:** basement level, north face; connects to the chamber's sub-floor, used for structural maintenance; DC 13

Thieves' Tools to open; allows entry at floor level beneath the Hydra's sightlines

The Regional Effects

Within 1 mile of the Supreme Hall, while the corruption holds:

- **The Record is Sealed:** divination spells seeking information about the regime's crimes return no information
- **The Ruling Stands:** all Merregon contracts within 10 miles are considered valid and enforceable; Merregons within this range have advantage on saves against effects that would compel them to break their contracts
- **Exhausting Effect:** creatures attempting to publicly resist the regime must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom save each hour or gain one level of exhaustion

The party has been operating within this effect for the entire campaign without realizing it. When the corruption ends, the exhaustion lifts. Let the party feel the difference.

The Main Chamber

The Supreme Hall's primary space: 80 feet long, 60 feet wide, 40-foot vaulted ceiling. The Hydra occupies the chamber's center, surrounding the judicial dais where the Justiciars once sat.

The chamber's features:

- **The Judicial Dais:** elevated 3 feet, 30 by 20 feet; the Hydra coils around it with six Corrupted Heads raised and three Gagged Heads bound at different points along its body
- **The Gallery:** elevated seating along the north and south walls, 10 feet up; accessible via staircases at the chamber's four corners; provides high ground and line of sight to the Hydra's full body
- **The Evidence Vault:** a locked room off the east wall (DC 15 Thieves' Tools; the Justiciars' personal case files, intact and undestroyed, because the Hydra's presence made them unnecessary to destroy); contains the original court records predating the corruption
- **The Golden Scales:** decorative feature flanking the dais; they have been weighted with coins as described in the Regime Compendium; they are also lair action triggers for Scales of Injustice; destroying the scales removes that lair action permanently (each scale: AC 14, 30 HP)

- **The Marble Columns:** eight columns running the chamber's length; provide three-quarters cover; the Hydra can move between them but its reach is 10 feet so columns outside that range are safe positions

The Hydra's Current State

Six Corrupted Heads are raised and active. Three Gagged Heads are bound at different points:

- **First Gagged Head:** bound to the Hydra's left flank, 20 feet from the main entrance; the bindings are Infernal-threaded rope (DC 16 Thieves' Tools or DC 15 Athletics to cut with a silvered weapon; 1 action); accessible without triggering the Hydra if the party approaches from the maintenance sub-floor
- **Second Gagged Head:** bound to the Hydra's right flank, 40 feet from the main entrance; the same binding mechanism; accessible from the gallery on the south wall
- **Third Gagged Head:** bound at the Hydra's neck junction, 60 feet from the main entrance, directly adjacent to the judicial dais; the most difficult to reach; accessible via the clerk's corridor that emerges behind the dais

The Encounter

No combat in this scene. The party enters and observes before committing.

What the Party Observes

DC 12 Perception on entry to the main chamber:

- The six Corrupted Heads track movement; anything larger than a small animal that enters the chamber is registered by all six simultaneously
- The three Gagged Heads are identifiable by their bound state; they do not track movement; they appear to be aware of the party's presence but cannot signal
- The lair action triggers are visible: the weighted scales, the marble barrier positions, the golden idol placements
- The regeneration: the party can observe the Hydra's Corrupted Regeneration if they watch for 1 round; one of the Corrupted Heads sustains a small wound from something in the ceiling structure and the wound closes in real time

DC 15 Arcana to identify the regeneration mechanism: it is driven by the corruption, not biology; fire damage suppresses it; each freed Gagged Head reduces regeneration by 6 HP.

DC 14 Investigation to identify the three Gagged Head positions precisely and the binding mechanism on each.

What the Party Can Do

Scout the Full Chamber

Let the party spend time in the doorway, the gallery, and the clerk's corridor before committing. Each vantage point reveals a different piece of tactical information. Parties that scout thoroughly enter the encounter with a specific positional plan rather than improvising.

Identify the Sub-Floor Access

The maintenance sub-floor access point is directly beneath the First Gagged Head's position. A party member who enters via the basement entrance can reach the First Gagged Head and free it before the Hydra is aware. This is the optimal opening move and it is only available if the party found the basement entrance.

Prepare Fire Sources

The regeneration suppression requires fire damage. A party that goes into the encounter without reliable fire damage sources will face a significant mechanical challenge. Mira anticipated this and provided two fire-based items in the pre-assault supplies: a flask of alchemist's fire (2d4 fire damage on hit, DC 12 Dexterity save or 2d4 additional at start of next turn) and a scroll of fireball (available if no party member has it prepared). Let the party notice and use them.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

The First Gagged Head's bindings have partially degraded; someone cut partway through them at some point and did not finish. DC 11 Athletics (rather than DC 15) to complete the cut. The first freed head is achievable in the surprise round before the Hydra is fully engaged.

Making it Harder

Two additional Cultist Fanatics are stationed in the gallery, assigned by the Hierophant before her death to monitor the chamber and alert the regime if the court showed any signs of activity. They are not combat-ready but they will use signal horns if the party triggers the Hydra. If they sound the horns, a Merregon response force of 4 arrives in 8 rounds, adding time pressure to the encounter's resolution.

Increasing Role Play

Let the party see the Three Gagged Heads clearly before combat begins. Give each one a brief description: the first is large and old, with scales that have a different quality from the Corrupted Heads, a deeper color; it is watching the party with an expression that is either patience or hope and may be both. The second's binding is tighter than the others, as if whoever applied it knew this head specifically would be the most dangerous to release. The third is the one closest to the dais, and its gag is newer than the others; it was re-bound more recently, which means something it did recently alarmed the regime enough to rebind it.

That last detail is a small mystery the party carries into the fight. They find out when they free it.

Treasure and Rewards

No direct rewards. Tactical intelligence gathered here carries into Scene 3 and 4.

Development and Dial Impact

No dial changes from this scene.

SCENE 3:

THE GAGGED HEADS

The first objective before the Hydra is fully engaged: freeing the three bound Justiciars. This scene runs simultaneously with the early rounds of Scene 4 if the party cannot free all three heads before the Hydra activates. The goal is to free as many as possible before full combat, because each freed head reduces the regeneration and changes the fight's difficulty.

Read or paraphrase the following (adjust based on whether the party attempts this before or after triggering the Hydra):

The bindings are Infernal-threaded. Someone who understood the contract system applied them; the threading runs through the same binding language as the Merregon contracts, which means they are subject to the same vulnerabilities. A void form would dissolve them instantly. A silvered blade cuts them in one action. Patient work with Thieves' Tools manages them in about the same time.

The Gagged Heads are aware of you. They track your approach with the specific attention of something that has been waiting for a long time and is not going to waste the opportunity by making noise before you finish.

Features of the Area

First Gagged Head (sub-floor access):

The maintenance sub-floor runs beneath the chamber at a depth of 4 feet. A party member of Medium size or smaller can move through it at half speed. The access point beneath the First Head is directly below its binding point; one action to climb up through the access grate (DC 11 Athletics) puts the party member adjacent to the binding without triggering the Hydra's detection.

Freeing the First Head without triggering the Hydra:

DC 13 Stealth while in the sub-floor, then the binding action. If the DC is met, the head is freed before the Hydra registers the intrusion. The Hydra's Corrupted Regeneration immediately drops by 6 HP per turn.

Second Gagged Head (south gallery):

The gallery provides elevated access to the Second Head's binding point, which is at shoulder height on the Hydra's right flank. A party member who reaches the gallery (accessible from the south staircase without entering the Hydra's detection range) can reach the binding point with a 10-foot reach weapon or by descending from the gallery edge (DC 12 Athletics).

Freeing the Second Head without triggering the Hydra:

DC 15 Stealth from the gallery approach; the south staircase is partially visible to three of the six Corrupted Heads. The binding action follows.

Third Gagged Head (clerk's corridor):

The clerk's corridor emerges behind the dais, directly adjacent to the Third Head's position. This is the most protected approach and the most rewarding: the Third Head is at the neck junction, which means freeing it requires reaching a point the Corrupted Heads cannot easily cover.

Freeing the Third Head without triggering the Hydra:

DC 14 Stealth through the clerk's corridor; the corridor has two doors (DC 12 Thieves' Tools each) and the second door opens directly behind the judicial dais, which is within the Hydra's awareness. The binding action, once adjacent, takes 1 action.

The Encounter

What Happens When Gagged Heads Are Freed

Read or paraphrase the following when the first head is freed:

The binding dissolves. Not dramatically; it simply stops being binding. The Infernal threading fades and the rope falls in pieces to the chamber floor. The head raises. It takes a breath that sounds like the first breath after a long time underwater.

It looks at you. It does not speak immediately. When it does, its voice is the voice of something that has been waiting to say something specific for a very long time and is choosing its first words with the care of someone who knows they are the first words.

"The court," it says, "is in session."

When the second head is freed, the Hydra's regeneration drops to 6 HP per turn. The two freed Justiciars begin consulting each other in low voices that the party cannot hear but that clearly contain urgency and purpose.

When the third head is freed, the regeneration stops. All remaining Corrupted Heads must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or become Confused for 1 round as the corruption's coherence fractures.

The third freed head, once its binding is removed, immediately speaks:
"I know what you are here for. The evidence vault key is behind the second scale on the left. It was put there by a court clerk three years ago in the hope that someone would eventually need it."

The third head is the one that was recently re-bound. What it did that alarmed the regime: it told a court clerk where to hide the evidence vault key. It was re-bound within the hour. It has been waiting since then to finish the sentence.

The Hydra's Awareness

If the party attempts all three approaches before the Hydra is engaged and fails any Stealth check, the Hydra activates. All six Corrupted Heads orient toward the intrusion simultaneously. This is not an initiative roll immediately; the Hydra assesses for one round before acting. A party member who has been detected can use that round to complete the binding action they were already performing (if they were already adjacent) or to reposition.

The party can still free heads during the combat, but it requires movement into the Hydra's reach range and provokes opportunity attacks from Reactive Heads.

What the Party Can Do

Free All Three Before Activating

The optimal sequence. Sub-floor first, clerk's corridor second, gallery third. The sub-floor approach is the most protected; starting there and using its success to mask subsequent approaches with the Hydra's partially reduced awareness (the regeneration dropping signals something is wrong but not specifically what) is the highest-success-probability sequence.

Use a Void Form

If the party retained any void forms from Chapter 5 with a valid authority seal: a void form applied to any Gagged Head's binding dissolves it instantly without a check or an action. The party may have been carrying this leverage for several chapters, and this is the moment it will pay off at maximum value.

Free One and Trigger the Rest in Combat

A valid approach. Free the First Head via sub-floor before the Hydra activates, then fight the combat with 12 HP less regeneration from the start. Free the remaining two during the combat as secondary objectives alongside the Corrupted Head pool.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

The void form option is available and the party has one remaining with a valid seal. Mira flagged it this morning as a possible tool for the bindings. Any party member who read the contract mechanics knows it applies.

Making it Harder

The sub-floor grate beneath the First Head is sealed with a regime lock added three weeks ago (DC 16 Thieves' Tools). The sub-floor approach is harder and slower. The party must choose between spending time on the lock or committing to the gallery and clerk's corridor approaches without the sub-floor's protection.

Increasing Role Play

After the third head is freed and speaks about the evidence vault key: give the party a moment to react to the fact that a court clerk hid that key three years ago in the hope that someone would need it, and the Justiciar that was re-bound for telling them knew that the party would eventually come and held that information for three years in the specific, patient way of something that understands that some things take a long time to matter.

The court clerk is probably dead. The party does not know this. They may never know this. The key is behind the second scale on the left.

Treasure and Rewards

From the Evidence Vault (after the key is retrieved):

- Original court records predating the corruption (includes authenticated legal precedents that strengthen the Scene 5 case presentation; DC 12 Investigation to identify the three most relevant for the current case; advantage on Scene 5 Persuasion check if used)
 - The court's seal (the Supreme Court's official authentication seal, intact and uncompromised; any document bearing this seal is legally authenticated under Orenthian law; this is different from and more significant than any seal the party has previously acquired)
-

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
All three Gagged Heads freed before Hydra activates	+2	0	-2
Two Gagged Heads freed before Hydra activates	+1	0	-1
One Gagged Head freed before Hydra activates	0	0	0
Void form used on a binding	0	0	0
Evidence vault key recovered	0	0	0

SCENE 4:

THE CORRUPTED COURT

The Hydra fight. Six Corrupted Heads, the full mechanical suite from the Regime Compendium, and the specific challenge of a boss encounter where the regeneration is the primary obstacle and the freed Justiciars are the primary tool for removing it.

Read or paraphrase the following (once the Hydra activates):

The six Corrupted Heads orient simultaneously. It is not fast; it is deliberate. Each head moves to cover a different sightline with the specific coordination of something that has had three years to learn how the room works.

The freed heads, however many there are at this point, do something different. They pull back and down, positioning themselves away from the party and away from the Corrupted Heads, as far as their shared body allows. They are not fleeing. They are getting out of the way. They have been in this body for three years. They know what is about to happen.

The first Corrupted Head speaks. Its voice has the quality of something that learned language from legal documents and has never used it for anything else. "The court is not in session," it says. "Unauthorized persons will be removed."

*A second Corrupted Head adds: "Resistance to lawful authority constitutes contempt."
A third Corrupted Head says nothing. It simply bites.*

Features of the Area

The Combat Space

80 by 60 feet, 40-foot ceiling. The eight columns provide cover. The gallery is accessible but the Hydra's Reactive Heads can make opportunity attacks on creatures moving along the gallery edge. The judicial dais is elevated and difficult terrain for the Hydra to navigate around without losing attack angles.

The golden scales: if not destroyed in Scene 2, they are lair action triggers for Scales of Injustice. Destroying them removes the most mobility-disrupting lair action from the encounter.

The Hydra's Combat State

Starting state depends on Scene 3 outcomes:

- **Zero Gagged Heads freed:** Corrupted Regeneration 18 HP per turn; 6 Reactive Head opportunities; full lair action suite
- **One Gagged Head freed:** Corrupted Regeneration 12 HP per turn; 5 Reactive Head opportunities
- **Two Gagged Heads freed:** Corrupted Regeneration 6 HP per turn; 4 Reactive Head opportunities
- **Three Gagged Heads freed:** Corrupted Regeneration 0; regeneration stops; Confused condition applied to remaining Corrupted Heads for 1 round; effectively a winnable attrition fight

The Fire Suppression Mechanic

Fire damage suppresses the Corrupted Regeneration for 1 round. On any turn where the Hydra took fire damage since its last turn, regeneration does not activate. The party does not need to deal fire damage every turn; they need to deal fire damage in the same round they deal maximum Corrupted Head Pool damage to prevent that damage from being partially healed before the next round. Coordinating fire damage with the highest-damage round is the encounter's central tactical puzzle. A party that dumps its highest-damage resources into a single round while also including fire damage that round suppresses regeneration and maximizes net damage dealt.

The Encounter

Round 1

The Hydra uses Multi-attack: six Bite attacks distributed across the party, prioritizing clustered targets. If three Gagged Heads were freed, the Corrupted Heads are Confused and may target each other or the wrong party members. The first lair action fires at initiative count 20: Scales of Injustice if the scales are intact, or the Marble Barrier if they are not.

Round 2

The Hydra uses Procedural Delay (bonus action) on the party's highest-action-economy character. Shadow Docket fires against a party member already hit this round. The lair action cycles to Golden Idols if Scales of Injustice fired Round 1.

Rounds 3 and 4

The Corrupted Head Pool is under sustained pressure. The party should be coordinating fire damage with their highest-damage rounds. Overrule fires once per round when a spell-caster uses a 2nd level or lower spell; the party's lower-level spell slots are being actively countered. Recess lair action applies Restrained to the party's most mobile member.

When the Pool Drops Below 105 HP (Half)

The six Corrupted Heads are visibly deteriorating. The corruption that drives them is losing coherence. Read or paraphrase the following:

The heads are arguing. Not tactically; the coordination is still there in the bite patterns and the reactive opportunities. But between attacks, the six heads are generating a sound that is not quite language and not quite pain and is something in between, the specific sound of a corrupted legal system whose internal contradictions have been under enough pressure long enough that they are finally becoming audible.

The three freed heads are silent. They are watching with the patience of things that have learned to wait.

When the Pool Reaches 0

The Corrupted Heads do not fall simultaneously. They fail one by one, starting with the one that has taken the most recent fire damage. Each failure produces a sound like a gavel coming down. When the last one fails, the chamber is quiet.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The corruption fails and the room changes. Not physically; the golden idols are still on the colonnade outside, the weighted scales are still flanking the dais, the Goristro's portrait is still in the anteroom. But the specific quality of institutional weight that has been pressing down on everyone within a mile of this building lifts. It lifts the way a sound lifts when it stops: you did not know how loud it was until it is gone.

The three freed Justiciars are still. Then one of them, the eldest, the one that was freed first, raises its head to the full height the chamber allows and says, in the voice of something that has been waiting three years to say this:

"The Supreme Court of Orenthis is in session. Let the record show that this court reconvenes under its own authority, under emergency provisions, with a quorum of three, on the date of the current calendar year."

It looks at the party.

"Who petitions this court?"

What the Party Can Do

Coordinate Fire and Damage

The encounter's central tactical challenge. The party needs to identify their highest single-round damage output and ensure fire damage occurs in that same round. Pre-planning this in Scene 2 or 3 produces the most efficient execution.

Free Gagged Heads During Combat

If not all three were freed in Scene 3, freeing them during combat is still available. Each requires movement to the binding point and 1 action while within the Hydra's reactive reach. The opportunity attack risk is real but the regeneration reduction reward is significant. At 12th level, the party has the resources to absorb a reactive bite attack in exchange for removing 6 HP of regeneration per turn.

Destroy the Golden Scales

Each scale (AC 14, 30 HP) destroyed removes the Scales of Injustice lair action permanently. Two actions spread across two party members in Round 1 can remove the encounter's most disruptive mobility effect before it fires.

Use the Gallery

Elevated position removes the party from the floor's difficult terrain and provides clear sightlines for ranged attackers. The reactive opportunity attack risk from the gallery edge is real but manageable at 12th level.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

All three Gagged Heads were freed in Scene 3 and the Hydra begins the encounter with zero regeneration and a 1-round Confused condition. The encounter is demanding but the attrition pressure is significantly reduced. Focus fire on the Corrupted Head Pool with fire suppression on the highest-damage rounds.

Making it Harder

The Hydra has been specifically prepared for resistance assault: the Contempt of Court lair action fires in Round 1 rather than being available from Round 3 onward. The party faces the encounter's most powerful lair action immediately, before they have established position or suppressed regeneration.

Increasing Role Play

The six Corrupted Heads' argument sound in the back half of the encounter should be described specifically enough that the party can hear fragments. Not words, exactly, but the rhythm of legal language without content: the cadence of objections and rulings and procedural citations spoken to nothing by something that has been running on institutional authority for three years and is finally running out of it.

The freed heads watching should also be described: patient, attentive, and ready. They have been in this body. They know what it is capable of. They are not afraid. They are waiting for the moment they have been waiting for since the first day they were bound.

Treasure and Rewards

From the Hydra's Defeat:

- The corruption's end (all three regional effects end permanently; the Merregon contracts within 10 miles begin their void process; the Exhausting Effect lifts; the Record is Sealed ends and divination spells function normally within range)
 - The court's authority restored (the three freed Justiciars are operational and the court reconvenes under its own authority)
 - Access to the judicial dais (the physical seat of Orenthian legal authority; the party stands here for Scene 5's case presentation)
-

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Hydra defeated with all Gagged Heads freed	+2	0	-1
Regional effects end (Merregon contracts voiding)	+1	+1	-1
Golden Scales destroyed before lair action fires	0	0	-1

SCENE 5:

THE RESTORATION

The court reconvenes. The evidence is presented. The Merregon contracts void. The legal challenge is issued. This is the Act II triumph.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The petitioner stands before the court.

The three Justiciars have arranged themselves on the judicial dais with the specific posture of something that has been practicing this in its mind for three years. The eldest head sits at center, the other two flanking. The chamber is quiet except for the sound of the party's breathing and the distant sound, through the walls and across the civic district, of Merregon patrol units stopping.

Not all of them. Not immediately. But within the first minute of the court reconvening, the void begins propagating through the contracts that the restored court's authority makes invalid, and the Merregons whose contracts run through the Supreme Court's endorsement chain begin, one by one, to put down their halberds.

The eldest Justiciar speaks.

"State your name and your standing before this court."

Features of the Area

The Reconvened Court

The judicial dais with three operational Justiciars. The chamber as it was during the fight, with the damage of combat visible in the stonework and the absence of the Hydra's bulk making the room feel larger than it did.

Sister Kara is the civilian witness. She stands at the chamber's edge, still, with her staff and her pack and the locked box, and she watches the party present the case.

The Encounter

The Case Presentation

The party petitioner makes the case. This is a single extended Persuasion check representing the full presentation, modified by preparation:

Base DC: 15

Modifiers:

- Prepared from downtime study: advantage
- Original court records used from the evidence vault: advantage (does not stack with the above; choose the higher)
- Mezzoloth's authenticity challenge identified and prepared for: DC reduced by 2
- Mezzoloth's authenticity challenge not identified: DC increased by 2 (the Justiciars raise it mid-presentation and the petitioner must address it in the moment; DC 15 Persuasion sub-check; failure means the testimony is marked as potentially contested rather than confirmed)
- Court's own seal used to authenticate key documents: DC reduced by 2
- Three external entity documents presented (Federation, Tidal League, Mountain Compact response): DC reduced by 1

The Justiciars' Response

On a success: the Justiciars accept the evidence as sufficient for a formal charge and a legal challenge to the Goristro's authority. They do not convict; conviction requires a full proceeding with the Goristro present or in absentia with adequate notice.

What they issue is a formal Writ of Challenge: a legal document that names the Goristro as subject to answering charges before the restored court, specifies the crimes alleged, and carries the force of Orenthian law behind it.

The Writ of Challenge is not a weapon. It is a statement of legal standing. But it is the first time since the regime began that the Goristro's authority has been formally challenged by an institution with genuine legal legitimacy. Every citizen of Orenthis who hears about it will understand what it means.

On a failure: the Justiciars accept the evidence as significant but identify one gap that prevents a formal charge at this time.

They issue a Provisional Finding instead of a Writ of Challenge and enter a state of Judicial

Review. During this time they will not fight for the party, but they also not process any regime warrants. This creates a power vacuum in the city.

To win them over, the party can find the "Original Charter" in Act III, which acts as a narrative auto-success for a second attempt at a ruling for the Writ of Challenge.

The Locked Box

After the case presentation, regardless of outcome, Sister Kara steps forward. Read or paraphrase the following:

She sets the box on the judicial dais.

The eldest Justiciar lowers its head to examine it. There is a pause that has the quality of recognition in it.

Then the Justiciar speaks.

"We know this box," it says. "We have been looking for it for sixty years." It raises its head and looks at Sister Kara. "Where was it?"

"In a reliquary," she says. "In the Cathedral of Gold. It was put there for safekeeping. Before the regime."

The Justiciar is quiet for a moment. "May we open it?"

Sister Kara looks at the party. She is asking for confirmation of something she already knows the answer to.

When the party confirms: the eldest Justiciar opens the box. Not with a key; the original lock responds to its authority directly, opening at the head's touch. Inside is a single folded document, very old, written in a legal script that predates modern Orenthian by at least three centuries. The Justiciar reads it. Then it raises its head.

"This is the Foundational Compact," it says.

"This is the document from which all subsequent Orenthian law derives, it contains both founding principles and operational provisions. It was believed lost in the Second Succession." It is quiet for a moment. "It establishes that no single authority may hold all three branches of governance simultaneously. It establishes that no authority may be self-declared; all authority must derive from the

consent of the governed." It looks at the party.

"The Goristro's rule has been in violation of this document since the day he took power. Every action he has taken has been legally void from the beginning. Article 4 in particular addresses governance during periods of instability. We recommend thorough reading before any transition period begins."

It sets the document on the dais beside the Writ of Challenge [or Provisional Finding].

"This does not end his occupation," it says. "He does not care about the law. But it means that when he falls, every action he took falls with him. Every detention, every contract, every decree. Void from inception." It looks at each party member in turn. "You have given us something we did not know we still had."

The Merregon Contracts Voiding

During the case presentation, the void propagates. Run it as ambient narration: Within the first five minutes: Merregon units within the Supreme Hall's immediate vicinity stop and stand still, processing the conflict in their directives.

By the end of the presentation: the streets within the civic district are quieter. Where Merregon patrols were running, they have paused. Not all of them; contracts that run through the Rakshasa's authority rather than the court's endorsement chain are unaffected. But the specific subset of contracts that the restored court's authority makes invalid is voiding in real time and the city can feel it.

Tam, outside with the extraction team, sends a sending stone message during the presentation:

"Something is happening in the eastern district. The Merregons on the corner just put down their weapons. All four of them. They are standing there. People are coming out of their buildings to look."

What the Party Can Do

Present the Full Evidence Package

The complete archive, authenticated with the court's own seal. This is the optimal presentation. Every modifier applies and the DC is at its lowest.

Let Sister Kara Speak

If a party member asks Sister Kara to contribute to the presentation: she provides testimony about the Cathedral's corruption and the reliquary's contents that adds a personal account dimension to the documentary evidence. DC reduced by 1 additional.

Ask the Justiciars Questions

They will answer questions about the legal implications of the evidence, the Foundational Compact's discovery, and what the Writ of Challenge/Provisional Finding means in practice. They are judges. They know the system. Let the party talk to them.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

The Mezzoloth's authenticity challenge does not arise; the Justiciars accept his testimony as adequately supported by the corroborating documentary evidence. The base DC is 13 rather than 15.

Making it Harder

The Justiciars identify two gaps rather than one: the Mezzoloth's testimony and an evidentiary chain question about the dual-authorization document's provenance. Both can be addressed but the sub-checks add pressure to the presentation.

Increasing Role Play

When the eldest Justiciar reads the Foundational Compact and says "void from inception": give every player a moment. The party has been fighting to restore the law. They just found out that the law was always on their side; the Goristro was always illegal. Everything the regime built was built on nothing. Every person detained, every family separated, every loyalty purge, every broadcast, every golden idol on every colonnade: none of it was ever legitimate. It was always just force pretending to be authority.

That is the victory. It is not a comfortable one, but it is the right one.

Treasure and Rewards

From the Case Presentation:

- Writ of Challenge or Provisional Finding (formal legal challenge to the Goristro's authority)
- Foundational Compact (authenticated by the court; establishes the legal framework for post-regime governance; critical for Act III's restoration arc)
- The court's ongoing operation (the three Justiciars are operational and will continue to function; they will not hide; they consider their visibility a necessary statement)

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Writ of Challenge issued (successful presentation)	+2	+1	-2
Provisional Finding issued (failed presentation)	0	+1	0
Foundational Compact discovered and authenticated	+1	0	-1
Merregon contracts voiding publicly visible	+1	0	-1

SCENE 6:

BOWMAN

He walks in while the party is still standing in the restored court.

This scene occurs with no time gap after Scene 5. The party has not moved. The Justiciars are still on the dais. Sister Kara is still at the chamber's edge. The Writ of Challenge and the Foundational Compact are on the judicial dais. The party is standing in the greatest institutional victory the resistance has achieved.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The main entrance doors open.

It is Bowman, and he is not alone. Two figures in legal gray stand behind him, carrying document cases. They stop at the entrance. He continues forward alone.

He looks exactly as he always has: well-dressed, precisely careful, warm in the specific way of someone who has practiced warmth until it became indistinguishable from earnest warmth.

That is the point. The face he is wearing is the face he has been wearing since Chapter 1, the face of a helpful, well-positioned, slightly-too-convenient ally, but it is not his face. It has never been his face.

He reaches up. And he removes the face. Not dramatically; he simply stops maintaining it, the way you stop holding a door when you no longer need it open. The features that replace it belong to no one in particular. They are the features of a creature that has worn so many faces that whatever was underneath has become its own kind of neutral.

He is a Changeling, actually he is the Changeling Vice-Lord. The Goristro's second-in-command. He has been since the moment he introduced himself as someone the party could trust. The Changeling looks at the party with the expression of someone who has been running a very long calculation and has finally reached the number he was looking for.

"You knew," he says. It is not a question. "Or you suspected. Which amounts to the same thing at this stage."

He looks at the Justiciars.

He looks at the two documents on the dais.

He looks back at the party.

He smiles. It is genuine.

He has been working toward this moment for a long time and he is allowed to feel it.

"You did it," he says. "You actually did it." He looks around the chamber. "I want you to know that I mean that. What you have accomplished here is extraordinary."

He pauses.

"I also want you to know that I have been preparing for this moment for a long time."

He reaches into his coat and produces a document. He sets it on the dais beside the Writ of Challenge and the Foundational Compact.

"I have a proposal. I would like to propose an amendment to section seven."

Features of the Area

The Chamber

As it was at the end of Scene 5. The party is still positioned from the fight and the presentation. The Justiciars are on the dais. Sister Kara is at the chamber's edge. The two figures in legal gray remain at the entrance.

Bowman is in the center of the room, between the party and the entrance, but not blocking the entrance. He is not threatening. He is presenting.

The Encounter

His Proposal

The document he placed on the dais is a framework for a Transitional Governance Council. It names himself as its chair. It identifies three external entities as formal sponsors: two he has been cultivating independently of the party's diplomatic work, and one that is familiar: the Mountain Compact.

He approached the Mountain Compact directly three weeks ago, before the party learned they had been deceived by the Archmage. He offered them specific intelligence about the deception in exchange for their support of his transitional governance framework. They accepted. He knew the party would eventually tell the Mountain Compact about the deception. He wanted to tell them first.

The proposal is structured as follows: the restored court issues a transitional governance instrument appointing the council. The council operates for a defined period pending full democratic restoration. The Goristro's legal challenge is managed through the council rather than the court directly, which insulates the court from regime retaliation. The three sponsoring entities provide external legitimacy. Every element of this proposal is legally sound. The Foundational Compact's rediscovery actually strengthens it; the Compact explicitly requires transitional governance mechanisms during authority vacuums.

He is not wrong about any of this. That is the problem.

What He Actually Wants

DC 15 Insight to identify that the council chair position, in the transitional governance framework as drafted, has more practical authority than the restored court during the transition period.

On a success: the party understands that he is not proposing oversight of the governance transition. He is proposing to be the governance transition.

On a DC 18 Insight to identify something more specific, the proposal's language about "the chair's discretionary authority during periods of active conflict" would give the council chair the power to suspend the court's operations temporarily if he determined active conflict warranted it. He has drafted a legal mechanism to neutralize the court he just helped restore.

He is offering them a genuine solution to a genuine problem, wrapped around a core that converts the resistance's institutional victory into his personal authority.

The Justiciars' Assessment

The eldest Justiciar reads the new proposal document. It takes two minutes. The other two read simultaneously.

Then it looks at Bowman.

"This framework is legally coherent," it says. "The transitional governance mechanism is consistent with the Foundational Compact's provisions." It pauses. "The discretionary authority clause in section seven is not."

Bowman meets the Justiciar's gaze without flinching. "That clause is a necessary operational provision," he says. "Without it, the council cannot function during active regime response." "It is a necessary provision," the Justiciar agrees, "for a council chair who intends to use it."

There is a silence.

He looks at the Justiciar for a long moment.

Then he looks at the party.

"You have built something worth taking," he says. "I want you to take that as a compliment. I have been watching you work for a while now and I have genuinely admired the execution."

He picks up the document from the dais, calmly, without hurry.

He is still negotiating. He has not lost yet and he knows it. The Mountain Compact's support is still real. The two other external entities are still committed. The proposal minus section seven is still legally coherent and fills a genuine governance gap that the restored court cannot fill on its own.

He is offering them a version of the deal that does not have the poison in it. He wants them to take it. He wants them to trust him one more time.

DC 16 Insight to assess whether the amended proposal is genuinely safe.

It is not. Not because the language is still dangerous, he will revise section seven cleanly if required, but because the chair position as structured gives him enough legitimate authority to make the next move from a position of institutional power rather than opposition. The proposal without section seven is better than the proposal with it.

Three Resolution Paths

Accept the proposal as amended (removing section seven):

This is the path he wanted. He gets the chair.

The chair is subordinate to the court. The court has the authority. He has the access. He will do good work in this role. He will also, slowly and carefully and over a long time, use the access to position himself for something the party will not see coming until Act III. The party made the correct institutional decision and gave the most capable diplomat they have encountered a legitimate role in their government. He knows exactly what he is doing.

Reject the proposal outright and fight:
The Changeling's stat block is CR 14 in the Supreme Hall. He has been in this room for three years via the Hydra's presence in the building's institutional memory and he has positioned himself carefully. The two figures at the entrance are not guards; they are lawyers. He does not have combat backup here because he did not expect to need it. He expected to deal.

If combat occurs: the Supreme Hall's lair action infrastructure is technically still present even with the Hydra defeated; the Marble Barrier lair action remains available to the Changeling as an environmental feature of the space, representing the physical memory of the court's defensive mechanisms. He uses Assume Identity targeting the party member most recently trusted by the other party members. He uses Countershape to avoid every grapple. He uses plane shift (self only) when reduced to one quarter HP. He escapes. He is not defeated. He is inconvenienced. He exits with the Mountain Compact's support intact and the two other external entity commitments still in place. He will use them in Act III.

Negotiate the proposal into something acceptable:

DC 17 Persuasion to restructure the proposal so thoroughly that the chair position's authority is genuinely subordinate to the court. On a success, Bowman accepts the restructuring; he wanted the deal more than he wanted the specific clause and a subordinate chair position still gives him more than he has now. He signs. He is now the resistance's official diplomat to the transitional governance process with limited but real authority. He will use that authority in Act III. Carefully. With patience. He has learned something about the party in twelve chapters. They are thorough. He will not get a clause past them again. On a failure: he thanks the party for their time and withdraws the proposal entirely. He says he will return when the situation has developed further. He leaves. He is still positioned. He will be back in Act III with a revised version.

When He Leaves

He leaves either by exit or by plane shift. Before he goes, regardless of how the negotiation resolved, he says one more thing. He says it to the party, not to the Justiciars, not to Sister Kara, not to the two lawyers at the door.

Read or paraphrase the following:

"I want to tell you something that is true. Not strategic. Just true."

He looks at the party.

"I have never worked with people who were this good at what they do. I have been running variations of this kind of long positioning for longer than most of you have been alive. And you made it genuinely difficult." He pauses. "I want you to know I mean that."

He goes.

The chamber is quiet.

Sister Kara, from the wall, says: "Did we win?"

The eldest Justiciar answers before the party can: "The court is in session. The Writ of Challenge has been issued. The Foundational Compact is authenticated." It pauses. "What just happened in the last ten minutes is a question for another proceeding."

It looks at the party.

"You have done what you came here to do. The rest is the work of governance. And governance," it adds, with something that might be dry humor in something that old, "takes longer than law."

What the Party Can Do

Fight

Available. He escapes. He is not defeated. Act III has him as an independent faction with institutional credibility from whatever external entity support survived the encounter.

Accept the Amended Proposal

He gets the access he wanted minus the specific clause. Act III has him operating inside the resistance's governance structure with room to maneuver.

Reject Without Fighting

He withdraws with full positioning intact. Act III has him returning with a revised proposal and more leverage from the Mountain Compact relationship.

Negotiate to Subordinate Authority

DC 17. The best achievable outcome in this scene. He is contained but present. Act III has him as a constrained but dangerous internal actor.

Ask the Justiciars What to Do

The eldest Justiciar says: "We cannot advise on political decisions. We can tell you that the governance gap he describes is real and that it will need to be addressed before the Goristro falls." It pauses. "We can also tell you that the Foundational Compact includes provisions for emergency governance mechanisms that do not require a council chair." It does not say more than this. It has told them everything they need to know.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

The Justiciar's analysis of the discretionary authority clause is more explicit: it names the specific danger directly and the DC to identify what Bowman actually wants drops to 12. The party understands the full situation before negotiating.

Making it Harder

The Mountain Compact's support is more committed than the party realizes; they entered into a formal agreement with Bowman rather than a conditional support letter. Withdrawing that support requires a separate DC 15 Persuasion check with the Compact's representative, who arrives in the chamber during the negotiation and must be addressed simultaneously.

Increasing Role Play

After Bowman leaves, give every party member a moment. They have just spent twelve chapters working with someone who was always going to do this. The question is not whether they should have seen it coming. The question is what they do now. Those are different questions and they both matter.

Sister Kara, if asked what she thinks: "He told the truth about everything except what he wanted. That is a specific kind of person. I have met them before." She looks at the door he left through. "They are very useful until they are not."

The eldest Justiciar, if asked about Act III: "The court will be here. We have been here for three centuries. We will be here for three more." It looks at the Foundational Compact. "Come back when you have what you need to close the case."

Treasure and Rewards

From the Scene::

- The Writ of Challenge (issued; active)
- The Foundational Compact (authenticated; the legal foundation for post-regime Orenthis; critical for Act III governance)
- The Changeling's positioning (whatever resolution path was taken, he is positioned for Act III in a specific way that the party understands and must account for)
- The court's ongoing operation (the Justiciars are present, operational, and publicly visible; this is itself a statement the regime must respond to)

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Changeling fought and escaped	0	+2	0
Proposal negotiated to subordinate authority	+1	0	0
Proposal accepted as amended	+1	0	0
Proposal rejected without fighting	0	+1	0
Foundational Compact emergency provisions identified	0	0	0

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

What the Party Should Know

- The Nine Justiciars are restored. The court is in session. The Merregon contracts that ran through the court's endorsement chain have voided. The Exhausting Effect is gone. The Record is Sealed is gone. The city within a mile of the Supreme Hall is different than it was this morning.
- The Writ of Challenge is public. The Goristro's authority has been formally challenged by a legitimate institution for the first time since the regime began. He does not care about the law. But every citizen of Orenthis who hears about the Writ of Challenge will understand what it means.
- The Foundational Compact establishes that the Goristro's rule has been legally void from inception. Every action he took, every detention, every purge, every decree, has no legal standing. This does not end his occupation. He does not need legal standing to hold power. But it means that when he falls, everything he built falls with him.
- Bowman is what he always was. The party knows this now. What they did not know before tonight is how long he has been what he always was, and how carefully he positioned himself within the resistance's work to be ready for this moment. He is gone, for now, and he is already in his next position.
- Act III begins from a position of genuine institutional strength. The court is restored. The regime's external relationships are dissolving. The legal case is complete. The Merregon enforcement network is fractured. The regime's institutional pillars are gone. What remains is the Changeling's faction, the Rakshasa's borderlands, the Archmage's Heritage Institute and Sub-Level 3, and the Goristro himself in his Gilded Tower.
- Sixteen people were transferred to Heritage Institute Sub-Level 3. The court has their names. The party has the sending stone channel. The Writ of Challenge names the Archmage as a co-respondent. Sub-Level 3 is the first Act III target.

Character Advancement
13th level reached.

Downtime (Optional)

- Publish the Writ of Challenge (active distribution through resistance networks; Hope +1 per district where it is successfully distributed; Heat +1 per district where the regime intercepts the distribution)
- Brief the Mountain Compact (DC 12 Persuasion via the Yagnoloth as intermediary; if the Compact was secured as support for Bowman's proposal, this check recovers their support for the resistance directly; on a success, their commitment to Bowman's framework is withdrawn and redirected)
- Research the Foundational Compact's emergency governance provisions (DC 13 History; surfaces the specific mechanisms the Justiciars referenced; establishes a governance framework that does not require a council chair; this is the resistance's alternative to Bowman's proposal if they rejected it)
- Debrief with the Justiciars (no check; they will speak to any party member who comes to them; they have three years of observations about the regime's operations from within the Supreme Hall; their observations are not operational intelligence but they are legally precise and some of what they noticed will matter)

Future Hooks

- Sub-Level 3: sixteen people. The Archmage's facility. The sending stone channel. The Writ of Challenge names him. This is the first Act III target.
- The Changeling's faction: whatever resolution path was taken, he is positioned for Act III. He has external entity support. He has institutional access in some form. He has twelve chapters of intelligence about the resistance's methods, capabilities, and relationships. He is not the Goristro's second-in-command anymore. He is his own faction. That is worse.
- The Goristro's response: the Writ of Challenge will reach him. He does not care about the law. He will respond with force. Act III begins with the knowledge that the Goristro is now actively moving against the resistance rather than relying on his institutional apparatus to contain it.
- The Darklord's Curse: the Mists do not part for victories alone. The Goristro's torment requires an enemy. The resistance has been that enemy throughout the campaign.

Understanding this, what the Mists need and what the party needs, is part of Act III's final confrontation.

Lead-in to the Next Chapter

Mira is at the resistance safe house when the party returns. She has been listening to the sending stone reports from Tam and from the resistance's city network. When the party walks in, she looks at each of them in turn.

Read or paraphrase the following:

*"The court is restored. The Writ is issued. The contracts are voiding." She pauses. "And Bowman made his move."
She does not ask what happened with him. She waits.*

When the party tells her: she listens without interrupting. When they finish, she is quiet for a moment. Then she says:

"I told you this morning to stay aware. I did not know exactly what I was warning you about."

She looks at the door. "Now I do."

She turns back to the table. Lyra's operational map is there, and on it, three markers that have not yet been addressed: the Heritage Institute east of the city, the Rakshasa's Border Fortress to the south, and the Gilded Tower at Oren's center.

"The Goristro now knows what we have done," she says. "He does not care about courts or compacts or writs. He cares about power and he still has it." She touches the Gilded Tower marker. "We have not beaten him. We have made it possible to beat him. There is a difference."

She looks at the party.

"Next Phase. We go after Sub-Level 3 first. We find the sixteen people. We close the Archmage's operation. We take the case from legal standing to complete record." She pauses. "And then we come for him."

She does not say it as a speech. She says it as a plan.

"Get some rest. Tomorrow it gets harder."

Considerations

If the party negotiated Bowman into a subordinate chair position:

Mira's response is careful. She says:

"You gave him a role. That was either the right call or the wrong one and we will not know which for a while."

She adds him to the map as a separate marker, not on the regime side and not on the resistance side, in the embassy district where the Yagnoloth's office is. "Watch him. The Yagnoloth will watch him. I will watch him. Hopefully that is enough."

If the party fought and he escaped:

Mira says:

"He is already in his next position. He had one ready."

She adds the same marker to the map.

"He will come back. With something we cannot simply fight."

If the Mezzoloth's authenticity challenge was not addressed and the court issued a

Provisional Finding:

Mira notes the gap.

"The Justiciars need the testimony confirmed. There is a way to do that in Act III through the Archmage's operational records. Sub-Level 3 first, then close the testimony gap before the final proceeding."

If Sister Kara has not yet said what she is going to do after this:

She is in the doorway of the safe house when the party settles in. She says:

"I am going back to the Cathedral tomorrow. I will be there when you need me. But tonight I need to be somewhere that is not a planning room."

She goes.

She comes back the next morning.

She does not say where she was or what she did. Only that she is ready.

Act III The Liberation



"We thought we were winning. We were wrong."

Act III begins in the aftermath of Act II's triumph and the complications from Bowman's gambit. And it begins differently from everything that came before. The resistance is not hiding in a cellar. It is not planning wagon ambushes or garrison raids. It has a restored court, a Writ of Challenge, a diplomatic network, and twelve chapters of documented crimes against the regime's most powerful figure. The resistance has won, in every institutional sense, the battle it set out to fight.

However, the Goristro does not care.

He has never cared about institutions. He did not rise to power through institutions. He rose through violence, demagoguery, infernal contracts, and the specific willingness to burn things that would not bend to him. The institutions were useful to him while they could be made to serve his authority, and now they cannot, and his response is not to contest the legal challenge or to seek a negotiated settlement. His response is to do what he has always done when something refuses to submit: he turns toward it and he charges.

Act III is the campaign's final arc. It is not longer than Act II. It is heavier. The party has dismantled the regime's apparatus piece by piece across twelve chapters. What remains is the core: the Changeling's independent faction operating inside the resistance's governance structure, the Rakshasa's borderlands and her contract network, the Archmage's Heritage Institute and the sixteen people in Sub-Level 3, and the Goristro himself in his Gilded Tower, furious and powerful and trapped in a domain that will not let him win and will not let him leave.

The Mists do not part for victories alone. That truth has been present since the campaign's first pages. Act III is where it becomes operational. The party cannot simply defeat the Goristro and walk out. Freedom must be earned in a way that the Dark Powers recognize, which means the party must understand what holds the domain together, what the Goristro's curse requires, and what dismantling the regime permanently rather than temporarily actually demands. That understanding is the through-line of Act III. Every chapter adds a piece of it.

Objectives

- Find and rescue the sixteen people transferred to Heritage Institute Sub-Level 3
- Close the Archmage's Project Provenance operation and complete the legal record
- Reclaim the borderlands and dissolve the Rakshasa's contract network
- Expose and neutralize the Changeling's faction before it can seize the governance transition
- Storm the Gilded Tower
- Confront and defeat the Goristro
- Help Orenthis choose its own future

Key Events

- The Sub-Level 3 rescue: the party finds out what Project Provenance was building toward, not just collecting people for study but attempting to produce something from the study; what the Archmage found is the Act III revelation that recontextualizes the entire program
- The Archmage's defeat: the Heritage Institute chapter, the hardest social and magical encounter in the act, against a creature who has modeled this confrontation and prepared for it
- The Rakshasa's fall: the borderlands chapter, the campaign's most emotionally weighted encounter, set in the place where families were separated and prisoners were processed and the regime's cruelty was most directly exercised
- The Changeling's endgame: he has been patient and positioned and careful; his final play comes when the party is closest to the Goristro, at the moment when the governance transition is most exposed; his defeat or accommodation determines what Orenthis's government looks like after the Goristro falls
- The Gilded Tower: the final assault, through a monument to tarnished gold and failed legitimacy, toward the demon lord who started all of this
- The confrontation with the Goristro: not just a fight; a reckoning with what the domain requires and what the Dark Powers will and will not permit
- The Mists and what they ask: the party must understand and address the curse's mechanism to produce a real liberation rather than a temporary defeat; this is the campaign's deepest act of resistance, not against the Goristro but against the structure that made him possible

The Changeling's Endgame

He has been patient since Chapter 1. He has whatever institutional position the party gave him, or none, depending on what happened in the last scene. He has Mountain Compact support. He has two other external entity commitments. He has twelve chapters of intelligence about the resistance's methods and relationships.

He makes his final move when the party is inside the Gilded Tower, when the governance transition is maximally exposed, when the people who would stop him are committed to the final fight and cannot easily disengage. His move is not violence. It is institutional. He attempts to use the transitional governance framework, whatever form it took after Chapter 13, to position himself as the recognized authority during the window between the Goristro's fall and the restoration of full democratic governance.

He is not wrong that this window will exist. He is not wrong that it needs to be managed. He is exactly right about the problem and completely wrong about the solution, because the solution he is proposing is himself.

The party must address this without abandoning the Gilded Tower assault. This is Act III's most complex logistical challenge and it is deliberate: the Changeling chose the moment specifically because the party cannot fully commit to stopping him without compromising the final confrontation.

The Darklord's Curse

The Goristro seeks the Sigil of Dominion: a symbolic object, rite, or recognition that would confirm his rule as rightful rather than merely absolute. The domain manufactures hope and then destroys it on a cycle he cannot break. He knows the game is rigged. He continues anyway.

The Mists preserve the resistance because the Goristro's punishment requires an enemy. When the party finally defeats him, the Mists do not part automatically, because defeating the tyrant is not the same as liberating the domain. The Dark Powers do not grant liberation for victory. They grant it for something more specific.

The party must understand what the Foundational Compact established: that all authority derives from the consent of the governed. The Goristro's rule was always void because consent was never given. The liberation of Orenthis requires not just the Goristro's defeat but a genuine act of self-governance by the people of Orenthis, a moment where they choose their own future without being directed to do so by the party or by any external authority.

The party can create the conditions for that moment. They cannot create the moment itself. That distinction is Act III's final lesson.

When the people choose, the Mists will know.

Optional Epilogue Conflict

At the DM's discretion, one final threat may remain. The secretive Arcanaloath Master of Contracts has survived the Goristro's fall.

The laws, treaties, debts, and infernal agreements he authored do not simply vanish with the regime. Entire institutions remain bound by clauses no one fully understands.

This encounter can take either of these two forms:

- A negotiation, where the Arcanaloath offers to "unwind" contracts... for a price
- A final battle, where the party destroys the last mechanism keeping tyranny "legitimate"

Defeating or outmaneuvering the Arcanaloath determines whether Orenthis is merely liberated or truly free.

Tone

Act III should feel desperate, then determined, then triumphant, then bittersweet.

Desperate: the Goristro is no longer relying on his institutional apparatus. He is moving directly. The resistance has never faced him without the buffer of lieutenants and systems and bureaucratic distance. That buffer is gone.

Determined: the party has everything they built. The court. The evidence. The diplomatic network. The resistance community. The freed prisoners and the former Believers and the uncertain functionaries who raised their cups slightly in the embassy district. None of it is

destroyed by the Goristro's direct response. It is tested by it. Determination is what happens when something is tested and holds.

Triumphant: the Goristro falls. The final confrontation is earned. The party has been building to this since Chapter 1. When it comes, it should feel like the culmination of everything they chose, not just the last fight in a long sequence.

Bittersweet: the Mists do not part automatically. Orenthis must choose its own future. The party has given it the tools and the legal foundation and the restored institutions, but the choice belongs to the people. Some of what was broken cannot be fixed. Some of the people who were lost are not coming back. The campaign does not end on pure triumph because pure triumph would be dishonest to everything that came before it.

Party Growth

This act covers the party from Levels 13-16. By the end of Act III, the party should:

- Have rescued the sixteen transferred persons and understood what Project Provenance was building toward
- Have defeated or accommodated the Changeling in a way they can live with
- Have confronted and defeated the Rakshasa, the Archmage, and the Goristro
- Have given Orenthis the tools it needs to choose its own future
- Have witnessed that choice being made
- Have stood at the edge of the Mists and watched them part, or not part, depending on what was earned
- Carry the weight of everything the campaign asked of them: the informant list, the Kenku's calculation, the people in the confession chambers, the sixteen names, the ones who were transferred before the party arrived, the ones who are not coming back
- Know that they did what could be done, which is different from doing everything, and have decided that the difference is something they can accept

Chapter 14 The Vice-Lord's Endgame



"He never needed to be the hero. He needed to be the one still standing when the heroes were busy."

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 14 begins Act III but must first resolve the Changeling's gambit at the end of Chapter 13. The boundary falls between the institutional victory and its political consequences.

It is not a dungeon crawl. It is not a boss fight in a fortress or a negotiation in a diplomatic office. It is a chase through the governance structure the party built, against someone who helped them build it, while the rest of the campaign is waiting for them to finish.

The Goristro is in his tower. The Rakshasa is in her fortress. The Archmage is in his Institute. But the party is not ready for any of them yet, and Bowman knows it, and he has chosen this moment specifically because the party is committed to a larger campaign and cannot fully disengage to deal with him without cost.

His gambit is not a coup. It is a legal maneuver. He is attempting to use the transitional governance framework to be recognized as the legitimate authority during the window between the Goristro's fall and the restoration of full democratic governance. He has documentation. He has external entity support. He has the Mountain Compact's formal backing and two other entities besides. He has a legal argument that is not without merit.

He is doing this now because if he waits until after the Goristro falls, the party will have time to stop him. If he does it while the party is committed to the larger campaign, they must split their attention between the institutional threat he represents and the physical threats that remain. He is counting on that split. He has been watching them work for fourteen chapters. He knows exactly how they commit to things.

The chapter's clock is the court's five-day review deadline for Bowman's instrument. After five days without a legal objection, the Justiciars will review the instrument on its own merits and may approve it. That is the pressure. Not the Gilded Tower, but the court's deadline.

This chapter feeds directly into Chapter 15. The party resolves the Changeling's gambit and then turns south toward the Border Fortress. There is no breathing room between them. That is correct.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Scene 1: The Move

The party learns what Bowman is doing and how far along he is. The governance structure they built is in the process of being converted, legally and carefully, into his personal authority.

Scene 1 should feel like discovering a fire that has been burning quietly for months and has just become visible.

Scene 2: The Network

Tracing Bowman's preparation: the external entity commitments, the documentation he has filed, and the specific legal mechanism he is using. Understanding the gambit fully before confronting it.

Scene 2 should feel like peeling back a surface that has been in place for fourteen chapters and finding something that was always underneath.

Scene 3: The Counter

The party's response. Multiple paths available: legal challenge through the court, direct confrontation, diplomatic disruption of his external entity support, or a combination. Each path has different costs and different outcomes. Scene 3 should feel like a problem that cannot be solved cleanly and must be solved anyway.

Scene 4: The Confrontation

Face to face with Bowman. He knows the party is here. He has been expecting them. The question is what each side has and what each side is willing to spend.

Scene 4 should feel like the final negotiation with someone who respects you and is trying to beat you and may succeed.

Scene 5: The Resolution

Whatever the party decided, it lands. The Changeling's gambit is stopped, accommodated, or partially contained. The party turns toward the south.

Scene 5 should feel like closing a door and

walking toward an open one, with the specific knowledge that something is still unresolved behind them.

RUNNING THE CHAPTER

Designed for: 13th-level characters

Sessions: 2

Advancement: Reach 14th level at end

This chapter is the campaign's most unusual structural challenge: a political confrontation running in parallel with the larger military and investigative campaign still ahead. It is deliberately short because the party needs to be moving. Everything in this chapter should feel compressed and purposeful.

The primary goals are:

- Deliver the Changeling's endgame as a political and institutional challenge rather than a combat encounter
- Force the party to make consequential choices under time pressure that is real but not manufactured
- Establish the governance structure that Orenthis will have after the Goristro falls
- Create the specific tension of a fourteen-chapter betrayal arc reaching its resolution
- Feed directly into Chapter 15 with whatever institutional state the party produced here

Guidance

The Gambit Is Not Strictly Evil

This is the most important guidance in the chapter. Bowman is doing something self-serving and dangerous. He is not doing something obviously villainous. The governance gap he is filling is real. The legal mechanism he is using is legitimate. The external entity support he has cultivated is genuine. A party that responds with pure hostility is missing the point. A party that engages with the actual problem he is addressing and finds a solution that addresses it without giving him the chair is solving the chapter the way it was designed to be solved.

The Justiciars Are the Key

he restored court is the party's strongest institutional asset against Bowman's legal maneuver. The Foundational Compact's emergency governance provisions that the eldest Justiciar mentioned in Chapter 12 are the specific tool. A party that went back to the Justiciars during downtime and researched those provisions enters this chapter prepared. A party that did not enter this chapter needing to research them in real time while the gambit is in progress.

He Does Not Want to Fight

he Changeling's combat stat block is CR 14 and he is genuinely dangerous. But he does not want to fight the party in Chapter 14. Fighting them costs him the institutional legitimacy he has been building. A Changeling who is seen attacking the resistance's leadership in the middle of the governance transition is a Changeling whose legal claim to the chair collapses immediately. He will fight if cornered but he will try everything else first.

The Clock Is Real But Contained

The party has five days before the court's review deadline. That is the only clock. The Rakshasa is not going anywhere. The Archmage is not going anywhere. The party can address this chapter fully within its five-day window and then turn south. The urgency is the court deadline, not the larger campaign timeline.

SCENE 1: THE MOVE

The party learns what Bowman is doing. This scene occurs in the days immediately after Chapter 12's conclusion. The source of the intelligence is the Yagnoloth, who has been watching Bowman with the professional attention of one diplomat observing another.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The message arrives through the Yagnoloth. Not directly; but through the diplomatic back channel he manages with the Mountain Compact, which means the Yagnoloth saw it before the party did.

When the party finds him he is already at the planning table with the message in his large hand and the small arm resting on the table beside it, and his expression is the expression of someone who has just had a professional assessment confirmed in a way they did not enjoy being right about.

"The Mountain Compact has filed a formal recognition document with the court. Three days ago." He sets the message on the table. "It recognizes the Transitional Governance Council as the legitimate provisional authority of Orenthis, pending democratic restoration. It names the council chair."

*He looks at the party.
"He approached them six weeks ago. Before you told them about the Archmage's deception. He knew you would tell them eventually and he wanted to be the one who told them first." He pauses. "He was."*

He picks up the message with the small arm and folds it precisely.

"The other two external entities filed their recognition documents yesterday. He waited until all three were in place before moving." He sets the folded message down. "He is very good at this."

Features of the Area The Yagnoloth's Assessment

He provides a complete picture of the gambit if the party asks questions.

What Bowman has:

- Three formal external entity recognition documents on file with the court, all legally valid
- A Transitional Governance Council framework filed with the court as a formal instrument during the Chapter 12 downtime period, in whatever form the party negotiated or failed to negotiate
- The Mountain Compact's support secured before the party disclosed the Archmage's deception, meaning that disclosure did not neutralize it
- A legal argument based on the Foundational Compact's genuine governance gap provisions that the Justiciars themselves acknowledged

What Bowman does not have:

- The court's formal approval of the council instrument; the Justiciars have received it but have not ruled on it; they are waiting
- The resistance's endorsement, which several of the external entities' recognition documents implicitly assumed would follow
- Control of any physical resource, military force, or enforcement mechanism; his authority is entirely institutional and entirely dependent on the court accepting the instrument

"He needs the court to approve his arrangement," the Yagnoloth says. "Without court approval, the external entity recognitions are premature and legally meaningless."

He looks at the party.

"The court has not approved it. I believe the court is waiting to hear from you."

The Encounter The Justiciars' Message

A sealed document arrived at the resistance safe house that morning, bearing the Supreme Court's official seal.

Read or paraphrase the following:

"The court has received a Transitional Governance Instrument filed by a party known to this court as Bowman, identity otherwise unverified. The instrument is legally coherent and addresses a genuine governance need. The court has also received three external entity recognition documents in support.

The court does not approve documents without consultation with affected parties. The resistance of Orenthis is an affected party. The court will hold the instrument for five days pending your response. After five days, in the absence of a legal objection, the instrument will be reviewed for approval on its own merits.

The court notes that the emergency governance provisions of the Foundational Compact remain available.

The court further notes that the individual filing this instrument is skilled, prepared, and operating in good faith within the legal system.

This observation is neutral. The court makes no judgment about whether good faith operation within the legal system is sufficient to qualify for the authority being sought.

The court awaits your response."

The Five-Day Window

The party has five days from the message's receipt. That is the chapter's only clock. Mira reads the message and says:

*"He chose the timing on purpose. He has been watching us from the beginning. He knows we have things to do that are not this."
She sets the message down.*

*"And he filed three days ago, which means he already has a head start."
She looks at the party.*

"We need to be better."

What the Party Can Do

Assess the Legal Situation

DC 13 Investigation to establish exactly what the five-day window means: the party can address the Changeling fully within the window while still turning south to the Rakshasa on schedule. The deadline is real but it is not in conflict with the larger campaign timeline. Five days is enough if the party moves with purpose.

Contact the Justiciars Directly

They are available and will speak to any party member who comes to them. They will not advise on political decisions but they will clarify the legal situation with precision. DC 11 Persuasion to get the specific emergency governance provisions they referenced in Chapter 12. On a success, they provide the full text of the relevant Foundational Compact provisions. On a failure, they provide the section numbers and let the party research it themselves.

Locate Bowman

He is in the Yagnoloth's building. He moved into a formal diplomatic office after Chapter 12, with the Yagnoloth's resigned permission. He is not hiding. He expected this conversation.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

The Yagnoloth has already drafted a preliminary legal objection based on the emergency governance provisions. It is not complete but the research has been done. DC 11 Investigation to refine it rather than DC 15 to produce it from scratch.

Making it Harder

The Mountain Compact's recognition document includes a clause that the party's disclosure of the Archmage's deception actually strengthens Bowman's position: by telling the Compact about the deception, the party inadvertently confirmed that the resistance has reliable intelligence and demonstrated that Bowman's original intelligence was accurate. The Compact views him as credible because he was right. Dismantling this requires a DC 17 Persuasion check with the Compact's representative.

Increasing Role Play

Mira, after reading the Justiciar's message, says:
"Good faith operation within the legal system. That is what they said about him." She puts the message down. "He spent fourteen chapters operating in good faith within our system too. Everything he gave us was real. Everything he told us was accurate." She looks at the party. "I have been trying to figure out what to call that and I keep coming back to the same word. Patient." She pauses. "He was patient."

Treasure and Rewards

No direct rewards. The Justiciar's message and the Yagnoloth's assessment are the outputs.

Development and Dial Impact

No dial changes from this scene.

SCENE 2:

THE NETWORK

The party investigates the full scope of Bowman's preparation: the external entity relationships, the documentation, and the specific legal mechanism he is using. Understanding the gambit completely is necessary for addressing it effectively.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The Yagnoloth has been doing what he does, which is knowing things about diplomatic arrangements that the parties involved did not realize were observable. He has a map of Bowman's external entity network that is more complete than anything the party assembled themselves, because the Yagnoloth spent thirty years building the relationships that Bowman has been covertly cultivating, and professional recognition goes in one direction.

"He is using three entities," the Yagnoloth says. He marks them on Lyra's operational map: the Mountain Compact, a trade consortium called the Amber Road Collective, and a minor noble house with historical claims to Orenthis's northern territories called the House of Veld.

"The Mountain Compact is the most significant. The other two have less weight but their combined recognition creates a threshold that the court must treat as substantive."

He pauses.

"The Amber Road Collective approached me four months ago. I declined to work with them."

He looks at the party.

"Bowman did not decline."

Features of the Area

The Three External Entities

The Mountain Compact:

- **Status:**
Formally committed; recognition document filed; commitment predates the Archmage deception disclosure.
- **Vulnerability:**
The deception itself. The Compact was deceived into providing trade route intelligence that funded a human experimentation facility. They committed to

Bowman before knowing the full details of what their intelligence enabled. DC 15 Persuasion with the Compact's representative, using the Project Provenance logbooks as evidence, to shift their recognition from unconditional to conditional on Bowman's role being subordinate to the court. On a success, their recognition document is amended and filed with the court.

The Amber Road Collective:

- **Status:**
Committed; recognition document filed; relationship built over four months.
- **Vulnerability:**
The Collective's primary interest is trade access to Orenthis after the regime falls. They do not care about governance for its own sake; they care about who controls the trade agreements. DC 13 Persuasion with the Collective's representative, using Veth's Merchant Federation formal support as a competing offer: the Federation is a larger trading partner than the Collective and has already committed to the resistance. If the Collective's support goes to Bowman, they are on the losing side of the trade relationship. On a success, the Collective withdraws their recognition document entirely.

The House of Veld:

- **Status:**
Committed; recognition document filed; historical territorial claims make them interested in any post-regime governance structure that might restore their northern land rights.
- **Vulnerability:**
Their territorial claims. The Foundational Compact includes provisions about historical land claims during governance transitions. DC 14 Investigation to identify the relevant provision: it establishes that historical territorial claims are evaluated by the court, not by the transitional governance council chair. If Bowman is council chair, he controls the claims process. If the court controls it, the House of Veld has stronger legal standing than under Bowman's framework. DC 14 Persuasion with the House's representative, using the Foundational Compact provision as evidence. On a success, their recognition document is withdrawn.

The Encounter

The Legal Mechanism

The Transitional Governance Instrument
Bowman filed is built on two Foundational

Compact provisions:

- **Article 7, Section 3:**
During periods of active conflict where the primary governance authority is incapacitated, a provisional governance body may be established with external entity recognition and court approval.
- **Article 11, Section 1:**
The provisional governance body's chair holds discretionary authority over matters not specifically enumerated in the court's active jurisdiction.

The party's counter-mechanism:

- **Article 4, Section 2:**
During periods of active conflict, the court itself may assume provisional governance authority directly, delegating specific administrative functions to designated officers of the court without establishing a separate governing body.

This last provision makes Bowman's instrument legally redundant. It fills the same governance gap without requiring a council or a chair. The Justiciars become the provisional authority directly.

DC 13 Investigation or DC 12 History to find Article 4, Section 2 independently.
DC 11 if the party researched the Foundational Compact during downtime.
Automatic if the Justiciars provided the section numbers in Scene 1.

Bowman's Awareness

He knows the party is investigating. He is not stopping them. He is watching the five-day deadline and calculating whether they will find the Article 4, Section 2 mechanism in time to file a legal objection before the instrument review deadline.

He built his filing timeline to give the party five days. Not because he expected to win if they had five days, but because five days with the Rakshasa and the Archmage and the Goristro all ahead of them felt, to him, like a constrained five days. He built the timeline around the pressure of the larger campaign.

What the Party Can Do

Dismantle the External Entity Support

Each entity has a specific vulnerability and a specific DC. Addressing all three changes the legal landscape significantly: the Mountain Compact's conditional recognition reduces the instrument's strength, the Collective's withdrawal removes a recognition leg entirely, and the House of Veld's withdrawal reduces it to one external entity, which falls below the threshold the court considers substantive.

Research and File Article 4, Section 2

Filing an Article 4, Section 2 instrument with the court requires: the text of the provision, a petition from a party with legal standing, and the signatures of at least two court officers or recognized resistance leadership. It takes one full day to prepare properly. Filing it legally supersedes Bowman's instrument and removes the need to dismantle his external entity support, because the governance gap his instrument fills is filled by the court's direct assumption of provisional authority.

Do Both

The optimal approach. Filing Article 4, Section 2 is the institutional solution. Dismantling the external entity support weakens his position for Act III regardless of whether the filing succeeds, because an isolated Changeling with no external backing is a different problem from a Changeling with institutional legitimacy.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

The Yagnoloth has already identified Article 4, Section 2 and has a draft petition prepared. Filing it requires only the party's signatures and one day of preparation. The external entity work is still available but not required for the core resolution.

Making it Harder

Bowman anticipated Article 4, Section 2 and preemptively filed an interpretive brief with the court arguing that his instrument and Article 4, Section 2 are complementary rather than competing: the court assumes provisional authority and delegates the administrative chair function to him specifically. The Justiciars have received this brief. DC 17 Persuasion with the Justiciars to counter the interpretive argument; on a success, they reject the complementary interpretation; on a failure,

they hold the question and the Article 4, Section 2 filing is complicated.

Increasing Role Play

When the party identifies what the Amber Road Collective actually wants, give them a moment with the specificity of it. Bowman spent four months cultivating a trade consortium because he understood that external entity support is built on interests, not values, and interests can be satisfied with contracts. He is right about this. The Yagnoloth is right about this. The party is about to use exactly this knowledge to dismantle his support network. He taught them how by doing it himself.

Treasure and Rewards

From Scene 2 research:

- Article 4, Section 2 of the Foundational Compact (the legal mechanism for the court's direct provisional authority assumption; the chapter's resolution tool)
 - Complete map of Bowman's external entity network (useful for Act III regardless of Chapter 14's outcome)
 - Specific vulnerability assessments for all three external entities
-

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Mountain Compact recognition made conditional	+1	0	0
Amber Road Collective recognition withdrawn	+1	0	0
House of Veld recognition withdrawn	+1	0	0
Article 4 Section 2 mechanism identified	0	0	0

SCENE 3:

THE COUNTER

The party executes their chosen response to Bowman's gambit. This scene covers the legal filing, the external entity approaches, or both, and ends with the party's counter-measure in place before the confrontation in Scene 4.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The Yagnoloth drafts documents the way other people breathe: continuously, without apparent effort, with the small arm managing the details and the large arm signing where signatures are required. He does not editorialize about what he is helping the party do. He works.

At one point Veth stops by the Yagnoloth's office with a Federation trade access proposal for the Amber Road Collective that arrives at exactly the right moment, which either means he was briefed or he has been paying attention. The Yagnoloth, without looking up from his drafting, says: "Thank you, Councillor." Veth nods and goes. The small arm turns to the next page.

*The deadline is running.
The Rakshasa is south.
The Archmage is southwest.*

The party has chosen to address them first and that was the correct call.
Make sure it feels correct.

Features of the Area

The Article 4, Section 2 Filing

Preparing and filing the Article 4, Section 2 instrument requires one full day. The Yagnoloth handles the drafting.

The party handles the political signatures: they need endorsements from at least two of the following:

- Mira as resistance leadership
 - Sister Kara as a recognized civic figure
 - The Yagnoloth as a diplomatic officer
 - Veth as an external entity representative
- All four are available and all four will sign without requiring a Persuasion check.

When the filing reaches the court: the eldest Justiciar sends a brief acknowledgment. The court is reviewing the competing documents.

The Transitional Governance Instrument and the Article 4, Section 2 petition are now before the court simultaneously. The court will rule within 48 hours.

This is faster than the five-day review timeline Bowman built his plan around. He built the timeline assuming the party would fight him directly, which is slower, or not find the Article 4 mechanism in time.

He did not plan for the Yagnoloth's drafting speed.

The Encounter

Each approach is a separate scene beat. Run them quickly; the chapter is compressed.

The Mountain Compact:

The Compact's representative is Aldric Forss, a dwarven trade factor who has been managing the Compact's Orenthis relationship for six years. He is not hostile to the party. He is committed to Bowman because Bowman gave him accurate intelligence and presented a coherent governance plan. DC 15 Persuasion using the Project Provenance logbooks; on a success, he requests 24 hours to consult with the Compact's home council before amending his recognition document; on a failure, he maintains the commitment but his tone is less certain than it was.

The Amber Road Collective:

The Collective's representative is Maren, a half-elven merchant whose interest in Orenthis is entirely transactional. She backed Bowman because he offered guarantees about trade access. Veth's Federation proposal, combined with the party's endorsement of post-regime trade negotiations, produces a better guarantee than Bowman can offer. DC 13 Persuasion; on a success, her recognition document is withdrawn within the hour.

The House of Veld:

The Veld representative is a young human named Cassia who inherited her position three months ago and is frankly overwhelmed by the current situation. She backed Bowman because he presented a clear path and she needed a clear path. DC 14 Persuasion using the Foundational Compact territorial provision; on a success, she withdraws her recognition document and asks the party to keep her

informed about the court's territorial claims procedures.

What the Party Can Do

File Article 4 and Approach All Three Entities

The full response. Achievable within the five-day window if the party splits responsibilities efficiently. The Yagnoloth handles the drafting, Veth handles the Collective approach, the party handles the Mountain Compact and House of Veld.

File Article 4 Only

The minimum institutional response. The external entities remain committed to Bowman but the court's review now has a competing instrument. The court will likely approve Article 4; Bowman's instrument is not stronger on the merits. But he retains the external entity relationships going forward.

Approach the Entities Only

If the party does not find or file Article 4: dismantling the external support reduces his instrument's legal standing but does not provide a competing governance mechanism. The court still has to approve or reject his instrument on its own merits. Without Article 4, the party's legal counter is weaker.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

Forss from the Mountain Compact reaches out to the party proactively. He has been reviewing the Project Provenance documentation and he has questions that, when answered, make the DC 15 check unnecessary; his amendment to the recognition document is conditional without a check once he understands the full scope of what his intelligence enabled.

Making it Harder

The Amber Road Collective's Maren has received a counter-offer from Bowman in the last 24 hours, better trade terms than the party can match. The DC increases to 17. On a failure, she remains committed. On a success, she withdraws but notes that she received a better offer, which tells the party that Bowman is aware of the threat to his network and has been responding in real time.

Increasing Role Play

Cassia from the House of Veld, after withdrawing her recognition document, asks the party a question she has clearly been holding: "What happens to the northern territories? After. When there is a real government again." She is not asking for a guarantee. She is asking whether anyone has thought about it. She is seventeen years old and she inherited a position she was not prepared for. She deserves an honest answer.

Treasure and Rewards

From Scene 3:

- Article 4, Section 2 filing confirmed (institutional counter-measure in place)
- External entity responses (each successful approach reduces Bowman's positioning)
- Cassia of the House of Veld as a minor future ally if the party answered honestly

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Article 4 Section 2 filed with the court	+1	0	-1
All three external entity documents withdrawn or amended	+2	0	-1
Two external entities addressed	+1	0	0
One external entity addressed	0	0	0

SCENE 4:

THE CONFRONTATION

Face to face with Bowman. He knows the party is here. He knows what they have done with the external entities. He knows about the Article 4 filing. He has been watching.

He is in the Yagnoloth's building, in the diplomatic office he has occupied since the end of Chapter 13. When the party arrives, he is standing at the window looking into the embassy district's small garden.

Read or paraphrase the following:

He turns when they enter. He does not look like someone who has just had his plan partially dismantled. He looks like someone who was expecting to have his plan partially dismantled and is now on to the next version of it.

"You found Article Four," he says. "The Yagnoloth drafted it, I assume. He is faster than I planned for." He gestures to the chairs. "Sit down. I would like to talk to you before the court rules."

He sits in his chair. He looks at the party. "I want to be clear about something. Not strategic. Just clear." He pauses. "I have been genuinely useful to you for quite some time now. Everything I gave you was real. Every piece of intelligence, every forged document, every well-timed arrival. I did that because I wanted this." He gestures toward the window, toward the city, toward whatever is on the other side of the Goristro's fall.

"I want Orenthis. I have wanted it since before you existed."

He meets the party's eyes. "And what I want from it is different from what you want from it. I am not pretending otherwise. But I want to ask you something, directly, before the court decides." He leans forward slightly.

"What is wrong with what I am offering? Not the section seven version. The clean version. A transitional council chair who is competent, positioned, and genuinely invested in Orenthis's stability, operating under court oversight. What specifically is wrong with that?"

He is asking a real question. He wants a real answer.

Features of the Area

The Office

The Yagnoloth's building, second floor. His documents are on the desk, organized with precision. The window overlooks the garden where Veth ate lunch alone for months.

The Encounter

The Conversation

This is not a negotiation. It is a reckoning.

He is asking the party to tell him what they actually think about him.

The party can answer in any way (or ways) they choose. What they say determines the quality of the resolution available in the next scene.

If the party says he is untrustworthy:

He says "That is accurate. But untrustworthiness in a governance structure with strong institutional oversight is a manageable problem. Incompetence is not. I am not incompetent."

If the party says he helped the resistance only to benefit himself:

He says "Also accurate. But self-interest and public benefit are not mutually exclusive. I would argue they are the basis of every functional governance arrangement that has ever existed."

If the party says he is manipulative:

He says "Correct. I am a diplomat. That is the job description." He pauses. "The question is whether you want someone who is good at the job in the role or someone who is not."

If the party says they do not trust him with the power the chair provides:

He is quiet for a moment.

Then he says: "That is the honest answer. That is the one I can work with." He looks at the documents on his desk. "Tell me what oversight would make the chair position acceptable. Specifically. I will tell you whether I can agree to it."

Three Resolution Paths

Reject him completely:

He accepts the rejection with the specific grace of someone who had a contingency for this.

He says: *"Then the court will decide. And I will work with whatever the court decides."*

He means it. He has positioned himself inside the legal system because the legal system is the legitimate authority. He is not going to attack it.

If Article 4 was filed and the entities were addressed: the court rules for Article 4 within 48 hours. Bowman's instrument is set aside. He remains in the diplomatic space with whatever external entity relationships survived. He is a diplomatic actor without an institutional role.

If Article 4 was not filed: the court reviews his instrument on its own merits. DC 16 Persuasion from any party member who appears before the court to argue against it; on a success, the court requests significant amendments before approval; on a failure, the instrument is approved with modifications.

Negotiate genuinely:

If the party answered his question honestly: DC 15 Persuasion to reach an amended agreement. On a success, he accepts a chair position with specific constraints that he drafts with the party's input and files with the court immediately. The constraints are: reporting requirements to the court weekly, no discretionary authority over any matter under active court jurisdiction, automatic review of all decisions by the Justiciars, and a sunset clause that terminates the transitional council within 90 days. He signs all of these. He means to honor them. He will also be looking for the gaps.

Combat:

He does not go there easily. If combat begins he uses Assume Identity targeting the party member who gave the most honest answer to his question. He uses Shapeshift and Countershape to avoid grapple.

He uses plane shift when reduced to half HP. He does not fight to the death. He considers fighting a failure state.

If he plane shifts, he is gone for the remainder of Act III. He returns in the epilogue with whatever he has built outside the domain.

What the Party Can Do

Answer the Question Honestly

The single most valuable action in this scene. The honest answer unlocks the genuine negotiation path and produces the best achievable outcome.

Use the Article 4 Filing as Leverage

If filed: telling him the court will rule within 48 hours in favor of Article 4 changes his calculus. He may accept the constrained chair as better than no institutional role at all. DC 12 Persuasion to use the filing as a negotiating lever; on a success, he moves immediately to the constrained chair negotiation.

Ask Him What He Actually Wants

Not institutionally. What he actually wants from Orenthis after the regime falls.

He is quiet for a long moment. Then he says: *"I want to matter. Not as a tyrant and not as a servant. As someone who built something that outlasted him." He looks at the window. "I have been running variations of this kind of positioning for longer than most cities stand. I would like, once, to be on the side that builds something that lasts."*

It is the most honest thing he has said whole campaign and perhaps ever. It is also entirely compatible with everything he has done. Both things are true.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

He opens the conversation by acknowledging that the Article 4 filing changes the legal landscape significantly and that he is interested in the constrained chair arrangement. The DC for the genuine negotiation drops to DC 12.

Making it Harder

The Mountain Compact's Forss has reached out to Bowman since the party's approach and Forss's conditional amendment actually strengthened Bowman's argument: a conditional recognition from the Mountain Compact is still a recognition, and Bowman is framing the condition as evidence that he is operating transparently with external oversight. The DC for rejecting him completely increases by 2 if the party does not address this framing.

Increasing Role Play

When he says he wants to build something that lasts: let the silence hold. Do not fill it with narration. Let the players decide what their characters do with that information. Some of them will believe him. Some will not. Some will believe him and not think it changes anything. All of those are correct responses.

Treasure and Rewards

No direct mechanical rewards. The outcome of this scene determines Scene 5's content and the governance landscape for Act III's remaining chapters.

Development and Dial Impact

No dial changes from this scene

SCENE 5:

THE RESOLUTION

Whatever was decided in Scene 4 lands here. The court rules. Bowman takes his position or does not. The thread closes.

Read or paraphrase the following (adjust based on resolution path):

The court's ruling arrives the following morning. The eldest Justiciar's message is brief.

For the Article 4 ruling:
"The court has reviewed both documents. The Article Four, Section Two emergency governance provision is the more legally grounded mechanism and does not require the establishment of a separate governing body. The court assumes provisional governance authority effective immediately. Administrative delegations are attached.

The Transitional Governance Instrument filed by the party known as Bowman is set aside. The court notes that the external entity recognitions are premature and are returned to the filing parties as unacted upon.

The individual known as Bowman is recognized as a diplomatic officer of the transitional court with advisory capacity and no independent authority. This recognition may be reviewed at any time by court order.

The court thanks the petitioners for their diligence.

The matter is concluded."

For the constrained chair ruling:
"The court has reviewed the amended Transitional Governance Instrument. The amendments are substantive and the constraints enumerated are enforceable. The instrument is approved with the following additional condition: the council chair reports directly to the court and the court retains authority to suspend the chair's function at any time by unanimous Justiciar vote.

The court notes that this arrangement is unusual. The court further notes that unusual arrangements sometimes produce better outcomes than standard ones. The court will be watching.

The matter is concluded."

Features of the Area

The Encounter

Bowman's Response

If the Article 4 ruling: he says "Advisory capacity." He considers this for a moment. "I can work with advisory capacity." He means it. Advisory capacity in a court-run provisional government is less than he wanted and more than nothing.

If the constrained chair ruling:
He says "The court will be watching." He looks at the party. "So will you." He pauses. "Good. I work better when people are paying attention."

Both versions of Bowman, in this moment, are telling the truth.

If he Plane Shifted in Scene 4:
He is gone. The court receives the Article 4 filing and approves it without a competing instrument. The ruling arrives faster than expected, within 24 hours, because there is nothing to evaluate against. The eldest Justiciar's message notes simply:

"The court has received no competing instrument. The Article Four, Section Two emergency governance provision is approved. Administrative delegations are attached. The court is in session."

The Yagnoloth, reading the ruling, says: "He will come back. With something different." He sets the message down. "But not during the tower."

He is right about both things.

The Yagnoloth Takes Responsibility

Regardless of which resolution path was taken, the Yagnoloth formally accepts the court's primary administrative delegation. He does this without being asked and without drama.

He says one thing about it:
"Someone has to manage this while you finish the job at hand. I am the most qualified person available." He pauses. "I am also, you should note, the person with the most to lose if the governance transition fails. Self-interest and public benefit are not mutually exclusive." He picks up the first delegation document and begins working through it with the small arm holding the page flat.

This is important because it means the governance structure has an operational administrator from this chapter forward. The court is functioning. The provisional governance is being managed. The party can go south, then southwest, then back to Oren for the tower, without the governance structure being a variable they need to track.

Mira's Assessment

She reads the ruling summary the party brings back.

She is quiet for a moment.

Then she says: "We gave a shapeshifter with no name and no history and no loyalty either an advisory role in our restored court or a constrained chair in our provisional government." She pauses. "I want to register, formally, that I am uncomfortable with both outcomes." She pauses again. "I also want to register that I cannot identify a better one. Given what we know and what we had to work with and the time we had to work with it."

She puts down the summary.

"The Yagnoloth has the administration. The court is operational. The governance structure is in place." She looks at the party. "This piece is resolved." She turns back to the table. Lyra's operational map is there. She points to the marker northeast along the Thornwood road.

"The Rakshasa is waiting. We go."

What the Party Can Do

Accept the Outcome and Move

Whatever form it took, accept it and turn attentions to the northeast. The governance thread has been closed. The Yagnoloth has the administration. The Changeling is either contained within a defined role or absent from Orenthis entirely. The party does not need to track this variable through the remaining chapters.

Check on Sister Kara

She has been in the Cathedral since this chapter began. She is available if the party goes to her before departing. She is ready. She says: *"I have been ready since the Cathedral. I have been waiting for you to finish what you needed to finish."* She picks up her staff. *"Let us go end this."*

Brief the Justiciars

One final conversation before the campaign's remaining chapters. The eldest Justiciar says: "The court will function in your absence. Bring us the Goristro's legal record when you return." It pauses. "Return."

One Final Exchange With Bowman (Optional)

If the party seeks him out before leaving; he is in the Yagnoloth's building, already working through the first items on his advisory caseload. He looks up when the party enters.

Read or paraphrase the following:

"I know you are leaving," he says. "I know where you are going." He sets down the document he was reading. "I want to tell you something that is not strategic."

He looks at the party.

"I built toward this moment for years. Every accurate piece of intelligence. Every well-timed arrival. Every forged document. I did all of it because I wanted to be in the room when Orenthis chose its future." He pauses. "I am in a room. It is not the room I planned to be in. But I am in it."

He picks up the document again.

"Come back. There is work to do and I am going to need people who understand what it takes to actually build something."

He returns to work.

The party can respond or not. He does not require a response. He is already focused on the next item.

This is the Changeling's final scene in the main campaign. Whether the party says anything to him before they leave is their choice. What he said is true. All of it is true. That does not resolve the question of what he is. It just means the question belongs to the epilogue now, not to the campaign.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

The ruling arrives before the end of day with time to spare. The party has a full evening for debrief and a night's rest before departing northeast.

Making it Harder

The ruling arrives at the same time as intelligence from Tam: the Rakshasa has moved to heightened alert since the Writ of Challenge. The party reads both simultaneously and must make decisions about both at once, without time to fully process the governance resolution before turning toward the next chapter.

Increasing Role Play

Before the party leaves: Veth is in the garden. He has been there since the ruling arrived. He is looking at the fountain. When a party member approaches, he says: *"I have been in this district for months. I watched this city from two hundred feet away and I could not do anything." He looks at the party. "I want you to know that I am going to be here when you get back. Doing the work. Whatever needs doing." He pauses. "Come back."*

He does not say it as a sentimental thing. He says it as a logistical statement. He needs people who can do what the party does.

Treasure and Rewards

From the Resolution:

- Governance structure fully established and operational (the Yagnoloth administers; the court oversees; the Changeling is in a defined and monitored role or absent; the party does not need to track this variable again until the epilogue)
 - Bowman's position closed (advisory role or constrained chair or absent; the arc is complete)
 - The road northeast is open
-

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Article 4 approved, Bowman in advisory role	+1	0	-1
Constrained chair approved, Bowman in monitored role	+1	0	0
Bowman's instrument approved without constraint	-1	0	+1
Bowman plane shifted, thread closed by absence	0	0	0

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

What the Party Should Know

- The Changeling's arc is closed. He is in a defined position within the governance structure or he is gone from Orenthis. The party knows which. The governance structure is operational and administered. This variable does not return in the main campaign.
- The court is operating. The provisional governance is in place. Orenthis has a legal government, however provisional, for the first time since the regime began.
- The Rakshasa is northeast along the Thornwood road, past the empty border garrison from Chapter 3, at the end of a road the party has traveled before. She has been preparing since the Writ of Challenge.
- The Archmage is southwest in the Heritage Institute. Sixteen people are in Sub-Level 3. The party has not forgotten.
- The Goristro is in his tower. Two chapters stand between the party and him. Both of those chapters are missions with specific objectives. Neither is preparation. They are the final work before the final confrontation.

Character Advancement

14th level reached.

Downtime (Optional)

None. The party departs northeast as soon as the ruling arrives.

Lead-in to the Next Chapter

Mira pins a single marker on Lyra's map. Northeast of Oren, along the Thornwood Forest road, past the site of the Chapter 2 wagon ambush, past the empty garrison from Chapter 3, at the border of the land the Rakshasa has controlled since before the regime began.

Read or paraphrase the following:

"She is not like the others. She did not need the regime to be who she is. She was already there when the Goristro arrived, already running the border operations, already building the apparatus that he then scaled up and weaponized." Mira looks at the marker. "She did not serve him out of fear or greed or ideology. She served him because he gave her more resources to do what she was already doing."

She looks at the party.

"The families separated at her checkpoints along the Thornwood road are still separated. The people processed through her facility are still unaccounted for. The ones who were taken before we knew to look for them." She pauses.

"We are not going northeast for the campaign. We are going northeast for them."

She picks up her pack.

"Let us go."

Considerations

If Bowman plane shifted: the Yagnoloth notes that his external entity relationships survived his departure. He will return at some point. His return and what he proposes then is epilogue content, not campaign content. The party does not need to prepare for it. It will arrive when it arrives.

If the constrained chair was accepted: the Yagnoloth has agreed to serve as the court's primary administrative delegate with Bowman's council chair operating under his professional oversight. The Yagnoloth said yes to this with the expression of someone who has been doing difficult work for a long time and is resigned to continuing. He said one thing: "He is very good at this. So am I. We will see who is better."

If Cassia asked about the northern territories and the party answered honestly: she is at the resistance safe house when the party gathers to depart. She does not ask to come with them. She asks if she can be useful here while they are gone. Mira looks at her for a moment and says yes.

If the party sought out Bowman for the final exchange: they leave with the specific knowledge of someone who told them the truth about everything except what he wanted, who wanted to be in the room when Orenthis chose its future, and who is now in that room doing the work. Whether that is a satisfying resolution is the party's call to make. The campaign does not resolve it for them.

Chapter 15 The Rakshasa's Domain



"She did not build a system of cruelty. She built a system. The cruelty was the point of the system, which is a different thing, and the difference is what makes it so hard to dismantle."

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 15 takes the party northeast along the Thornwood Forest road, past the border garrison they raided in Chapter 3, to the Rakshasa's Border Fortress: the place where families were separated, where prisoners were processed, where the regime's cruelty was most directly exercised against the most vulnerable people in Orenthis.

The road is familiar. The party has traveled it before carrying freed prisoners and the first pieces of evidence that the resistance could act upon. They travel it now different from what they were then.

The Rakshasa has been here since before the Goristro's rise. She will be here, in her way, until someone stops her.

She is not like the other lieutenants the party has faced. The Hezrou was a bully given tools he should never have had. The Nycaloth was a mercenary who stopped caring when the math changed. The Mezzoloth was a coward with institutional cover. The Rakshasa is none of these things. She is competent, patient, and genuinely without mercy, and she has been doing this work for longer than the regime has existed. The regime did not corrupt her. It resourced her.

She knows the party is coming. She has known since the Writ of Challenge was issued. She has been preparing. Not frantically, not defensively, but with the specific preparation of someone who has faced everything before and has never been stopped by anything that came from outside.

The party has one significant tactical advantage that no previous encounter has provided: the blessed weapon vulnerability. The Rakshasa is pierced by weapons wielded by creatures under the effect of bless. Against any other form of damage she is immune or resistant. This mechanic should be established before the fight, not discovered during it. The resistance

knows about it. Mira knows about it. Sister Kara knows about it. The party goes into this encounter informed.

The chapter is structured around three objectives that build on each other. The borderlands must be navigated, the fortress must be entered, and the Rakshasa must be confronted in the space she has controlled for years. Each objective is harder than the previous one. By the time the party reaches her, they have been through the borderlands and the fortress and they are fighting someone who has had months to prepare for exactly this.

She will not negotiate. She will not surrender. She will not panic. She will be, until the very end, composed.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Scene 1: The Road Northeast

The journey along the Thornwood Forest road toward the Border Fortress. The party passes the site of the Chapter 2 wagon ambush and the Chapter 3 border garrison, now a ghost of what it was. The road is familiar. What lies at the end of it is not.

Scene 1 should feel like returning to a place the party thought they understood and finding it has been waiting for them.

Scene 2: The Perimeter

The Border Fortress exterior and its defenses. The Rakshasa has reinforced since the Writ of Challenge. Her garrison is larger than it was and she has had months to prepare for a direct assault.

Scene 2 should feel like assessing something that was built to be impenetrable and finding the specific places where it is not.

Scene 3: The Cages

The fortress interior and what it contains. The detention yards, the processing areas, the specific geography of a place designed to break people. And the people currently inside it. Scene 3 should feel like walking through the physical evidence of everything the resistance has been fighting against.

Scene 4: The Fortress Falls

The combat push through the fortress's interior defenses toward the Rakshasa's command center. Merregons, the fortress's layered structure, and the specific challenge of fighting through a building designed to contain resistance.

Scene 4 should feel like a sustained assault that costs something before the final confrontation.

Scene 5: The Rakshasa

The confrontation. A CR 15 boss fight against a creature with Greater Magic Resistance, Legendary Resistance (3/day), and complete immunity to non-blessed weapon damage. The hardest fight in Act III before the Goristro himself.

Scene 5 should feel like confronting something that has never been stopped and finding out whether that changes today.

Scene 6: The Borderlands After

The fortress falls. The processing stops. The families separated at her checkpoints begin the long process of being reunited. What the borderlands become without the Rakshasa. Scene 6 should feel like something being given back that should never have been taken.

RUNNING THE CHAPTER

Designed for: 14th-level characters

Sessions: 3-4

Advancement: Reach 15th level at end

This chapter is Act III's most emotionally weighted encounter. The Rakshasa is mechanically the hardest fight before the Goristro and the borderlands are the campaign's most direct physical evidence of what the regime has done to ordinary people. The chapter does not let the party forget either of these things.

The primary goals are:

- Deliver the Rakshasa's defeat as the most personally significant combat victory in Act III
- Walk the party through the physical reality of the detention and processing apparatus they have been fighting against since Chapter 1
- Give the separated families a chapter
- Establish the bless mechanic as the fight's central tactical requirement
- Set up Chapter 16 by surfacing additional Project Provenance intelligence in the fortress's records

Guidance

The Bless Mechanic Is Non-Negotiable

The Rakshasa's vulnerability to piercing damage from weapons wielded by creatures under bless is not a hint or a suggestion. Without it, non-magical piercing, slashing, and bludgeoning damage is immune. Magical damage is not blocked but she has Greater Magic Resistance: she automatically succeeds on saving throws against spells and magical effects. The party needs bless active on weapon users to deal reliable damage. Mira knows this. Sister Kara knows this. The resistance briefed the party before they left Oren. Do not let this be a surprise in Scene 5.

The People Inside the Fortress

The detention yards hold prisoners. Not named NPCs with elaborate backstories, but people. A family that was separated at a checkpoint eight months ago and has been held separately since. A merchant taken for expired papers. A teacher taken for using old textbooks. The party has heard versions of these stories since the beginning of the campaign. Walking through the detention yards is the chapter's emotional center, not the Rakshasa fight. Let it be that.

She Has Been Preparing

The Rakshasa has had months since the Writ of Challenge. She has doubled her Merregon garrison, reinforced her perimeter, and prepared the fortress for a direct assault. The party should feel the preparation in every scene before Scene 5. She is not surprised. She is not rushed. She is ready, and readiness is what makes her the specific kind of dangerous she is.

The Regional Effects

The Rakshasa's regional effects, Papers Please and Separated, are still active throughout the borderlands. The party has been in Oren for most of the campaign. The borderlands feel different: watched, pressured, and specifically hostile to connection. Let the party feel the Separated effect if any of them have the Charmed condition toward each other or toward NPCs traveling with them. Sister Kara qualifies.

The Road Is Familiar

The party has traveled the Thornwood Forest road before. In Chapter 2 they ambushed a detention wagon on that road. In Chapter 3 they raided the border garrison that sits between Oren and the Rakshasa's fortress. Those victories were real. The road remembers them. Use that familiarity deliberately: the party passes the Chapter 2 ambush site and the Chapter 3 garrison on the way northeast, and both should be noted.

SCENE 1:

THE ROAD NORTHEAST

The party travels northeast along the Thornwood Forest road toward the Border Fortress. This scene covers the journey, the familiar geography, and the intelligence they gather before the assault.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The Thornwood Forest road looks the same as it did in Chapter 2. Same packed earth, same close tree line, same cold light filtering through the canopy. You pass the place where the wagon was stopped, identifiable by a section of road that was churned up and never quite smoothed back over. Someone has placed a small cairn of stones at the road's edge. You do not know who built it. You do not stop.

An hour past the cairn, the border garrison from Chapter 3 comes into view. Or what remains of it. The palisade is intact but the gates stand open, and the space inside is wrong in a way that takes a moment to identify: it is empty. Not abandoned in a hurry. Empty in the way of a place that was vacated deliberately, equipment removed, posts stripped, the only thing left the physical structure and the memory of what was done there.

Beyond it, the road continues northeast. Another two miles, Tam's latest report said. Past the garrison, past the point where the Thornwood begins to thin, where the tree line pulls back and the borderlands open up and the fortress becomes visible on elevated ground ahead.

Tam is waiting at the tree line. He has been there since yesterday.

Features of the Area

The Chapter 2 Ambush Site

The party passes it on the way northeast. The cairn at the road's edge was built by someone from the local village. Locals know what happened there. Several have heard, in the months since, that the resistance was behind it. The cairn is small and unmarked. It has been maintained; the stones are clean and upright.

If the party stops: DC 10 Investigation to find that the grass at the roadside near the cairn has been worn down by foot traffic. People have been coming here. A small, folded piece of

paper has been tucked between two of the stones. It is addressed to no one. It says, in a careful handwriting: "We know what you did and we have not forgotten."

This is not a plot point. It is a moment. Let it resonate.

The Chapter 3 Garrison

The border garrison stands open and empty. The Rakshasa absorbed its Merregon garrison into her fortress reinforcements after the Writ of Challenge. She did not need the forward position anymore; she needed depth at the fortress itself.

Walking through the empty garrison: the processing areas are still configured. The cells still have the marks that prisoners leave in cells. The administrative post where the Imp Warlock ran his quotas and his paperwork is still there, the desk untouched, the quota sheets still pinned to the board.

The most recent quota sheet is dated three weeks after the party's Chapter 3 raid. The numbers on it are smaller than the previous ones. The Imp Warlock was gone but someone kept the quota system running for three more weeks by momentum alone before the position was left vacant.

Sister Kara, if present, looks at the quota sheet for a moment. She says nothing. She walks on.

The Regional Effects

Within 5 miles of the fortress, the Rakshasa's regional effects apply:

Separated: Creatures more than 30 feet from any creature they have the Charmed condition toward must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw each hour or gain one level of exhaustion from the psychic weight of enforced separation. Sister Kara is affected if she is traveling with the party.

This effect should be played straight. Let the party experience, briefly and mildly, what the detained families have been experiencing for months. If Sister Kara fails a save and gains a level of exhaustion: describe her expression when she realizes what just happened to her. She has been treating families who carried this for months. Now she knows what it feels like.

The Checkpoints

Two checkpoints between the empty garrison and the fortress, closer together than the road from Oren would suggest. The Rakshasa tightened the perimeter after the Writ of Challenge. Each checkpoint: 2 Merregons and 1 Merregon administrative unit.

The checkpoints can be bypassed via a route Tam identified: a dry stream bed running parallel to the road inside the thinning Thornwood tree line. DC 11 Survival to navigate it. It adds 1 hour to the journey and arrives at the fortress's west face rather than the main northeast approach.

Papers Please: Creatures without official documentation have disadvantage on Charisma checks made to pass through checkpoints or interact with regime-aligned NPCs. The party should have forged papers from the resistance's network. If they do not, DC 14 Deception at each checkpoint.

The Encounter

Tam's Report

He is at the tree line when the party arrives.

"The fortress has been reinforced. Sixteen Merregons on exterior patrol, up from the eight that Henrik's records show. New construction on the west face. The detention yards are full." A pause. "There are families in there. I can see the yards from the ridge."
He does not say anything else.

He also provides:

- **Current garrison size:**
24 Merregons total; 16 exterior, 8 interior
- **Detention yard population:**
Approximately 40 civilians currently held
- **The Rakshasa's location:**
Mornings in the command tower, afternoons in the processing yard conducting inspections; the inspections are not administrative; they are personal
- **The secondary processing building on the west face:**
New construction, recently completed, not yet used
- **A courier event:**
Three weeks ago a courier arrived from the Heritage Institute, met with the Rakshasa privately for two hours, and left; the courier arrived with an empty document case and left with a full one

That last detail reverses the party's assumption. The Rakshasa was not receiving instructions from the Archmage. She was sending something to him. What she sent is a thread that will connect to the next chapter.

The Embedded Contact

Petra is a human woman in her late thirties who joined the resistance network eight months ago after her husband was taken at a checkpoint. She has been in the border village since, feeding intelligence north through a contact chain that reaches the resistance's network. She knows the fortress's current layout better than Henrik's records.

She provides, without requiring a check:

- **The afternoon window:**
The Rakshasa conducts processing yard inspections at 2 PM daily, lasting approximately 45 minutes, during which the command tower is unoccupied
- **The contract anchor:**
In the command tower's ground floor administrative room, same mechanic as the Hezrou's compound
- **A drainage culvert:**
On the fortress's south face, unmapped by the current garrison, DC 11 Survival to locate from Tam's sketch
- **The secondary processing building:**
construction complete; not yet operational; the detention of labor crews during construction suggests the Rakshasa wanted it ready before an assault came

She also says, when she is done providing intelligence:

"My husband is in there. His name is Havin. He was taken for expired papers eight months ago."

She does not ask the party to prioritize him. She states the fact. She lets the party decide what to do with it.

What the Party Can Do

Pause at the Cairn

The folded note is there. It does not require a check to find if the party stops. It should feel like the campaign's Act I work being acknowledged by the world.

Walk Through the Empty Garrison

The quota sheet is there. The cells are there. Everything the Imp Warlock built in Chapter 3, still configured, still running on momentum even after he was gone. Three weeks of inertia. Give the party the specific quality of a system that ran itself for three weeks after its operator was removed.

Speak With Petra at Length

DC 10 Persuasion to open a longer conversation; she provides three additional operational details: the specific patrol gap on the south face near the drainage culvert (4 minutes between passes), the location of the Merregon contract anchor within the fortress, and the detail that the detained civilians include eleven children held separately from their parents.

Prepare for the Bless Requirement

Mira briefed the party before departure. Sister Kara reinforces it on the road:
"The Rakshasa is immune to almost everything. The blessing is not optional."

She says it once. She does not say it again. The party should confirm their bless plan before they reach the perimeter.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

The checkpoint Merregons are operating on reduced staffing due to the garrison reinforcements going to the fortress interior; each checkpoint has 1 Merregon instead of 2. The Papers Please Deception DCs drop by 2.

Making it Harder

The Rakshasa issued a heightened alert three days ago in response to intelligence about resistance movement. The checkpoints have been briefed on party member descriptions. DC 16 Deception to pass the first checkpoint even with valid forged papers; the Merregon administrative unit is running enhanced verification protocols.

Increasing Role Play

The Thornwood road at night, on the way back in Chapter 3, felt like escape. The same road northeast now feels like arrival. The party is not sneaking. They are not running. They are going to the place where the regime's cruelty was most directly exercised and they are going there on purpose and they have been building toward this since the garrison documents in Chapter 1 named a symbol and two words that did not fit the pattern.

Treasure and Rewards

From Petra's Intelligence:

- Fortress layout update (reduces DC of any planning check for the assault by 2)
- Afternoon inspection window (creates a Scene 3 access window to the command tower)
- Contract anchor location (same voiding mechanic as before)
- South face drainage culvert (alternative entry point for Scene 2)
- The document case reversal detail (thread connecting to Chapter 16)

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Cairn note found and read	+1	0	0
Checkpoints bypassed via stream bed	0	0	0
Checkpoints passed cleanly	0	0	0
Checkpoint alarm triggered	0	+2	0
Petra's full intelligence obtained	0	0	-1

SCENE 2:

THE PERIMETER

The party approaches the Border Fortress and plans their entry. The fortress has been reinforced and the Rakshasa has had months to prepare. This is not the same installation the party raided in Chapter 3.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The Border Fortress is larger than the garrison the party cleared in Chapter 3. It was always larger; the resistance's early intelligence understated it. What has changed since the Writ of Challenge is visible in the additional wall sections, the new patrol routes, and the specific quality of attention the exterior Merregons bring to the perimeter. These are not garrison Merregons going through routine motions. These are Merregons who have been briefed.

The fortress sits on slightly elevated ground with clear sightlines in every direction. The detention yards are visible on the east side, barred and walled. The command tower rises above the rest of the structure. The secondary processing building on the west face is new construction, clean stone against the older weathered walls of the original fortress.

The south face drainage culvert is visible from the ridge, partially obscured by scrub growth. Petra was right; it does not appear on the patrol rotation.

Tam has been on the ridge for six hours. He hands over a sketch of the patrol routes with the gaps marked.

"Sixteen on the exterior. The best gap is on the south face." He marks the culvert on the sketch.

"Four minutes between passes. The culvert is narrow. Medium creatures can manage it." He pauses. "The command tower window on the second floor has been lit continuously since I arrived. She is in there."

Features of the Area

The Fortress Exterior

The Border Fortress has four faces:

Northeast face:

The main gate and the primary approach from the Thornwood road. The most heavily defended approach. 4 Merregons at the gate, 2 on the northeast wall section. This is the direction the Rakshasa has been expecting an assault to come from and she has prepared accordingly.

East face:

The detention yards. Barred windows at ground level. A service entrance used for prisoner transfers. 3 Merregons on the east wall section. The service entrance is locked (DC 15 Thieves' Tools) but used frequently enough that the lock mechanism is slightly worn.

South face:

The drainage culvert and the kitchen entrance. The least defended approach; 2 Merregons on the south wall section with a 4-minute gap in their patrol overlap. The culvert (DC 12 Athletics to navigate) opens into the fortress's sub-basement. The kitchen entrance is unlocked during daylight hours.

West face:

The secondary processing building and storage. 3 Merregons on the west wall section. The secondary building has its own entrance, locked with a mechanism identical to the one the party encountered at the Nycaloth's compound.

The Encounter

Entry Options

South Face Culvert:

DC 12 Athletics, 4-minute window. Enters sub-basement below the processing area. Requires DC 12 Stealth per interior section once inside. The optimal approach for a full stealth entry.

East Service Entrance:

DC 15 Thieves' Tools. During prisoner transfer hours (morning and evening) the door is opened by Merregons and the party can slip inside during the movement. DC 14 Stealth to enter undetected. Enters adjacent to the detention yards, which is useful if the party wants to reach the prisoners early.

Northeast Gate (Deception):
DC 16 Deception with forged documentation;
DC 14 with Petra's intelligence about current
authorization formats. Enters the main
courtyard directly. Highest risk, most central
access.

West Face Secondary Building:
DC 15 Thieves' Tools on the secondary
processing building entrance. Enters the new
construction directly, bypassing the main
fortress interior. The secondary building
connects to the main structure via a covered
corridor. This is the entry point that gets the
party to the Project Provenance evidence
fastest.

The Afternoon Window

If the party times their approach for the
Rakshasa's afternoon inspection (starting at 2
PM, lasting 45 minutes): the command tower is
unoccupied. A party that reaches the tower's
administrative room during this window can
access the Merregon contract anchor without
the Rakshasa present. Voiding the contracts
before the confrontation removes the interior
Merregon force's coordination authority when
she falls.

What the Party Can Do

Use the Culvert

The stealth entry. Best suited for parties that
want to clear the detention yards and find the
contract anchor before the Rakshasa is alerted.

Use the Afternoon Window

Timing the approach for 2 PM optimizes the
contract anchor access and the command tower
entry. Requires coordinating the entry with the
patrol gap and the inspection schedule
simultaneously.

Prepare Bless

Before any entry, the party should confirm who
is concentrating on **bless**, how many targets it
covers, and who is the designated caster for the
upcoming fight. This is a planning conversation
that should happen here, before entering the
fortress, not in the middle of a fight.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

The south face culvert's patrol gap is 6 minutes
rather than 4, either because the Rakshasa's
reinforcements stretched the patrol rotation or
because one of the south wall Merregons has a
contract clause that produces a consistent
additional pause. Petra identified it; the party
knows which Merregon and when.

Making it Harder

The culvert has been partially blocked with an
iron grate since Petra's last reconnaissance. DC
16 Thieves' Tools or DC 17 Athletics to clear it
within the patrol window. Failure does not
trigger an alarm but forces the party to abort
and find another entry point.

Increasing Role Play

Tam, handing over the sketch, pauses before
the party moves toward the fortress. He says:
"Havin is in there. East yard, second block. I
have been watching the yard for six hours." He
does not explain how he knows which cell. "If
there is a way to get him out before the fight,
take it." He hands over the sketch. "That is all I
am saying."

Treasure and Rewards

No direct rewards. Entry method and timing
decisions carry into Scene 3.

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Afternoon window identified and used	0	0	0
Culvert entry successful	0	0	0
Deception entry successful	0	0	0
Alarm triggered during entry	0	+2	+1

SCENE 3:

THE CAGES

The party is inside the fortress. This scene covers the interior: the detention yards, the processing areas, the contract anchor, and the secondary processing building. The party should spend time here before the fight.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The interior of the fortress is organized. Not in the way the Yagnoloth's office is organized, with the precision of someone who takes pride in their work. In the way that a processing system is organized: each step following the next, each area designated for a specific function, each function producing an output that feeds the next step.

The detention yards are to the east. Through the barred windows you can see them: families in separate enclosures, the separation itself clearly deliberate, adults from children from elderly. The enclosures are clean. The Rakshasa does not permit visible squalor in her facility. Visible squalor would imply neglect, and this is not neglect.

This is precision.

Features of the Area

The Detention Yards

The east side of the fortress. Three separate enclosures:

Adult detention:

22 people. Mixed population: merchants, teachers, civic workers, and three people whose only documented offense is having family members reported as suspicious by neighbors. Havin is here, in the second block. He is alive and physically uninjured. He is also, after eight months of deliberate family separation under the Separated regional effect, carrying a specific kind of damage that is not visible in his posture or his expression. It is in the way he does not look at the east enclosure where the children are kept, which is 40 feet away and visible through the bars. He has learned not to look.

Children's detention:

11 children. Ages range from approximately 2 to 12. They are supervised by two Cultist staff members who are not cruel to them and who have clearly told themselves that this is a form of mercy. The children are quiet in the way that children become quiet when they have been in an unfamiliar place for a long time without their parents.

Elderly detention:

7 people. Held separately from the adults for administrative classification reasons that the Rakshasa's records describe as "processing efficiency." They are held separately because the Separated effect is measurably more damaging when the separated parties are aware of each other's proximity without being able to reach each other. This is documented in the administrative records. The Rakshasa noted it as an efficiency gain.

The Encounter

Freeing the Detainees

The detention yard locks: DC 13 Thieves' Tools each, or a Merregon guard key. There are 8 interior Merregons; 3 are in the detention yard area, 2 are in the command tower area, and 3 are in the processing wing.

Freeing the detainees before the Rakshasa is alerted requires:

- Neutralizing the 3 yard-area Merregons without raising an alarm (DC 14 group Stealth to approach; standard Subdue Protocol applies)
- Opening the locks (DC 13 per enclosure)
- Moving 40 people toward a safe exit without the interior Merregons noticing (DC 15 group Stealth for the full group; DC 12 if using the culvert exit route, which is too narrow for 40 people simultaneously but can be used as a staged exit over 20 minutes)

A party that frees the detainees before the Rakshasa is alerted removes 40 civilians from the combat zone and prevents them from being used as leverage in Scene 5. The Rakshasa has no Bureaucratic Shield reaction available if there are no Merregons within 5 feet, but more importantly: she cannot use Cruel Example on a detained civilian if the detained civilians are not present.

Havin

Havin looks at the party when they reach his cell. Not with hope, exactly. With the careful assessment of someone who has been through enough false alarms to have learned not to react until something is confirmed.

"You are from the resistance," he says. It is not a question. He has seen the broken chain symbol.

He does not ask about Petra immediately. He helps open the adjacent cells first. Then, when the last lock is open, he says: *"Is she alright?"*

If the party says yes: he closes his eyes for a moment. Then he opens them and says: *"Tell me what to do."*

He is not a combatant. But he is someone who has been waiting to be useful for eight months and he will do whatever the party needs that does not require him to hold a weapon. He can guide other detainees through the culvert. He can maintain order in the exit queue. He can also, if asked, confirm that three weeks ago a courier arrived from somewhere south and west and left with a document case, and the Rakshasa seemed satisfied after.

The Contract Anchor

The command tower's ground floor administrative room. A locked document case (DC 14 Thieves' Tools) holds the Merregon deployment authority instrument. Voiding it requires an executed void form with a valid seal.

If the party has a remaining void form and a valid seal: the void executes when the form is delivered to within 10 feet of the anchor. The interior Merregons' coordination authority collapses. In Scene 5, when the Rakshasa falls, the interior Merregons disengage cleanly and immediately rather than requiring the standard Wisdom save.

If the party does not have a void form: destroying the document case physically (AC 15, 20 HP) disrupts but does not void the contracts; the Merregons operate at disadvantage on saves against effects that would compel them to break their contracts for the remainder of the encounter.

The Secondary Processing Building

The new construction on the west face, connected to the main structure by the covered corridor. It has not yet been used for its intended purpose. Inside:

- Twelve workstations identical to those in the Nycaloth's secondary facility from Chapter 9
- A correspondence file containing three documents: a specification sheet from the Archmage detailing the workstation requirements, a delivery receipt confirming the document case the Rakshasa sent southwest three weeks ago, and a provisional operational schedule listing the first intake date as two weeks from now

The Rakshasa was building a second Project Provenance processing site. The document case she sent to the Archmage contained the first intake selections: people currently in her detention yards who met his sorting criteria. They have already been selected. They do not know it yet.

This is the thread that connects to Chapter 16. The party now knows the Archmage is expanding the program and has a list of specific people from this fortress targeted for the Heritage Institute.

The Intake Selections

DC 13 Investigation in the secondary processing building to identify which of the current detainees are on the Archmage's intake list. There are seven names. Five are in the adult detention enclosure. Two are the children.

What the Party Can Do

Free the Detainees

The chapter's most important non-combat action. 40 people, including Havin, including 11 children, including 7 elderly individuals who have been held in deliberate proximity to their families without contact. Get them out before the fight.

Void the Contracts

If void form resources are available. The clean mechanical resolution for the interior Merregon force. Worth doing before Scene 5 if the party has the means.

Investigate the Secondary Processing Building

The connection to Chapter 16. The specification sheet and the provisional intake schedule confirm that the Archmage's program is expanding and that people currently in this yard are already on the list.

Find the Intake Selections

DC 13 Investigation to identify which detainees are on the Archmage's list. Seven names. Five adults, two children. All currently in the yard. The party freed them before the intake date. The Archmage does not know this yet.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

The 3 yard-area Merregons are on a predictable rotation with a 5-minute gap at the yard's north corner. The DC for neutralizing them without alarm drops to 11 and the group Stealth check for the detainee extraction drops to 12.

Making it Harder

The Rakshasa concluded her afternoon inspection early and returned to the command tower. The contract anchor access window is closed. The party must either attempt the anchor during the Scene 5 fight or accept that the Merregons retain their coordination authority until she falls.

Increasing Role Play

The children's enclosure. Before the party opens it: one of the children, a girl of about eight, is at the bars watching. She has seen the party move through the yard. She does not call out. She watches. When a party member approaches, she says: "Are you going to take us to our parents?"

She is asking whether the party can get them to the adult enclosure before evacuating. The answer is yes, if the party moves carefully. The reunions in the yard, 20 feet of open ground between the adult and children's enclosures, should take no longer than two minutes. Let them take two minutes. Let the party be present for them.

Treasure and Rewards

From the Detention Yards:

- 40 freed detainees including Havin
- Havin's intelligence about the document case (confirms the Rakshasa sent the Archmage something rather than received something)

From the Secondary Processing Building:

- Project Provenance expansion documentation (connects directly to Chapter 16; DC 13 Investigation to extract the relevant documents)
- Intake selection list (7 names; 5 adults, 2 children; all currently in the detention yards; confirms the Archmage's program is actively expanding)
- Specification sheet from the Archmage (documents his direct involvement in establishing the secondary site; admissible legal evidence;)

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
All detainees freed before alarm	+2	0	0
Detainees freed during combat	+1	0	0
Contract anchor voided	0	0	-1
Secondary processing building investigated	0	0	-1
Intake selection list recovered	+1	0	-1

SCENE 4:

THE FORTRESS FALLS

The push through the fortress's interior defenses toward the Rakshasa's command center. 8 interior Merregions, the fortress's layered structure, and the sustained combat that depletes the party before Scene 5.

Read or paraphrase the following (adjust based on whether the alarm has been raised):

The interior of the fortress between the detention yards and the command tower is designed to slow an assault. Not to stop it; the Rakshasa is not the kind of strategist who believes a fortification can stop a determined force. It is designed to cost the assault something. Every junction has a chokepoint. Every corridor has a position. Every room between the yard and the tower has been considered.

She has been thinking about this since the Writ of Challenge. She has had months. The layout shows it.

Features of the Area

The Combat Corridor

The route from the detention yards to the command tower spans three distinct spaces:

The processing wing:

30 by 40 feet, used for intake documentation and prisoner classification. 3 Merregions stationed here. Narrow exits on both ends create chokepoints. Cover available behind processing stations (half cover, AC 14, 20 HP each). If the alarm has been raised, these Merregions are on heightened alert and have advantage on Perception checks.

The courtyard crossing:

An open 30-foot gap between the processing wing and the command tower base. No cover. 2 Merregions patrol this crossing on a 4-minute circuit. If the alarm has been raised, they are stationary and watching. Crossing unseen requires DC 15 group Stealth under alarm; DC 12 without alarm.

The command tower base:

Ground floor, 20 by 20 feet. The administrative room containing the contract anchor is here if not yet accessed. The staircase to the upper floors is here. 3 Merregions stationed here if the alarm has been raised; 2 if not.

The Encounter

Running the Combat

This is a sustained push through three spaces with brief recovery opportunities between them. Structure it as three linked combat beats:

Beat 1 (Processing Wing):

3 Merregions, standard tactics, chokepoint pressure. The party should be able to handle this without significant resource expenditure. Regeneration applies; silver or fire sources are needed.

Beat 2 (Courtyard Crossing):

A movement challenge rather than a full combat. 2 Merregions can be avoided with stealth or must be neutralized in the open. The open ground is the difficulty; the Merregions here call for backup immediately if they see the party.

Beat 3 (Tower Base):

2-3 Merregions, tighter space, the staircase as the objective. The Rakshasa can hear this fight from two floors up if it goes loud. If she hears it, she finishes her current activity and begins her descent. She arrives at the top of the Scene 5 initiative rather than being surprised.

Resource Management

The party should expend moderate resources in Scene 4. The goal is to arrive at Scene 5 somewhat depleted, reflecting the sustained nature of the assault, without being so depleted that the Rakshasa fight is unwinnable. Calibrate the Merregon numbers to your party's size and resource recovery options.

If the party has bless available: remind them it is needed in Scene 5. Using it in Scene 4 on weapon users who do not need it there is a tactical mistake they should be aware of before committing.

What the Party Can Do

Move Fast

A party that clears each beat quickly limits the Rakshasa's preparation time. If the party moves through all three beats in under 10 rounds of total combat, she has not yet descended and Scene 5 begins with her at the tower's upper level.

Use the Contract Void

If the void form was executed in Scene 3: the interior Merregons in Scene 4 have degraded coordination. They cannot use signal horns to summon the Rakshasa through the contract authority chain. The party can fight through the tower base without alerting her until they physically arrive.

Prepare for Scene 5

Between Beat 2 and Beat 3: a brief pause in the courtyard crossing while the party assesses the tower base is the last opportunity to prepare bless and coordinate Scene 5 tactics. Take it.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

The detainees were freed cleanly in Scene 3, which means the Rakshasa has fewer defensive assets: she cannot use Bureaucratic Shield (no Merregon within 5 feet in Scene 5 means no interposition target). Reduce Beat 1 to 2 Merregons.

Making it Harder

The alarm was raised during Scene 3 entry. The Rakshasa has had time to position herself at the top of the command tower stairs rather than in the tower interior. Scene 5 begins with her having the high ground. Add 1 Merregon to each beat.

Increasing Role Play

Between Beat 1 and Beat 2: the party passes through the intake documentation room. The classification ledgers are here, 14 months of them, every person processed through this facility since the Rakshasa took operational control. The names go on for pages. The party has met some of them. Tavin is in here. Several names from the resistance's freed prisoner lists are in here. Several names from the Hezrou's unauthorized detention list are in here.

Give the party one beat of quiet in this room. They are in the middle of a combat push and they have just walked through the paper record of everything the campaign has been about. Let that be felt before they continue.

Treasure and Rewards

From the Processing Wing:

- Intake documentation ledgers (14 months of records; complete documentation of the Rakshasa's processing operation; significant legal evidence for the Justiciars' case)
- Confiscated belongings storage (locked room, DC 13 Thieves' Tools; holds the personal effects of everyone processed through the facility; Havin's belongings are here if the party looks)

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Processing wing cleared quickly, under 4 rounds	+1	0	0
Alarm raised during Scene 4	0	+1	+1

SCENE 5:

THE RAKSHASA

The confrontation. The command tower's upper level, where she has been waiting.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The stairs end at a door. It is not locked.

She is on the other side of it, standing at the window that overlooks the detention yards. In her humanoid disguise she looks like a middle-aged woman in an administrator's coat, the kind of person who has been doing careful, important, thankless work for a long time. If you did not know what she was, she would look tired.

She turns when the door opens. She looks at the party. She looks at the detention yards below, where the enclosures are open and the people are not in them.

"You freed them," she says. Not as an accusation. As an observation. As data.

She looks back at the party.

"Then we have nothing left to discuss."

She drops the disguise. The humanoid administrator is replaced by the horse-headed fiend beneath it, and the room becomes smaller immediately, and the Truesight turns toward the party, and whatever anyone saw in her composed expression before is still there, composed and without mercy, wearing a different face.

"Come, then."

Features of the Area

The Command Tower Upper Level

30 by 25 feet. The window overlooking the detention yards on the east wall. A desk on the north wall with documents. A reinforced door on the west wall leading to a secondary staircase (locked from this side; DC 12 Thieves' Tools or DC 15 Athletics to force; connects to the fortress roof). Stone floor, no cover except the desk (half cover, AC 14, 25 HP).

The Encounter

The Bless Mechanic

The Rakshasa is immune to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical attacks. She also has Greater Magic Resistance: she automatically succeeds on saving throws against spells and other magical effects, and the attack rolls of spells automatically miss her.

The only reliable damage source is piercing damage from weapons wielded by creatures under the effect of bless. Magical weapon attacks that deal piercing damage from blessed creatures bypass both immunities simultaneously.

A party without bless: magical slashing and bludgeoning weapons can still damage her, but the absence of reliable piercing damage from blessed sources makes the fight punishing. Not impossible but significantly harder.

A party with bless on 2-3 weapon users: the fight is hard and intended to be hard. She has 221 HP, Legendary Resistance (3/day), and Cruel Efficiency. She will use every tool available.

Round 1

Rakshasa uses Processed (bonus action) on the party's primary damage dealer: that creature has disadvantage on saves against her spells and abilities until the start of her next turn. She uses Claw twice and Spellcasting once, specifically dominate person targeting a non-blessed party member. She stays mobile; Reposition is her opening legendary action.

Round 2

She uses Claw three times via Multi-attack. She uses Processed on a different target. If dominate person landed in Round 1, the dominated party member acts against their allies on their turn.

Round 3

Cruel Efficiency fires if she has reduced any creature to 0 HP: she regains 10 HP and all creatures within 30 feet must succeed on DC 18 Wisdom save or be Frightened. This is the fight's momentum point; if a party member has gone down, she becomes significantly harder to control.

Legendary Actions

She uses Reposition (1 action) to stay out of grapple range. She uses Claw (2 actions) when she has the opportunity. She uses Detain (2 actions) on the party's primary blessed weapon user to prevent them from maintaining damage output. She uses Cruel Example (3 actions) only if a creature is already at 0 HP within 5 feet.

Legendary Resistance

She has 3 uses. She burns them on: dispel magic attempts against her active spells, banishment or similar expulsion effects, and the first successful save-or-suck spell that would remove her from the fight.

She Does Not Panic

At half HP, she does not become desperate. She becomes more focused. The specific sign that she is at half HP is that she stops using Processed as a bonus action and starts using it on every available turn. She is narrowing her attention to the most dangerous targets.

At quarter HP, she says one thing. She is looking at the party and she is looking at the window behind them, at the empty detention yards where the people she processed are not anymore, and she says:

"I will rebuild this."

She means it. She is not threatening. She is stating a fact about herself. Whatever happens in this room, the apparatus she built can be built again. She is the architect. The building is secondary.

She fights until 0 HP. She does not surrender. She does not retreat. She falls composed.

What the Party Can Do

Maintain Bless

The fight's central tactical requirement. The designated bless caster should not be in melee range. If bless drops, re-casting it is the highest-priority action on the following turn.

Disrupt Concentration

She maintains dominate person through concentration. Forcing a Constitution save through damage is the fastest way to end the effect.

Use the Desk as Cover

The only cover in the room. Half cover reduces her Claw attack accuracy. Not a permanent solution but useful when bless casters are positioning.

Force the Roof Exit

The secondary staircase door to the roof: DC 12 Thieves' Tools or DC 15 Athletics. The roof is open ground. She loses the desk as a positioning anchor and the party gains full mobility. She will use Reposition legendary actions to stay in melee range regardless, but the open ground removes her ability to use the room's dimensions to limit movement options.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

The contract void from Scene 3 disrupted her Merregon coordination authority; she cannot use Bureaucratic Shield because no Merregon will enter this room to interpose. Additionally, the freed detainees removed her leverage; she cannot use Cruel Example on a hostage. Both of these are the payoff for Scene 3's work.

Making it Harder

The alarm was raised earlier and she had time to pre-cast dominate person on one party member before the party arrived. That party member arrives at the command tower door under her control and must succeed on a DC 18 Wisdom save before the encounter formally begins or acts against the party in Round 1.

Increasing Role Play

When she says *"I will rebuild this"*: do not let it pass without a beat. She is right that she has the knowledge to rebuild the apparatus. She is also wrong that she will have the opportunity. But the statement is not bravado. It is accurate about what she is. She is the architecture. The buildings are incidental.

If Sister Kara is present: she is not in the fight. She is in the doorway. When the Rakshasa says *"I will rebuild this,"* Sister Kara says, quietly: *"No. You will not."*

She does not say it as a declaration. She says it as a correction.

Treasure and Rewards

From the Rakshasa's Body:

- Her personal seal (the Rakshasa's authority seal; delivering it to the Justiciars collapses all remaining active contracts in the borderlands)
- Her correspondence with the Goristro (confirms her independent operational authority predating the regime; evidence that the regime did not create the apparatus, it resourced it; significant for the legal record)

From the Desk:

- The document case receipt (confirms she sent the Archmage a selection list three weeks ago; connects directly to Chapter 16 and the expansion of Project Provenance)
 - Operational records for the secondary processing building (documents the planned intake schedule and selection criteria; legal evidence; DC 13 Investigation to extract the relevant pages)
 - An unsent personal correspondence not addressed to anyone in the regime (a single letter in a language that predates modern Orenthian by several centuries; DC 16 History to identify the language; what it says is at the DM's discretion and may connect to the Rakshasa's origin story; it is not required for the campaign)
-

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Rakshasa defeated	+1	+2	-1
Personal seal delivered to Justiciars	+1	0	-1
Goristro correspondence recovered	0	0	-1
Document case receipt recovered	+1	0	0
Detainees freed before confrontation	+1	0	0

SCENE 6:

THE BORDERLANDS AFTER

The Rakshasa is dead. The fortress is quiet. The regional effects end.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The Papers Please effect lifts first. You can feel it go: the specific awareness of being watched, the reflexive reaching for documentation that you no longer need. It does not vanish dramatically. It just stops.

The Separated effect takes slightly longer, as if the weight of it needs a moment to register that the source is gone. Then it too lifts, and the party members who have been carrying it realize they have been carrying it for the entire day.

Outside, in the yard where the detainees were freed, the families are together. Not organized, not in any particular formation. Just together, in the specific chaotic way of people who were kept apart and have now been allowed to occupy the same space and are not yet sure what to do with that.

Havin is in the yard with Petra, who arrived through the culvert twenty minutes after the party entered the fortress. Neither of them is saying anything. They are standing close enough that their shoulders are touching and that appears, for now, to be sufficient.

Features of the Area

The Fortress's State

The interior Merregons whose contracts ran through the Rakshasa's authority are disengaging. Standard void behavior: some leave immediately, some stand in place, a few sit down. The party has seen this before. Familiar, but no less strange.

The Merregons whose contracts ran through the broader regional authority, not the Rakshasa specifically, are unaffected by her death. They are at various checkpoints along the Thornwood road, still operational. The Rakshasa's personal seal, delivered to the Justiciars, will collapse those chains within 48 hours of court action. Until then, the checkpoints continue. The party should flag this as unfinished business for the court.

The Secondary Processing Building

The party can document and secure it before leaving. Mira's standing instruction is to secure and document, not destroy; destroyed evidence is lost evidence, and the Justiciars need everything they can get.

The Encounter

The Families

40 people are now in the fortress yard. They cannot stay there. Tam has wagons positioned a mile back along the Thornwood road. They can hold the full group but it requires two trips. The first trip leaves within the hour. The second leaves three hours after.

Several detainees are in poor health and need Sister Kara's attention. She moves through the yard with her pack and her calm and her thirty years of knowing what wounds need immediate attention and which ones can wait. She does not look up from her work.

Havin helps with the logistics of organizing the group for transport. He has been in this yard for months. He knows who needs to go first.

What the Party Can Do

Extract the Families

The primary Scene 6 action. Organize the 40 detainees into two groups, get the first group to Tam's wagons, and send the second group as soon as the wagons return.

Find the Letter

The unsent personal correspondence in the Rakshasa's desk. It is there if anyone looks. It is not required for the campaign. It is the kind of detail that enriches the world if the DM wants to develop it.

Document the Secondary Processing Building

Before leaving: Lyra, if present, can produce a complete layout sketch in one hour. This documentation directly accelerates the evidence preparation for Chapter 16.

Brief the Justiciars

Via sending stone: inform the court that the Rakshasa's personal seal is in the party's possession and en route. The eldest Justiciar acknowledges and confirms that the court will begin contract collapse proceedings on receipt. The Thornwood road checkpoints will be void within 48 hours.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

Tam arrived with three wagons rather than two. The full group can be extracted in one trip. The afternoon is freed for documentation and briefing rather than logistics.

Making it Harder

A Merregon patrol from a regional checkpoint not under the Rakshasa's direct contract authority arrives at the fortress during extraction. They are operational and their contracts are valid. They see the civilian group in the yard. DC 16 Deception with the Rakshasa's personal seal as a forged authority document to redirect them; DC 14 Persuasion to establish that the situation is under authorized control. On a failure, combat; 4 standard Merregons; the detainee extraction is not at risk but the timeline is compressed.

Increasing Role Play

Before the party leaves the fortress: give them a moment in the detention yard with what they accomplished. Not a speech. Not a list of outcomes. Just a moment where the party is standing in the yard where families were deliberately separated and the families are no longer separated and the Mists are still at the edge of the map and the Goristro is still in his tower and there is one chapter before him.

Let the party feel the distance between what they have done and what they still have to do. Both of those things are true simultaneously. They should be allowed to weigh both.

Sister Kara, finishing her triage, sits down on a bench in the yard for the first time since she arrived. She does not say anything. She just sits.

Treasure and Rewards

From Scene 6:

- 40 freed detainees including Havin (his testimony about the document case exchange corroborates the secondary building's records; his and Petra's testimony about conditions in the fortress are the most direct first-person accounts of the Rakshasa's operation available; admissible before the Justiciars)
- Rakshasa's personal seal delivered to court
- Secondary building documentation (Chapter 16 accelerant; DC 11 Investigation to integrate with existing Project Provenance evidence)

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Rakshasa's seal delivered to Justiciars	+1	0	-1
Secondary building documented	+1	0	0
Borderlands checkpoints voided	+1	0	-1

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

What the Party Should Know

- The Rakshasa is gone. The border operations are dismantled. The detention and processing apparatus in the borderlands has no administrator. The families who were separated at her checkpoints along the Thornwood road are being reunited. The people who passed through her facility and survived are walking out of the fortress yard into the afternoon light.
- The Thornwood road checkpoints will void within 48 hours of the court receiving the Rakshasa's personal seal. The borderlands will be, for the first time since the regime began, uncontrolled by infernal contract authority. The road the party traveled in Chapter 2 with a single wagon and seven prisoners will be a free road.
- The Archmage sent a specification sheet and intake criteria to the Rakshasa. She sent him back a selection list: people from her detention yards targeted for Heritage Institute Sub-Level 3. Seven of them were in this fortress. The party found them and freed them before the intake date. The Archmage does not yet know this.
- The secondary processing building was nearly operational. Project Provenance was expanding. The party has been seeing the shape of it since Chapter 1. Chapter 16 is where they see the whole of it.
- One chapter stands between the party and the Goristro: the Heritage Institute. The Archmage knows the regime is falling. His response has been to accelerate the program. He is not trying to save the Goristro. He is trying to finish his research before it falls.

Character Advancement
15th level reached.

Downtime (Optional)

There is no downtime after this chapter. The party turns southwest toward the Heritage Institute. The Archmage knows the Rakshasa has fallen. He does not know what the party found in her secondary building. He does not know they have the selection list. He does not know they are coming.

He will know soon.

Lead-in to the Next Chapter

Mira receives the party's debrief at the resistance safe house. She listens to the full account. When they get to the secondary processing building and the selection list, she stops them.

Read or paraphrase the following:

"He was expanding it," she says. "While we were taking apart the regime piece by piece, he was building more of it." She picks up the specification sheet the party recovered. "Seven people from this fortress on the intake list. Sixteen already inside Sub-Level 3." She looks up. "Twenty-three people that we know of. And an operational timeline that had the second site ready in two weeks."

She sets the specification sheet down.

"He knows the regime is falling. He has known since the Writ of Challenge. And his response was to accelerate the program." She looks at the party. "He is not trying to save the regime. He is trying to finish his research before it falls."

She picks up her pack.

"We go southwest. We find what he has been building toward. We get the twenty-three people out." She pauses. "And then we end it."

She looks at the party.

"The Goristro is next after the Archmage. One more obstacle and then we come for him."

She meets their eyes. "Be ready."

Considerations

If Havin and Petra are together and healthy: Mira assigns them to the resistance's borderlands network. Petra's eight months of embedded intelligence makes her the most qualified person available for monitoring the checkpoint dissolution process along the Thornwood road. Havin, for his part, asks to come with the party. Mira says no. He accepts it. He asks the party, before they leave, to come back. He says it the same way Veth said it: not as sentiment. As logistics. Come back.

If the party found the unsent letter in the Rakshasa's desk: Mira has it translated by the resistance's oldest linguistic contact. Whatever it says about the Rakshasa's origin and her relationship to Orenthis before the regime belongs to a longer history that the campaign will not fully tell. Let it be present without being resolved.

If Sister Kara did not get the moment on the bench in the yard: give it to her on the wagon ride back along the Thornwood road. The same road she traveled to the Cathedral, to the Nycaloth's compound, to every place the campaign has taken her. She sat down. She looked at her hands. She has been treating wounds since Chapter 4 and she will treat them in the next chapter and the chapter after that. She is tired in a way that is not physical. Let the party see it. Let it be something they carry into the Heritage Institute.

Chapter 16 The Heritage Institute



"He does not think of himself as cruel. He thinks of himself as necessary. The distinction mattered enormously to him but to no one else."

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 16 takes the party southwest to the Heritage Institute: a tower complex built in the ruins of Orenthis's old capital, where the Archmage has spent four years rewriting history, justifying atrocity, and running the intellectual engine that made everything the regime did feel inevitable rather than chosen. He is the last lieutenant standing between the party and the Goristro. He is also, in some ways, the most dangerous thing the party has faced, not because of raw power but because of what he has been building toward.

Sub-Level 3 is here. Sixteen people, selected by the program the party has been uncovering since Chapter 1, have been inside this building for varying lengths of time. The party now has the selection list from the Rakshasa's secondary processing building. They know the names. They know the sorting criteria. What they do not know yet is what the Archmage found.

Because he found something. That is the Chapter 16 revelation that has been building since the Fomorian's pamphlets in Chapter 8 described "the measurement of capable minds," since the garrison documents in Chapter 1 named a symbol and two words, since Senna from Chapter 9 described people being selected for their ability to hold onto accurate information under conditions designed to replace it. The Archmage did not run this program for three years simply to classify people. He was looking for something specific. He was measuring resistance to cognitive alteration because he believed that resistance had a source, a specific, replicable, teachable source, and he believed that if he could identify and extract that source, he could apply it.

He found it. Or believes he found it. He has spent the last six months trying to verify the finding and is close enough to completion that accelerating the program when the regime began to fall was, to him, a reasonable professional decision.

What he found, and what he planned to do with it, is the chapter's central revelation. It recontextualizes Project Provenance from a

classification program into something more specifically horrifying: an attempt to manufacture the cognitive resistance that the regime's propaganda apparatus could not break, so that the Archmage could understand it, document it, and ultimately control it. He wanted to know how people held onto truth. He wanted that knowledge. He did not particularly care what it cost the people he studied to produce it.

The chapter is not purely a boss fight. It is a rescue mission running simultaneously with a boss fight, inside a building that has been specifically designed to make the party uncertain about what they know. The Archmage's regional effects and lair actions are not theatrical; they are the specific tools of someone who has spent four years studying how to undermine cognitive reliability. The party walks into his building and the building pushes back against what they know.

Sub-Level 3 is the moral center of the chapter. The Archmage is the obstacle between the party and it.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Scene 1: The Old Capital

The approach through the ruins of Orenthis's old capital to the Heritage Institute. The history of what was here before is visible in the ruins. What replaced it is visible in the tower. Scene 1 should feel like walking through the physical record of what the regime did to Orenthis's past and finding the building where it was done deliberately.

Scene 2: The Institute's Exterior

The Heritage Institute's defenses and approach options. The Archmage does not rely on Merregon garrison defense; he relies on the building's own cognitive effects and the specific deterrent of being known as someone the regime protected absolutely. Scene 2 should feel like approaching something that is watching back, since the building registers intrusion not with alarms but with uncertainty.

Scene 3: The Rewritten Floors

The Institute's public levels. The archive floors where history has been systematically altered, the research offices where the program's supporting documentation lives, and the first encounter with the Archmage's regional and lair effects in a contained space.

Scene 3 should feel like trying to navigate a space that is actively working against the party's ability to trust what they know.

Scene 4: Sub-Level 3

The rescue. Sixteen people in a facility below the Institute's main structure, some of whom have been here long enough that the difference between what they were and what they are now is visible. The party has the names. They have to find them and get them out. Scene 4 should feel like the reason the party is here, the actual reason, more than the Archmage.

Scene 5: The Archmage

The confrontation. A CR 16 boss fight against a creature who has modeled this encounter, prepared for it, and is fighting with the specific advantage of someone who knows the party's capabilities before the first round. The hardest arcane fight in the campaign. Scene 5 should feel like fighting someone who has done their homework and finding out whether preparation is sufficient when it meets people who have spent sixteen chapters becoming who they are.

Scene 6: What Was Found

The aftermath. What Sub-Level 3 contained, what the Archmage's research produced, and what the party does with the finding. The Institute is secured. The Goristro is next. Scene 6 should feel like understanding something that changes the shape of everything that came before it.

RUNNING THE CHAPTER

Designed for: 15th-level characters

Sessions: 3-4

Advancement: Reach 16th level at end

This chapter is Act III's most intellectually demanding encounter. The Archmage's stat

block is the most mechanically complex in the campaign, his lair actions are specifically designed to undermine the party's tactical advantages, and the regional effects begin before the party enters the building. The rescue mission in Scene 4 runs as a parallel objective alongside the boss fight preparation in Scenes 3 and 5.

The primary goals are:

- Deliver the Sub-Level 3 rescue as the campaign's final rescue mission and the payoff for sixteen chapters of following the Project Provenance thread
- Reveal what the Archmage found and what he planned to do with it
- Make the Archmage the most mechanically demanding fight before the Goristro
- Establish the old capital ruins as a location with weight and history
- Set up the Goristro finale with the party at full understanding of what the regime was building and why

Guidance

The Revelation Is the Point

The Archmage's research finding is the chapter's most important content. Structure the chapter so the party reaches Sub-Level 3 before the final fight if at all possible, because understanding what he found changes the quality of the confrontation. A party that goes into Scene 5 knowing what he was trying to do fights a different fight, emotionally, than a party that learns it in Scene 6.

The Building Pushes Back

The Archmage's regional effects begin outside the Institute. Inside, his lair actions specifically target knowledge and cognitive certainty. The party should feel this as a sustained pressure, not as discrete mechanical penalties. When Archive Rewrites fires, describe it as an experience, not as a die roll. When Revised Record removes a prepared spell, describe the character's reaching for something that is not where they left it.

Sub-Level 3 First If Possible

The optimal chapter sequence is: enter the Institute, navigate the rewritten floors while dealing with lair effects, reach Sub-Level 3 and extract the sixteen people before engaging the Archmage directly. This is harder than going straight for the Archmage but produces the chapter the party deserves. A party that rescues the sixteen people and then fights the Archmage is fighting for something that already happened. That is different from fighting toward something that has not happened yet.

The Archmage Has Prepared

His Institutional Knowledge trait means he cannot be surprised and knows the highest spell slot available to each spellcasting character within 60 feet at combat start. He has modeled the encounter. He has counterspell ready. He has prepared his action economy around the party's likely approach based on what he knows. The party should feel, in the first round, that they are fighting someone who has thought about this.

The Sending Stone Channel

The party has the sending stone channel that connects to Heritage Institute Sub-Level 3. They can use it before entering the Institute to learn the Sub-Level 3 layout and the current status of the sixteen people inside. This is the payoff for the earlier decision to use the stone carefully rather than recklessly triggering the alert.

SCENE 1:

THE OLD CAPITAL

The party travels southwest to the Heritage Institute, through the ruins of Orenthis's original capital city: the settlement that existed before Oren was built, abandoned in a succession crisis three centuries ago, and now occupied by the Archmage's tower complex.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The old capital is not ruins in the romantic sense. It is ruins in the accurate sense: buildings that were abandoned mid-use, streets that end where a wall collapsed and were never cleared, a civic square still identifiable by its geometry but missing every structure that gave the geometry meaning. Three centuries of weather and neglect have done what three centuries of weather and neglect do.

The Heritage Institute stands at the old capital's center, where the original administrative complex stood. The tower is not old. It was built twelve years ago, before the regime, when the Archmage was still a court scholar with an appointment from the previous government. The tower is taller than anything around it. It was designed to be.

Lyra, walking through the ruins toward it, says: "He built his Institute in the ruins of the thing he was rewriting the history of." She does not say it as a commentary. She says it as a cartographic observation. She marks the Institute's position on the updated map relative to the old capital's surviving street grid.

"He could see it from his window every morning," she adds. "Everything he was replacing."

She does not say anything else about it.

Features of the Area

The Old Capital Ruins

The ruins extend for approximately half a mile in every direction from the Institute's tower. The surviving structures are mostly foundations and partial walls; enough to identify the original layout but not enough to use as shelter or cover.

Key surviving features:

- **Old court building:**

A partial structure 200 feet northeast of the Institute; the original High Court of Orenthis met here before the current Supreme Hall in Oren was built; the Foundational Compact was drafted and signed in this building; the building is a partial shell

- **Original civic registry:**

150 feet north of the Institute; the records held here were transferred to Oren's archives three centuries ago; the Archmage has been using the registry's vault structure as an auxiliary storage space for his physical archives; it is externally accessible

- **Residential quarter** (largely collapsed): 300 feet west; provides cover for approach to the Institute's west face

The Regional Effects

Within 1 mile of the Institute, while the Archmage occupies it:

Rewritten Streets:

Signage, plaques, and public inscriptions subtly shift to reflect the regime's approved history. Creatures attempting to navigate by landmarks or recall local history have disadvantage on Intelligence checks to do so, as the physical environment contradicts their memories.

The Weight of Certainty:

Charisma checks made to undermine regime narratives or convince regime-aligned NPCs of the truth have disadvantage within this area.

Catalogued:

Creatures spending more than 1 hour within 1 mile of the Institute have a 25% chance of being noted in the Institute's records. If noted, regime-aligned NPCs in the area are mechanically more suspicious.

False Clarity:

Divination spells cast within 1 mile return subtly incorrect information, skewed toward the regime's preferred narrative. The DM provides accurate information with one false detail substituted, without indicating which detail is false.

The party should feel these effects beginning in the ruins. The False Clarity effect is the most significant in terms of immediate play: any attempt to scry or divine the Institute's interior

returns information with one false detail the party cannot identify. This means magical reconnaissance is unreliable here. The party must rely on physical intelligence: the sending stone channel from Chapter 9, Lyra's skills, and what they can see and hear.

The Encounter

The Sending Stone Channel

If the party established the channel in Chapter 9 and used it carefully: they can use it now to contact someone in Sub-Level 3 before entering the building. The channel connects to a stone in Sub-Level 3 that is currently in the possession of one of the sixteen people inside, a woman named Fenn who was a communication specialist before her detention and understood immediately what the stone was for.

Fenn's report, if contacted: the facility has six staff members, two of whom are Cultist researchers and four of whom are Merregon security with modified contracts that run through the Archmage's personal authority rather than the Rakshasa's chain. The sixteen people are in three groups by classification: Category A (6 people, most studied, longest detained), Category B (7 people), and Category C (3 people, recently arrived, not yet fully processed). There is one exit from Sub-Level 3 that is not the main staircase: a maintenance shaft on the north wall of the lower chamber that connects to the Institute's ground floor utility corridor. The shaft is accessible but requires DC 13 Athletics to climb.

She also says: *"He has been down here twice in the last week. Both times he left with notes. The second time he said something to one of the researchers that I could not hear fully but the words I caught were 'replication viable.'"*

Replication viable. The party carries this into the Institute.

What the Party Can Do

Walk Through the Old Court Building

DC 12 History to recognize its significance: this is where the Foundational Compact was signed. The building the party's entire legal strategy rests on was drafted in this shell. Give the party a moment with that.

Use the Auxiliary Registry Vault

DC 14 Investigation to identify the registry vault's contents as accessible from outside the Institute. Inside: physical archive overflow from the Institute, including early Project Provenance documentation predating the version the party has already found. DC 13 Investigation to extract one useful detail: the program's original design document, which specifies the finding the Archmage was looking for before he found it; it uses the phrase "inherited cognitive immunity" in its theoretical framework.

Inherited cognitive immunity. The party carries this alongside "replication viable."

Establish Approach Route

The residential quarter to the west provides cover for approaching the Institute's west face without triggering the Catalogued effect before the party is ready to enter. DC 11 Survival to navigate through it without leaving the 1-mile radius.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

Fenn, via the sending stone, has prepared a complete floor-by-floor layout of the Institute based on six months of careful observation. The party has a reliable map of the building before they enter, removing the navigation disadvantage from the Rewritten Streets effect inside.

Making it Harder

The False Clarity effect is particularly active today; the Archmage has been running an especially intensive research session and the effect's radius has temporarily expanded to 1.5 miles. The party encounters the effect earlier and the false detail in any divination is harder to identify (DC 18 Investigation to spot the false element rather than the standard difficulty of simply not knowing which element is false).

Increasing Role Play

Lyra, at the old court building, takes out her mapping materials and marks it on Lyra's operational map with a notation: "Original location, Foundational Compact signing." She is adding it to the historical record. She does this quietly, without comment, and puts her materials away. It is the kind of thing a cartographer does when she understands that some locations matter more than their current state suggests.

Treasure and Rewards

From the Auxiliary Registry Vault:

- Early draft of Project Provenance design document (contains the phrase "inherited cognitive immunity"; establishes the Archmage's theoretical framework before the program produced evidence; DC 13 Investigation to extract)
-

Development and Dial Impact

No dial changes from this scene.

SCENE 2:

THE INSTITUTE'S EXTERIOR

The party approaches the Heritage Institute. The building does not have a conventional garrison defense. The Archmage's security relies on the building's cognitive effects, his personal authority, and the specific deterrent of being known as someone the regime protected absolutely.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The Heritage Institute is a tower with five floors above ground and at least two below, clad in the same stone as the old capital's ruins as if it grew from them rather than being built among them. The windows are lit at every level. The entrance is a set of double doors at the base of the tower, unremarkable, no guards, no Merregon honor post, no visible security.

It is not unguarded. It simply guards itself differently.

Lyra, studying the exterior from the residential quarter cover, says: "The Catalogued effect has been running since we crossed the one-mile mark. We have been in his awareness for the last thirty minutes." She looks at the party. "He knows something is in the ruins. He does not know it is us yet." She pauses. "He will know when we open those doors."

She is right. The Institutional Knowledge trait does not extend outside the building. But the Catalogued effect has been noting unusual movement in the ruins for the last half hour, and the Archmage is attentive.

Features of the Area

The Institute Exterior

The tower footprint is approximately 40 by 40 feet. The public entrance is on the south face. Other access points:

- **North face maintenance access:** a utility door (DC 13 Thieves' Tools) that connects to the ground floor utility corridor; this is the exit point for the Sub-Level 3 maintenance shaft Fenn described; using it as an entry point puts the party in the utility corridor without triggering the Archmage's awareness immediately
- **East face:** no accessible exterior entry; solid stone to the second floor
- **West face:** a loading dock used for archival materials; currently unused; the dock door is not locked from the outside but is alarmed (DC 15 Arcana to detect, DC 17 Thieves' Tools to disable)
- **Roof:** accessible via the old capital's adjacent partial wall (DC 14 Athletics); the roof has a maintenance hatch (DC 12 Thieves' Tools) that connects to the fifth floor

The Encounter

The Archmage's Awareness

When the party opens any exterior door: the Archmage knows. His Institutional Knowledge trait activates and he knows the highest spell slot available to each spellcasting character within 60 feet. He does not know the party's identities specifically from this information alone, but the spell slot distribution is distinctive enough that if he has reviewed the party's documented capabilities (which he has, through the Heritage Institute's Provenance Protocol records), he will identify them within one round.

He does not panic when he identifies them. He begins his prepared response, which is a specific action sequence he has been holding in readiness since the Writ of Challenge. He has modeled this encounter.

What the Party Can Do

Enter via the North Maintenance Access

The optimal stealth entry. DC 13 Thieves' Tools, connects to the utility corridor, puts the party adjacent to the Sub-Level 3 access shaft. They can reach Sub-Level 3 before the Archmage realizes they are inside rather than simply present in the ruins. The window is approximately 3 minutes from the moment the maintenance door opens until the Archmage's Catalogued awareness updates enough to trigger the Institutional Knowledge response.

Enter via the South Public Entrance

Direct and immediate. The Archmage knows they are inside from the moment they open the door. Scene 3 begins under the Archmage's active awareness. He does not attack immediately; his prepared response involves relocating to his optimal combat position and activating lair defenses before engaging. He has 3 rounds of preparation before the party reaches his floor.

Enter via the Roof Hatch

DC 14 Athletics to the adjacent wall, DC 12 Thieves' Tools for the hatch. Enters at the fifth floor, which is the Archmage's primary research level. The party bypasses Scenes 3's lower floors entirely and arrives at the chapter's most cognitively distorted space immediately, before acclimating to the building's effects. High risk and the fastest path to the confrontation.

Use the Loading Dock

DC 15 Arcana plus DC 17 Thieves' Tools to enter without triggering the alarm. If the alarm triggers: the Archmage knows immediately and has an additional preparation round. If disabled successfully: same as the north maintenance access in terms of awareness timeline.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

The Archmage is currently in Sub-Level 3 for his second visit of the week, the one where Fenn heard "replication viable." He is not at his optimal combat position when the party enters. He has 1 preparation round rather than 3 regardless of entry point.

Making it Harder

The Catalogued effect has been running long enough that the Archmage has already identified the party specifically. When the party enters, he is already in his combat position on the fourth floor with his lair actions pre-primed. Scene 3's first room already has Archive Rewrites active.

Increasing Role Play

Before the party enters: give everyone a moment. They have been following this thread since Chapter 1. The symbol and two words. The garrison documents. The Fomorian's pamphlets. The secondary facility in Chapter 9. The intake selection list from the Rakshasa's building. Twenty-three people whose names they know. Sixteen of whom are somewhere below this tower.

The party has been building toward this building since the beginning of the campaign. Let that be acknowledged before they open the door.

Treasure and Rewards

No direct rewards in this scene. Entry method determines Scene 3's initial conditions.

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
North maintenance access used, 3-minute stealth window	0	0	0
South public entrance used, Archmage has 3 prep rounds	0	+1	0
Loading dock alarm triggered	0	+2	0

SCENE 3:

THE REWRITTEN FLOORS

The party moves through the Institute's accessible levels toward Sub-Level 3 and the Archmage's research floors. The building's cognitive effects are active throughout. This scene is not a single encounter but a layered movement through a space that is working against the party.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The ground floor of the Heritage Institute looks like an archive. It is an archive. Every wall is shelving. Every shelf has labeled cases. Every case contains documents that were, at some point, accurate, and have been systematically altered toward a preferred version of events.

The labeling system uses the original document references. The content has been changed. If you know the original content, you can see the changes. If you do not know the original content, the altered version is seamless.

There are no staff on the ground floor. There are no guards. There are no alarms beyond the ones the party either triggered or did not on entry. There is only the archive and the specific quality of silence of a room full of documents that have been lying for four years and have become very comfortable with it.

Features of the Area

The Institute's Floor Structure

- Ground floor: public archive; rewritten historical documents; utility corridor on the north side (leads to the Sub-Level 3 maintenance shaft if the party entered via the north face)
- Second floor: research offices; the Archmage's published work in progress; staff quarters currently unoccupied
- Third floor: the primary research archive; original Project Provenance records before the program's operational phase; the sending stone's paired device is here if the party wants to use it for communication with Sub-Level 3 from inside the building
- Fourth floor: the Archmage's personal research space; his highest concentration of lair action sources; the place he retreats to in combat
- Fifth floor: observation and the roof hatch

- Sub-Level 1: Institute infrastructure, utility systems
- Sub-Level 2: Overflow storage
- Sub-Level 3: The facility

Lair Action Environment

The Archmage's lair actions are sourced from physical features of the building. While moving through the Institute:

Archive Rewrites:

Fires automatically on each floor the party enters for the first time. DC 19 Intelligence save or the creature becomes uncertain of one fact they know about the regime, its crimes, or the resistance. This uncertainty imposes disadvantage on their next skill check or saving throw related to that knowledge. The party will make this save multiple times across Scene 3.

False Clarity (Regional):

Already active from outside the building; inside, any divination spell cast returns information with one false detail, and the Archmage is aware that a divination was cast.

The Encounter

The Cognitive Effects in Play

This scene should be narrated with the lair effects described as experiences rather than just mechanics. Examples:

When Archive Rewrites fires on a party member who has been tracking the Project Provenance evidence across multiple chapters: describe a moment where the evidence chain they have been holding, the specific sequence from the garrison documents to the secondary facility, seems less certain than it did outside. Not gone. Just slightly harder to hold. The save result determines whether it stays uncertain for the next check.

When False Clarity affects a party member using divination to locate Sub-Level 3: the information they receive is accurate except for one detail, possibly the floor number, possibly the direction of the maintenance shaft. The party should feel that magical navigation is unreliable here and that Fenn's physical intelligence from the sending stone is more trustworthy than any spell they cast.

The Institute's Staff

The building has six staff members: two Cultist researchers on the third floor and four Merregons with contracts running through the Archmage's personal authority in Sub-Level 3.

On floors 1-3, the party will not encounter staff if they entered via the north maintenance access and are moving carefully. If they entered via the south entrance and the Archmage has been preparing, the two Cultist researchers have been positioned on the third floor to delay the party.

The Third Floor Research Archive

The primary Project Provenance records are here. DC 13 Investigation to extract the most significant document in the archive: the Archmage's personal research journal, distinct from the formal program records. The journal covers the last six months of research and contains the finding the chapter has been building toward.

The journal entry the party needs is dated approximately three weeks ago. It reads, in the Archmage's precise notational hand:

"Subject cohort A-4 through A-6 have now demonstrated consistent replication of the resistance profile across artificially induced cognitive alteration conditions. The resistance is not trauma response, not ideological anchoring, not neurological anomaly. It is structural. It presents identically in subjects across species, age, and background when the one common variable is present."

The common variable is identified on the next page:

"Community. Specifically: maintained relational networks under conditions of isolation pressure. The resistance is not individual. It is collective. A person who holds onto truth alone eventually fails. A person who holds onto truth alongside others, even imagined others, even the memory of others, sustains the resistance indefinitely."

He underlined the next sentence twice:

"The implication for the propaganda apparatus is significant. The regime's isolation policies, family separation, detention network dispersal, neighborhood informant structures, all of these have been generating the exact condition that produces the resistance profile. We have been manufacturing our own opposition's core capability."

He found out that the regime's cruelty was making people harder to break. He found out that the families they separated and the communities they destroyed were the source of the cognitive resistance he was trying to study and replicate. He found out that the apparatus was working against itself.

And he did not tell the Goristro.

What the Party Can Do

Move to Sub-Level 3 First

The optimal sequence. If entered via the north maintenance access: the utility corridor is on the ground floor and the maintenance shaft is accessible without going through the archive floors at all. The party can reach Sub-Level 3 before encountering any lair actions.

Read the Research Journal

DC 13 Investigation on the third floor. If the party reads it before the confrontation: they go into Scene 5 knowing what the Archmage found and that he withheld it from the Goristro. That knowledge changes the confrontation's quality without changing its difficulty.

Locate the Sub-Level 3 Maintenance Shaft

From the ground floor utility corridor: DC 11 Investigation to find the maintenance shaft entrance. It is in the north section, partially concealed by storage equipment. DC 13 Athletics to descend.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

The Archive Rewrites effect only fires once per floor rather than on each entry. The party makes one save per floor rather than rolling each time they access a new room on that floor.

Making it Harder

The two Cultist researchers on the third floor have been briefed on the party's documented capabilities from the Provenance Protocol records. They are not combat-optimized but they have specific information about each party member's most effective tactical approach and will attempt to disrupt it through environmental action (collapsing shelves, activating the Archive Rewrites features manually, alerting the Archmage to specific party member positions) rather than direct combat.

Increasing Role Play

On the ground floor, give the party one document to examine: a history of the city of Oren that the party has reason to know well. Let them identify specific alterations: the garrison raid in Chapter 2 is described as an attack by criminal elements on a humanitarian transport. The Mezzoloth's departure from the Council in Chapter 6 is described as a voluntary administrative leave. The Cathedral of Gold's status in Chapter 11 is described as temporarily closed for renovation.

Each altered entry is something the party did. The archive has been rewriting the campaign in real time. The party is standing inside the regime's version of their own story.

Treasure and Rewards

From the Third Floor Archive:

- The Archmage's personal research journal (the chapter's central revelation; contains the finding about community-based cognitive resistance and its implications for the propaganda apparatus; admissible as evidence; significant for Act III's epilogue content)
 - Complete Project Provenance operational records (final documentation of the full program; everything the legal case needs; DC 13 Investigation to identify the three most legally significant documents)
-

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Research journal found	+1	0	0
Archive Rewrites fired multiple times without save failures	+1	0	0
Cultist researchers neutralized quietly	0	0	0
Cultist researchers alerted Archmage to party positions	0	+1	+1

SCENE 4:

SUB-LEVEL 3

The rescue. Sixteen people in a facility below the Institute's main structure. The party has the names. They have to find them and get them out.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The maintenance shaft ends at a utility crawlspace and then a door, and then you are in Sub-Level 3.

It is cleaner than the Nycaloth's secondary facility. More established. The workstations are the same design but there are more of them, better lit, with more sophisticated equipment and more detailed logbooks at each station. The facility has been operational for longer. It shows.

The sixteen people are in three groups in the holding area at the far end of the room. They look at the party when the door opens. The looks are varied: fear, hope, the careful blankness of people who have learned not to react until something is confirmed. One of them, a human woman in her late forties with the composed attention of someone who has been managing information for a long time, speaks first.

"I have been expecting you," she says. "I am Fenn. You used the sending stone in Chapter 9." She looks at the party. "I kept it."

She is ready. She has been ready for months.

Features of the Area

The Facility

40 by 50 feet, the largest Project Provenance facility the party has encountered. Three times the workstation capacity of the Nycaloth's secondary facility. The logbooks at each station represent months of research rather than weeks.

Four Merregons are present: two stationed at the main staircase access (the entrance from the Institute above), two patrolling the facility perimeter. Their contracts run through the Archmage's personal authority.

Two Cultist researchers are at their workstations when the party arrives, mid-session with two Category B subjects who

are currently in the workstation chairs. The researchers are not combatants in any meaningful sense but they will attempt to trigger an alarm if the party is visible to them for more than 1 round.

The Encounter

The Sixteen

Current population of Sub-Level 3:

- Category A (6 people, most studied): these individuals have been here the longest; the research journal describes their resistance profile as "fully mapped and consistently replicable"; they are the Archmage's primary research subjects and the ones he is closest to being done with; they are also the ones carrying the most accumulated weight from their time here
- Category B (7 people): mid-program; their resistance profiles are partially mapped; the journal describes them as "productive sources"
- Category C (3 people, recently arrived): Tavin is here; he arrived within the last two weeks from the Rakshasa's selection list; he has not yet been processed

Fenn is Category A. She is the longest-detained person in Sub-Level 3, having been here for six months. She is also the most operationally functional because she decided early that the only way to survive this was to stay useful to herself, and staying useful to herself meant keeping track of everything.

She has a handwritten map of Sub-Level 3 that she has been updating since her first week. She hands it to the party without being asked.

Tavin

He is in the Category C holding area. He recognizes the party if they previously interacted with him earlier. He does not ask about his sister immediately. He asks: *"Did you find the others?"*

He means the people who were transferred from the Nycaloth's secondary facility before the party arrived at the Studio of War. He does not know where they went. He has been asking about them since he arrived.

He does not know that he is asking about the Category C people from Chapter 9 who were transferred to this facility before him. Three of the Category C subjects who were processed at

the Nycaloth's facility and transferred here are the Category A subjects currently in Sub-Level 3, the ones who have been here the longest. They were transferred before the rescue. They have been here for six months. The party knows this, but Tavin does not. Whether and when to tell him is the party's decision.

Freeing the Sixteen

The Merregon security: 4 Merregons with contracts running through the Archmage. If the party enters via the maintenance shaft (from the north), they arrive behind the 2 perimeter patrol Merregons and can neutralize them before the 2 staircase Merregons register the intrusion (DC 13 Stealth or DC 14 group Stealth to approach both patrol Merregons simultaneously). On a success: the staircase Merregons are unaware. On a failure: all 4 engage.

The Cultist researchers: DC 14 group Stealth to approach before they see the party. On a success: they can be neutralized before triggering an alarm. On a failure: one manages to send a partial alert to the Archmage (he gets 1 additional preparation round for Scene 5, if he has not already been triggered).

The holding area locks: DC 12 Thieves' Tools per group, or a researcher key. The three groups are in separate holding areas consistent with the classification structure.

Extracting the Sixteen

The maintenance shaft is the exit: DC 13 Athletics per person to climb. Several Category A subjects are in poor physical condition and require assistance (Help action, Athletics DC 10 for the assisting character). The Category C subjects are in better condition and can manage the shaft independently.

Full extraction takes approximately 15 minutes if uncontested. If the alarm has been raised, the Archmage knows the facility is being evacuated. He does not abandon his combat position to stop it; his prepared response prioritizes the confrontation. But he can use the Institutional Memory lair action against party members known to have interacted with Sub-Level 3 subjects (mechanically, any party member who spoke with Fenn via the sending stone qualifies).

Once extracted to the ground floor utility corridor: Tam is waiting outside the north maintenance access with extraction wagons. The sixteen people can be moved to safety before the party goes on to the next scene.

What the Party Can Do

Clear the Facility Quietly

The optimal approach. Neutralize both pairs of Merregons and both Cultist researchers before any alarm reaches the Archmage. Extract all sixteen via the maintenance shaft. The party then goes up to Scene 5 with the rescue already complete, fighting for something that already happened.

Split the Party

Some members extract the sixteen while others go up to engage the Archmage directly. This reduces resource expenditure on the extraction but puts fewer people in Scene 5. The party should discuss this explicitly.

Ask Fenn About the Research

She has been in Sub-Level 3 for six months. She observed every session conducted in the facility and has been recording what she observed. Her account of the Archmage's research process, what he was measuring and what he seemed to find, corroborates the research journal before the party has even read it. DC 10 Persuasion to draw out her full account; on a success, she describes the moment the Archmage realized what the finding meant: "He was very still for a long time. Then he left without speaking to anyone. He came back the next day and ran every session again from the beginning."

Tell Tavin About the Three

Whether and how to tell Tavin that three of the people he has been asking about are here is the party's decision. He will ask again when he sees the Category A subjects. He will figure it out. The party can let him figure it out, or they can tell him beforehand. Both are valid. Neither is comfortable.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

The Archmage's research session is ending and one Cultist researcher has left the facility to retrieve materials from the third floor. Only one researcher is present when the party arrives, reducing the alarm threat significantly.

Making it Harder

The Archmage activated a Provenance Protocol surveillance node earlier today, which means one party member's documented information is already active in the facility's awareness system. That party member has disadvantage on Stealth checks within Sub-Level 3 for the duration of the scene. The node is a physical object (AC 12, 15 HP) that can be destroyed to end the effect.

Increasing Role Play

Fenn, during the extraction, stops for one moment before climbing the shaft. She looks back at the workstation she has been assigned to for six months. She does not say anything about it. She climbs.

Give the party a moment to watch her do this. She spent six months in a chair being studied by someone who was trying to understand what made her the way she is. She is climbing out of it now, and she is taking the map she made, and she is not looking back at the chair again.
That is enough.

Treasure and Rewards

From Sub-Level 3:

- Sixteen freed people including Fenn and Tavin
 - Fenn's handwritten facility map and observation records (corroborates the research journal; personal testimony from six months of direct experience; admissible before the Justiciars and more powerful than any documentary evidence)
 - Facility logbooks (complete research records for all sixteen subjects; the most comprehensive Project Provenance documentation available; DC 13 Investigation to identify the three entries that constitute the clearest legal evidence of crimes against persons)
-

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Extraction completed quietly, no alarm	+1	0	0
Partial extraction, alarm raised mid-scene	+1	+1	0
Tavin told about the three before he figures it out	+1	0	0

SCENE 5:

THE ARCHMAGE

The confrontation. He is on the fourth floor, in his personal research space, where he has been since the party's presence in the building became certain.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The fourth floor is the building's truest expression of who he is. The walls are covered in annotated maps of Orenthis, each one showing a different version of the same territory: the original geographic survey, the regime's redrawn administrative boundaries, the Archmage's own theoretical map of cognitive influence distribution across population centers. Three different versions of the same place, each one claiming to be the accurate one.

He is standing in the center of the room. He is not surprised. He has not been surprised since you entered the building. He watched you come through the ruins. He heard the maintenance shaft. He has the highest spell slot level of each of your spell-casters noted in the margin of the document he set down when you opened the door.

He looks at the party. He looks at whoever is not carrying the weight of Sub-Level 3 on their face yet and he looks at whoever is.

"You rescued them," he says. Not as a surprise. As an acknowledgment. "Then you have presumably read the research." He folds his hands. "Which means you know what I found."

He waits for a moment to see if the party confirms it.

"The irony is not lost on me," he says. "The apparatus that should have broken them was manufacturing the thing that prevented them from being broken. Every family we separated. Every community we disrupted. Every isolation protocol." He looks at his maps. "We were building the resistance. Quite literally."

He looks back at the party.

"I did not tell the Goristro. I want you to know that. Not because I am offering it as mitigation. Because it is a fact that belongs in the record." He picks up his staff. "I also did not stop the program. I accelerated it. Because the finding is significant and

I was close to completion and stopping it to report it would have cost me months."

*His eyes find the party's.
"I am aware of what that means about me."*

He casts mind blank. It was already running; this is simply acknowledging it.

"Now. Shall we?"

Features of the Area

The Fourth Floor Research Space

50 by 40 feet. Three annotated maps covering three full walls. A central workspace with research materials. The document he set down is the research journal. No cover except the workspace (half cover, AC 14, 30 HP).

The fourth floor is the Archmage's primary lair action source. All six lair actions are available here.

The Encounter

Before Initiative

He has had 1-3 preparation rounds depending on entry and alarm conditions.

What he has done with those rounds:

- 1 prep round:
Cast mage armor (already in AC; automatic), confirmed party position.
- 2 prep rounds:
Additionally cast wall of force preparation (held action for Round 1).
- 3 prep rounds:
Additionally established Provenance Protocol surveillance on the party's highest-damage character.

He cannot be surprised. He knows every spellcasting character's highest slot level within 60 feet before Round 1.

What the Archmage Says

He acknowledges the finding before the fight started. He acknowledges that he did not stop the program. He acknowledges what that means about him. He is not offering mitigation; and he says so explicitly. He is placing facts in the record in the same way he has placed everything in records for his entire career.

If the party asks why he did not stop: he says
"I wanted to know. The wanting to know was stronger than the cost of knowing."

He does not expect this to satisfy them. He also does not apologize for it.

If the party asks why he did not tell the Goristro: he says
"Because the finding makes the propaganda apparatus less effective, not more. Informing the Goristro would have ended the research. I was not finished."

[a short pause]

"I was also, I should note, deeply reluctant to help him. The work mattered to me more than the regime did."

He did not betray the regime out of conscience. He protected his research out of self-interest. Those are different things. The party should be allowed to notice the difference.

Round 1

Archmage uses Multi-attack: three Arcane Burst attacks distributed across two targets. He uses Protective Magic (counterspell) as a reaction if any party member casts a concentration spell. If he had 2 or more prep rounds: wall of force fires on his first turn, dividing the room. If he had 3 prep rounds: Provenance Protocol fires as a lair action at initiative count 20.

Round 2

He uses Rewrite targeting the party's primary damage dealer: Doubt (cannot repeat their previous action) or Compliance (Charmed, cannot target him). He uses Arcane Burst twice. He uses Methodical Retreat (bonus action) when a melee character moves within 5 feet.

Round 3

Revised Record lair action fires: one party member loses access to a class resource. Archive Rewrites lair action fires: DC 19 Intelligence save or disadvantage on next knowledge-related check. He continues Arcane Burst multi-attack. If a party member saved against his Rewrite in Round 2: Intellectual Contempt fires as a reaction, forcing a re-roll.

The Lair Action Cycle

He cannot use the same lair action consecutively. Across the fight, the six lair actions create a rotating pressure system: Provenance Protocol (surveillance), Revised Record (resource removal), Archive Rewrites (knowledge uncertainty), Tomes of Certainty (area damage and blindness), Locked Conclusion (forced concentration), Institutional Memory (personal memory replay and Stun).

The most dangerous combination: Locked Conclusion locking a concentration spell the party caster does not want to maintain, followed by Revised Record removing the spell slot they would use to end it intentionally.

Legendary Resistance

3 uses. He burns them on: banishment, any effect that would incapacitate him before the encounter's halfway point, and the first power word stun attempt.

Legendary Actions

Reposition (1 action) to maintain distance from melee characters. Arcane Burst (2 actions) for consistent damage output. Suppress (2 actions) against concentration spells. Policy Memo (3 actions) when the party is clustering for mutual support: forces DC 19 Intelligence saves on up to three targets with disadvantage on his abilities until end of next turn.

His Last Action (if the sequencing works): He will not surrender, he will fight until 0 HP. Once he is close to 0, he uses Reposition to move to the center of the room, equidistant from all three maps. He does not appear to be choosing a tactical position. He appears to be choosing where to stand and where he falls.

What the Party Can Do

Destroy the Maps

The three maps on the walls are lair action source objects for Archive Rewrites (each map: AC 13, 25 HP). Destroying all three removes Archive Rewrites from the lair action rotation. This costs action economy but removes a persistent cognitive pressure that fires every other round.

Focus Fire Through Counterspell

He has 3 uses of Protective Magic. Burning through them early with concentrated spell use in Rounds 1-2 removes his primary reaction tool for the rest of the fight. After 3 **counterspell**, he cannot prevent the party's concentration spells from landing.

Use the Research Journal

A party member who has read the journal and confronts the Archmage with the finding during combat can attempt DC 16 Persuasion as an action to force a different version of the fight.

On a success: the Archmage pauses for 1 round, does not act, and says: *"You understand what it means. That is not nothing."* He does not surrender. But he fights the rest of the encounter without using Institutional Memory or Revised Record. He is, in some small way, extending a professional courtesy to people who read his work carefully enough to understand it.

On a failure: he says: *"Understanding does not change the calculus."* He uses Policy Memo immediately.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

He had only 1 preparation round because the party moved quickly through the Institute. He does not have wall of force prepared. The fight opens without his most effective zone control tool.

Making it Harder

He has been in communication with Sub-Level 3 via the Archmage-side sending stone and knows the rescue was completed before the confrontation. He uses this knowledge tactically: he knows the party has been through the emotional weight of Sub-Level 3 and has calibrated his Institutional Memory lair action to target the subjects most likely to surface difficult memories specifically from that experience.

Increasing Role Play

When he says *"I am aware of what that means about me"*: let the silence hold for a moment before he picks up his staff. He is the only lieutenant in the campaign who has explicitly named the moral content of his own choices without being asked to. That does not make him sympathetic. It makes him specific. He chose the work over the people, knowing that was the choice. He lived inside that choice for four years. He is standing in the center of his maps at the end of it.

Give the party a moment to decide what they think about someone like that before the fight starts.

Treasure and Rewards

From the Archmage's Body:

- His research staff (attuned; +3 to spell attack and save DC; requires attunement by a wizard; also functions as a key to the Institute's auxiliary registry vault, which the party may not have accessed yet)
- His personal seal (the Archmage's authority seal; delivering it to the Justiciars adds his institutional authority to the legal case against the Goristro)
- Research notes from his person (the final version of the finding, in his handwriting, dated the day before the party arrived; it includes a section headed "Implications for Post-Regime Reconstruction" that he was apparently beginning to write; it is incomplete)

From the Fourth Floor:

- The three annotated maps (historical, regime, and cognitive influence distribution; the third map is the Archmage's most significant non-literary work; it shows, in precise cartographic terms, exactly how the regime's policies mapped onto population centers and what they produced; it is damning as a planning document and significant as evidence)
- His complete personal library (weeks of cataloguing; the most comprehensive archive of pre-regime academic work on cognitive resistance, propaganda mechanics, and institutional authority that exists; significant for post-regime reconstruction)

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Archmage defeated	+1	+2	-1
Personal seal delivered to Justiciars	+1	0	-1
Research journal used in confrontation	0	0	-1
Three annotated maps recovered	+1	0	0

SCENE 6:

WHAT WAS FOUND

The Archmage is dead. The Institute is quiet. The sixteen people are outside with Tam's wagons. This scene covers the aftermath and the delivery of the chapter's revelation to the resistance.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The regional effects end when he falls. Not all at once; the False Clarity effect is the last to go, as if the building needs a moment to stop lying. Then the streets outside the windows are just streets. The document inscriptions are just inscriptions. The maps on the walls are just maps.

The altered archive on the ground floor is still altered. The documents do not correct themselves. What he did to the historical record is not undone by his death. That is work for the restoration effort, not for this chapter.

Outside, Tam has the wagons ready. Fenn is sitting on the ground next to the north maintenance access door, organizing the sixteen people into groups for transport with the same systematic attention she applied to six months of facility observation. Tavin is beside her, not helping, just present.

He knows about the three people from the Nycaloth's secondary facility now. He worked it out when he saw them. He has not said anything about it yet.

Features of the Area

The Institute's State

The building is secured. The Sub-Level 3 Merregons whose contracts ran through the Archmage's personal authority have disengaged. The two Cultist researchers, if not previously neutralized, are on the third floor in various states of processing the fact that the person whose work defined their professional lives for four years is dead.

The building itself is a significant resource: the archive, the library, the research records. Mira's standing instruction applies: secure and document, do not destroy.

The Encounter

The Finding

When the party delivers the research journal to Mira and briefs her on the finding, she reads the relevant entries twice. Then she looks at the party.

Read or paraphrase the following:

"He found out that family separation and community destruction make people harder to break," she says. "Not easier. Harder." She sets the journal down. "He found out that the regime's central mechanism of control was manufacturing the thing that resists control." She pauses. "And he did not tell the Goristro."

She is quiet for a moment.

"The Goristro has been running a machine that was building his own opposition. For four years. Without knowing." She looks at the party. "He is going to find out. When we walk into that tower, he is going to understand what the research means." She pauses. "I want to think about how we use that."

This is the final strategic asset the party carries into Chapter 17. The Goristro does not know his apparatus was counterproductive. The party does. The finding has implications for the final confrontation that go beyond tactical advantage: understanding the Goristro's curse, the domain's structure, and what liberation actually requires all connect to what the Archmage found.

Fenn

When the extraction is organized and Tam is loading the first wagon, Fenn comes to find the party member she has been communicating with. She says:

"I kept a record. Everything he did, everything he found, everything he said in that facility. I kept it because I thought someone would need it." She produces a small handwritten document, dense and precise. "This is my testimony. It is complete. I wanted you to have it before we go somewhere else." She hands it over. "It is also my account of what the research found. In my own words. Which I think is different from his words, for a variety of reasons."

She does not elaborate on the variety of reasons. She goes back to the wagons.

Tavin

He approaches the party at some point during the extraction. He says:

"Three of the people I was looking for are here. They have been here for six months." He pauses. "I need you to tell me that the ones who came before them got out."

He is asking about the Category C subjects from Chapter 9 who were transferred before the party arrived. Those are the three Category A people who have been in Sub-Level 3 the longest. The party did get those people out in Chapter 9; the people transferred from the Nycaloth's secondary facility to Sub-Level 3 are the three Category A subjects currently being extracted now.

The timeline: transferred from Nycaloth's facility after the party's departure, arrived at Sub-Level 3, have been here six months. The party's Studio of War rescue freed the people who had not yet been transferred. The three who had already been transferred were the ones the party did not know to look for at the time.

If the party explains this clearly: he absorbs it. He says: *"So you did get them out. Just not then."* He looks at the three Category A people being helped into the wagons. *"Just now."* He nods. *"Alright."* He helps load the wagon.

If the party explains it unclearly or incompletely: he figures the rest out himself, eventually, and comes back later to confirm. Same response. He just needs the complete information to close the loop.

What the Party Can Do

Extract All Twenty-Three People

The sixteen from Sub-Level 3 plus the seven from the Rakshasa's selection list who were freed in Chapter 15 are all now in the resistance's care. Combined with the Chapter 9 survivors, the party has recovered every identifiable Project Provenance subject. The program is finished.

Secure the Institute

The building is a significant resource. The archive, even altered, contains the original documents underneath the alterations, accessible to restoration specialists. The library

is intact. The Sub-Level 3 facility should be documented and preserved as evidence before anything is removed or destroyed.

Deliver the Research Journal to the Justiciars

The finding, added to the legal record, changes the nature of the case. The party is not only presenting evidence of crimes against persons. They are presenting evidence that the Goristro's primary mechanism of control was, by the Archmage's own documented finding, counterproductive. The domain was manufacturing resistance. The Goristro's torment was built into his own apparatus.

The eldest Justiciar, receiving the journal, reads the relevant sections. Then it says: "This document establishes that the Goristro's governance apparatus was designed around a false premise. Every action taken on the basis of that premise was not merely criminal. It was self-defeating." It pauses. "The court will note this in the legal record. It is relevant to the question of what the domain requires for liberation."

That last sentence is the court speaking with more directness than usual. The party should notice.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

Fenn has already organized the extraction before the party arrives outside. The wagons are loaded and ready. The party can move immediately to the debrief and delivery phase without logistics.

Making it Harder

A response force of 4 Merregons with regional authority contracts (not Archmage-specific) arrives at the Institute during extraction, summoned by the alert that went out when the building's cognitive effects ended. They are not hostile yet but their contracts are valid and they are assessing the situation. DC 15 Persuasion with the Archmage's personal seal as authority evidence to redirect them; on a success, they stand down and disengage within the hour as their contract chain processes the authority gap.

Increasing Role Play

The Archmage's incomplete document, the section headed "Implications for Post-Regime Reconstruction," is in the party's possession. Give them a moment with it. He was starting to think about what happens after the Goristro falls, using the finding as a framework. He was beginning to think about how you rebuild institutions that were destroyed precisely because they were the source of the resistance the regime could not break.

He did not finish it. He was interrupted.

A party member who reads what exists of it and wants to see it completed has a project for the epilogue. The community-based cognitive resistance finding is the most significant piece of intellectual work produced during the regime's existence. What it means for post-regime reconstruction belongs to whoever decides to continue from where the Archmage stopped.

Treasure and Rewards

From Scene 6:

- Complete Project Provenance evidence package (all documentation from all sites combined; the most comprehensive legal record of a systematic crimes program that has ever been assembled in Orenthis)
 - Fenn's personal testimony (six months of direct observation; admissible; in the party's judgment the most powerful single document in the legal case because it is a person's account of what was done to people, not a bureaucratic record of what was done to subjects)
 - The incomplete reconstruction document (narrative; belongs to the epilogue; the finding's implications for what Orenthis becomes after the Goristro falls)
 - Twenty-three people recovered from the program in total throughout the campaign
 -
-

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Research finding delivered to Justiciars	+1	0	-1
Fenn's testimony delivered to legal record	+1	0	0
Institute secured and documented	+1	0	0

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

What the Party Should Know

- The Archmage is gone. Project Provenance is finished. Every identifiable subject has been recovered. The program that began with a symbol and two words in a garrison document in Chapter 1 has ended in a southwest tower in the ruins of the old capital, with its architect on the floor and its subjects in Tam's wagons heading north.
- The finding changes everything about the Goristro's situation without changing anything about the party's. The regime's central mechanism of control was manufacturing resistance. The Goristro has been running a machine that was building his own opposition for four years. He does not know this. The party does.
- The domain requires something beyond the Goristro's military defeat for liberation. The eldest Justiciar said so directly. The finding is relevant to the question of what the domain requires. The community-based cognitive resistance, the thing the regime's isolation policies were producing, is the answer to a question the party has not yet fully formulated. They will formulate it in Chapter 17.
- The Gilded Tower is the last objective. The Goristro is in it. He has been in it since the beginning of the campaign. The party has taken apart everything around him, piece by piece, chapter by chapter. What remains is him and the Mists and the question of what liberation actually means in a Ravenloft domain.
- Fenn has testimony. Tavin knows about the three. The incomplete document exists. The party is carrying more than weapons and evidence into the tower. They are carrying the finding.

Character Advancement

16th level reached.

Downtime (Optional)

There is no downtime after this chapter. The party returns to Oren and turns toward the Gilded Tower. Everything that needed to be done before the final confrontation has been done. What remains is the confrontation itself.

Lead-in to the Next Chapter

Mira is at the resistance safe house when the party returns. She has read the research journal summary the party sent ahead by sending stone. She has been thinking about it since.

Read or paraphrase the following:

She does not brief the party on the tower. She already briefed them on the tower months ago, in Act I, when it was a distant objective and the regime seemed impenetrable. They know what the tower is. They know what is in it. They have spent sixteen chapters making what happens next possible.

Instead she says:

"The Archmage found out that the apparatus was building its own opposition. That the isolation policies and the family separations and the community destruction were producing the exact cognitive resistance the regime could not break." She looks at the party. "He found out that we are made of each other. That the thing that makes us hard to break is not individual strength. It is that we hold onto things together."

She looks at the tower marker on Lyra's map.

"The Goristro's curse requires an enemy. The Mists preserve us because his punishment needs us running. We have been the machinery of his torment without knowing it." She pauses. "The domain needs him to fail. It needs him to keep almost winning and never winning. We have been serving that function."

She looks at the party.

"What the domain needs from us is not to be his enemy. It is to be Orenthis. The people who held onto things together. The people who built the resistance not because they were strong individually but because they refused to be separated from each other." She pauses. "When we walk into that tower, we are not going in as his opponents. We are going in as the thing his apparatus made stronger by trying to break it."

She picks up her pack.

"Let's go show him what we think of what he built."

Considerations

If the party wants to read the incomplete reconstruction document before the tower: let them. It is the Archmage beginning to think about post-regime governance through the lens of community-based cognitive resilience. It is incomplete but what exists is significant. The party carries it into the tower knowing that even the person who ran the program understood, at the end, that what the regime destroyed was worth rebuilding.

If Fenn wants to come with the party to the tower: Mira says no, gently and specifically. She says: "You have given us everything we needed. What you need now is not a fight." Fenn accepts this. She says: "Bring back everyone who is still there." She means the Orenthis that existed before. She means the community. She means the thing the Archmage found.

If Tavin asks whether the party is coming back: he does not ask as a sentimental thing. He says it the way Veth said it and the way Havin said it. Come back. As logistics. As requirement. As the specific demand of someone who has learned what it costs when people do not come back.

Chapter 17 All That Glitters



"He built a ridiculous monument to himself in a domain that would not want him. He polished it every day but never noticed the tarnish."

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 17 takes the party into the Gilded Tower: the Goristro's seat of power, his monument to himself, the structure he has been occupying since before the Mists came and that he has been gilding and expanding and decorating ever since, as if the right amount of gold applied to the right surfaces would eventually produce the legitimacy he has been seeking since the day the Dark Powers sealed him here.

It will not. It never will. That is his curse.

The tower is not a military fortress in the way the Rakshasa's Border Fortress was a military fortress. It does not have a competent defensive perimeter or a layered approach structure designed by someone who understood siege tactics. It has Merregons because every regime installation has Merregons, and it has Xvarts because the Xvarts go wherever the Goristro is,

and it has the specific defensive quality of a building that was designed to impress rather than to hold.

What it has, more than anything, is the Goristro's personality made physical. Every room is a statement about him. Every decoration is a claim. Every surface that has been covered in gold was covered because he decided it needed to be gold, and the decision was never reviewed by anyone whose opinion he respected, which means the gold is everywhere and the effect is not what he intended.

The tower is grotesque in the specific way of something that tried very hard to be magnificent and achieved something else entirely.

The Kenku has made her way here.

She has been broadcasting from the tower's upper floors since the resistance began raiding the regime's installations. She moved her operation here after the border garrison fell, after the resistance made enough noise that the Goristro decided he wanted his spokesperson

closer. She has been in the tower for months. She has been watching the regime fall from inside the building where its last representative lives.

She is not a combatant. She is a person who has been inside this system for a long time and has made calculations that cost others something and is now in the final position of someone whose value to the regime is measured entirely by her continued willingness to perform.

What she does when the party arrives is her decision alone, but the party should have the opportunity to be present for it.

The chapter ends with the party at the top of the tower, at the threshold of the Goristro's throne room. What waits on the other side of the final door is the Chapter 18 problem.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Scene 1: The Approach

The party approaches the Gilded Tower through Oren's streets. The city knows something is happening. The tower is visible from everywhere. The party has done everything that could be done before this moment.

Scene 1 should feel like the last breath before something irreversible, the specific quality of a city watching itself change.

Scene 2: The Ground Floor

Entry into the tower and its public monument level: the grand entrance hall, the trophy galleries, the propaganda archive that documents the Goristro's version of the campaign's events. The first Merregon and Xvart encounters. The specific horror of seeing the resistance's actions refracted through the regime's self-serving record.

Scene 2 should feel like walking through a lie that has been very carefully maintained, and watching it fail to hold up under the party's presence.

Scene 3: The Middle Floors

The tower's operational levels: the administrative floors where the regime's remaining bureaucratic functions have been centralized as the outer structure collapsed, the Kenku's broadcast station, and the Sigil of Dominion chamber where the Goristro's latest attempt at legitimacy is in progress. Scene 3 should feel like the regime in its final state, still performing, still running the machinery, still pretending, with the specific desperation of something that cannot stop even though stopping might be mercy.

Scene 4: The Upper Floors

The Goristro's personal levels: his residence, his trophy collection, the accumulated evidence of his curse in physical form. Every failed attempt at legitimacy preserved and displayed. Every shattered crown. Every voided treaty. Every ceremony that reached its final words and then fell apart.

Scene 4 should feel like walking through someone's psychology made architecture, and understanding, finally, what the curse has done to him.

Scene 5: The Throne Threshold

The party reaches the top of the tower. The Goristro's sanctum door is in front of them. Everything the chapter needed to accomplish is accomplished. The party is ready.

Scene 5 should feel like standing at the end of a very long road and knowing exactly what is on the other side of the door.

RUNNING THE CHAPTER

Designed for: 16th-level characters

Sessions: 2-3

Advancement: None (16th level is the intended campaign maximum)

This chapter is a dungeon crawl through a monument rather than a fortress. The combat encounters are real and the Merregons and Xvarts are genuinely dangerous at this level in the right combinations, but the chapter's primary function is not resource depletion for the boss fight. It is the party's reckoning with what the regime built and what it cost.

The primary goals are:

- Walk the party through the physical reality of the Goristro's psychology and his curse
- Give the Kenku her final scene in the campaign
- Surface the Sigil of Dominion mechanic as the party observes the curse in operation
- Deliver the party to the Chapter 18 threshold informed and emotionally prepared
- Use the tower's geography to tell the story of a creature that has been trying to become legitimate for years and has never once come close

Guidance

The Tower Is a Character

Every room should reflect the Goristro's specific psychology. Not generic fantasy evil; specific, recognizable self-aggrandizement. The portraits are larger than life and less accurate than they should be. The trophies include things that are not trophies. The gold is applied to surfaces that did not need gold and the application is slightly uneven because he supervised it personally and his eye for detail is poor. The grandeur is genuine effort. The result is something else.

The Kenku Is Not a Combat Encounter

She is present in the tower. She has been here for months. When the party reaches her broadcast station, she is there. What happens between them is a conversation, or a silence, or something that cannot be named cleanly. It is not a fight. It should never become a fight. Whatever she decides to do, she does as a person making a choice, not as an obstacle being cleared.

The Sigil of Dominion

The Goristro's curse involves a specific object, rite, or recognition that would confirm his rule as rightful. The party will find evidence of his current attempt in the middle floors: an elaborate ceremony being prepared, the latest in a long line of attempts that have all ended the same way. The party does not need to interact with it. But seeing it, understanding what it is and why it always fails, is part of understanding what Chapter 18 requires.

Resource Management

The party arrives at Chapter 18 having fought through a tower. They should have expended moderate resources. Calibrate to produce a party that is somewhat depleted but not critically so. The Goristro fight in Chapter 18 needs to be survivable by a party that has been through a dungeon crawl.

The City Outside

The people of Oren know the party is in the tower. Word travels. By the time the party reaches the middle floors, there are people in the streets below watching the tower. Not storming it; they are not soldiers. Just watching. The city is paying attention to what happens to the building that has defined its skyline for years. This matters.

The people are the community. They are the thing the Archmage found. They hold onto each other, watch together, and are refusing to look away. The party does not need to organize them or direct them. They are already ready.

SCENE 1:

THE APPROACH

The party moves through Oren toward the Gilded Tower. This scene is short. Its function is to give the city a moment and to give the party a moment before they go in.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The Gilded Tower is visible from everywhere in Oren. It always has been. In the years before the regime it was a different building: a civic administrative structure, functional and unassuming, three stories of gray stone that housed the offices of the city's coordination council. The Goristro added four more stories. He added the gold cladding. He added the banners. He added the spire at the top that serves no architectural function and was installed because he wanted one.

The building is taller than it should be for what it contains. It is gold in a way that gold should not be applied. It catches the light differently from everything around it, and the difference is not pleasant.

The streets between the resistance safe house and the tower are not empty. People have come out. Not to fight; they do not have weapons and most of them have never held weapons. They are standing in doorways and on corners and at the ends of alleys, watching the party walk through their city toward the building at its center.

Nobody says anything. A few of them nod.

One of them, an elderly human woman outside a bakery that is definitely not open today, reaches out when the party passes and touches the arm of the nearest party member for just a moment. She does not say anything either. She goes back inside.

Features of the Area

The Streets of Oren

The route from the resistance safe house to the Gilded Tower passes through three districts: the residential quarter, the market district, and the civic center where the tower stands. Each district has its own texture this morning.

The residential quarter:

Quiet. Families are inside or standing at windows. Children who would normally be in the streets are not. The absence of the Merregon patrols that used to run through here is visible in the specific way that the absence of something familiar is visible: the streets look slightly wrong without them, too open, too unwatched.

The market district:

More people here, drawn out by the same thing that drew the party out: the sense that something is happening today that should be witnessed. The stalls are not open. Several market vendors are standing in front of their locked stalls anyway, as if the habit of being present in the market overrides the fact that there is nothing to sell today.

The civic center:

The Supreme Hall is here, its doors open. The eldest Justiciar is visible through the entrance, positioned on the judicial dais, as it has been every day since Chapter 13. The court is in session. The party passes it on the way to the tower and the Justiciar sees them pass. It does not speak. It is in session.

The Encounter

Mira's Final Brief

Mira walks with the party to the tower's entrance plaza. She does not go in. This was established between them beforehand; she is the resistance's command structure and command structure does not go into the tower because command structure needs to still exist when the party comes out. She stops at the plaza's edge.

Read or paraphrase the following:

"Everything we know about what the domain requires is in what you are carrying," she says.

"The finding. The legal record. The understanding of what he has been doing to himself for four years without knowing it." She looks at the tower. "He cannot win. The domain will not allow it. But he can do a great deal of damage in the process of not winning, and he has been doing it for years, and today is the day we make it stop."

She looks at the party.

"The people in the streets are doing the thing the Archmage found. They are here together. They are watching together. They are refusing to be separated from this." She pauses. "That is already happening. You do not need to make it happen. You just need to do what you came here to do."

She does not say come back. She has said it before. She does not need to say it again.

*She steps back.
The tower entrance is thirty feet ahead.*

What the Party Can Do

Walk Through Each District

Let the party take the long route if they want it. Each district offers a last look at the Orenthis they have been fighting for: the families, the market vendors, the open court. A party that moves slowly through the city is giving themselves a last reminder of what is at stake. A party that moves directly is ready. Both are correct.

Speak With the People

If any party member stops to speak with the civilians watching: the civilians respond in kind. Not with speeches. With the specific language of people who have been watching the resistance work for sixteen chapters and have been afraid to hope and are hoping anyway. Keep these exchanges brief and specific. The elderly woman who touched the party member's arm: her name is Orna. She used to run the bakery. The regime reclassified her flour supply three years ago and she has not been able to bake commercially since. She came out today because she wanted to see whoever was going in.

Visit the Supreme Hall

If the party detours to the Supreme Hall before entering the tower: the eldest Justiciar speaks. It says:

"The court is aware of what you are about to do. The legal record is complete. Whatever happens in that building today, the court has what it needs to proceed." It pauses. "The Foundational Compact will be here when you return. The court will be here." Another pause. "You have done the legal work. Go do the rest."

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

The tower's exterior Merregon complement has been reduced; the Goristro pulled forces inside in response to the legal challenge, concentrating them in the tower rather than the streets. The entrance plaza is unguarded.

Making it Harder

A Xvart mob of approximately 60 is clustered around the tower's entrance, the largest single Xvart gathering the party has seen since Chapter 1. Rax the Anointed (a third iteration of this name, taken as an honorific by the current leader) is at their center. The mob is not attacking. They are guarding the entrance. The party must either disperse them or fight through them before entering the tower. Use mob rules: dispersal through Confident Confrontation (DC 13 Charisma), Remove the Leader, or Invoke a Higher Authority. Alternatively: the party has the Writ of Challenge bearing the Supreme Court's seal; presenting it with confidence to the mob constitutes a higher authority invocation with automatic success.

Increasing Role Play

Give the party a moment at the entrance plaza before they go in. Not a speech opportunity. Just a moment where they are standing outside the tower they have been building toward since Chapter 1, in a city that came out to watch them, in a domain that has been waiting for this. Let the players choose what their characters do with that moment. Some will check their equipment. Some will say something. Some will just walk forward. All of those are correct.

Treasure and Rewards

No direct rewards in this scene.

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Party acknowledged by civilians in the streets	+1	0	0
Xvart mob dispersed without combat	0	0	-1
Xvart mob fought through	0	+1	0

SCENE 2:

THE GROUND FLOOR

Entry into the tower and its public monument level. This is the dungeon crawl's first layer: the grand entrance hall, the trophy galleries, and the propaganda archive. Merregons and Xvarts. The regime's self-portrait.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The entrance hall of the Gilded Tower is 60 feet wide and 40 feet deep and every surface is gold. Not consistently gold; the application varies by material and by whoever applied it. The floor is marble that has been painted gold and is chipping in the high-traffic areas. The walls are stone that has been covered in gold leaf that is peeling at the corners. The ceiling is plaster that was gilded and has since developed cracks that the gilding has made more visible rather than less.

At the hall's far end, a portrait of the Goristro 15 feet tall. He is depicted in a heroic pose that required significant artistic license regarding his proportions. He looks, in the portrait, like a creature of dignity and purpose. The original artist was given specific instructions. The instructions were followed. The result is that the portrait looks nothing like him and exactly like what he thinks he looks like, which are different things and the difference is legible.

Six Xvarts in red sashes are in the entrance hall. They see the party immediately. Three of them start shouting before the party is fully through the door.

Features of the Area

The Entrance Hall

60 by 40 feet. Gold surfaces throughout. Eight decorative columns provide partial cover (half cover, AC 14). The large portrait at the far end. Two exits: the grand staircase at the northeast corner leading up, and a side corridor at the northwest corner leading to the trophy galleries.

The gold paint on the floor creates difficult terrain in three patches where it has bubbled and cracked; DC 12 Acrobatics to navigate at full speed, or treat as difficult terrain and move at half speed.

The Trophy Galleries

The northwest corridor leads to two connected rooms, each 30 by 25 feet, that the regime describes as trophy galleries. The party has seen trophy rooms before: the Hezrou's compound, the Nycaloth's Studio of War. Those trophy rooms contained exaggerated or false claims to military glory.

The Goristro's trophy galleries are different. The trophies are real. They represent genuine conquests, genuine victories, genuine moments of power over other people and institutions. Each one is labeled in his handwriting. The labels are accurate. The Goristro has not exaggerated his trophies because the actual things he has done are sufficiently terrible that exaggeration is unnecessary.

DC 12 Investigation to identify one specific trophy: a sealed document in a display case labeled "Original Charter of the Civic Council." The charter that granted the previous government its authority. He took it from the council chamber when he seized power. He kept it. He put it on display. He labeled it correctly.

The 8 gallery Xvarts are using the trophy cases as cover. They will not leave the gallery to join the entrance hall fight but will engage any party member who enters the gallery. DC 13 Stealth to pass through the entrance hall and bypass the gallery entirely; on a success, the gallery Xvarts do not engage.

The Propaganda Archive

The northeast corridor leads to the propaganda archive: a 40 by 30 foot room that is the regime's physical record of the last several years, annotated and organized by regime-approved historical standard. This is a room the party should spend a moment in.

The archive contains the regime's version of everything the party has done. Every significant resistance action, from the Chapter 2 wagon rescue to the Chapter 13 court restoration, is documented here, relabeled and recontextualized:

- The Chapter 2 wagon rescue: documented as a criminal attack on a humanitarian transport by violent extremists. The perpetrators are described as motivated by personal grievance and foreign influence.

- The Chapter 7 Council Halls confrontation: documented as an unauthorized disruption of democratic council procedures by an armed faction.
- The Chapter 12 Cathedral assault: documented as a terrorist attack on a house of worship during active services.
- The Chapter 13 court restoration: documented as an illegal seizure of civic infrastructure by a criminal organization with foreign backing.

Every entry is wrong in ways that are specific and calculated. Every entry also preserves enough accurate detail that someone who was not there could almost believe it.

The 10 archive Xvarts are patrolling through the shelves. They have been assigned to the archive specifically because the Goristro considers it important enough to guard. This is the document record of his version of events and he is protective of it.

DC 14 Investigation (5 minutes) to find the entry about a specific chapter the party cares about. The entry is wrong. The party knows it is wrong. The archive knowing it is wrong and saying it anyway is the archive's specific function.

The Xvart Presence on the Ground Floor

24 Xvarts total on the ground floor: 6 in the entrance hall, 8 in the trophy galleries, 10 in the propaganda archive. Use mob rules throughout. Three separate mob groups, each with a designated leader.

The entrance hall Xvart mob leader is Rax the Anointed, distinguished by a larger red sash and a hand-painted bull-head medallion that he made himself. He has Mob Collapse rules. He will not flee. He is one of the Xvarts who has been with the Goristro since before the regime and has nothing outside it.

The Merregon Complement

4 Merregons on the ground floor: 2 in the entrance hall positioned at the base of the grand staircase, 2 in the propaganda archive positioned at the archive's primary document cases. Their contracts run through the Goristro's personal authority. They will not disengage until he falls.

The Encounter

Three combat spaces, each with different character. Run them as linked beats with brief recovery opportunities between.

Entrance hall:

Xvart mob (6) plus 2 Merregons at the staircase. The Merregons hold position at the staircase; they do not advance until the Xvart mob is broken or the party is within 20 feet. The Xvart mob has Rax the Anointed as its leader; Mob Collapse triggers when he falls.

Trophy galleries:

Xvart mob (8) using trophy cases as cover. Half cover makes the ranged Xvart attacks more effective but also makes area effects less efficient. The gallery's dimensions (two connected 30 by 25 foot rooms) create interesting tactical geometry.

Propaganda archive:

Xvart mob (10) plus 2 Merregons. This is the ground floor's hardest combat because of the combined force. A party that bypassed the gallery has more resources for this fight. A party that fought through both previous spaces has expended more.

What the Party Can Do

Bypass the Gallery

DC 13 Stealth to pass the gallery entrance without engaging the 8 gallery Xvarts. This preserves resources for the propaganda archive fight and the upper floors.

Read the Archive Entries

DC 14 Investigation per entry. Each entry the party reads is wrong in a specific, documented way. A party that reads three or more entries has a complete picture of the regime's self-serving historical record, which is itself evidence for the Justiciars' legal archive. Lyra, if present, can produce a summary transcription in 10 minutes.

Recover the Civic Charter

The sealed document in the trophy gallery display case (DC 13 Thieves' Tools): the original charter of the previous civic council. Returning it to the court in Chapter 18's aftermath is a symbolic act with real legal weight; the Justiciars will recognize it as the document the regime's authority illegitimately displaced.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

Rax the Anointed is not in the entrance hall today; he went up to the middle floors to be closer to the Goristro when news of the party's approach reached the tower. The entrance hall mob has no designated leader and Mob Collapse rules apply at DC 8 rather than DC 10.

Making it Harder

The propaganda archive has been reinforced: 4 Merregons rather than 2, because the Goristro specifically ordered increased protection for the archive after the Writ of Challenge was issued. He was protecting his version of history.

Increasing Role Play

The archive entry about the Chapter 2 wagon rescue. Let the party read it. The entry describes the halfling man from Chapter 1, the one who was dragged away while the party watched, as a "criminal detainee resisting lawful processing." It describes the party as "foreign-backed extremists." It describes the freed prisoners as "escaped detainees posing public safety risks."

But the name Osso Brightpenny does appear in the archive. His name is in the category of people whose papers were expired. There is a notation next to his name: "Successfully reprocessed. Detention."

Was he in the border garrison after the wagon rescue in Chapter 2? He may have been among the people the party freed in Chapter 3. The party can check against the Chapter 3 freed prisoner list if they kept it. If he was freed in Chapter 3: the archive entry about him was not updated. It still indicates "successfully reprocessed." The archive is wrong about his current status. Either the regime does not know that, or perhaps it just does not really care.

Give the party a moment with that.

Treasure and Rewards

From the Trophy Gallery:

- Civic Council original charter (symbolic and legal value; return to court in Chapter 18 aftermath; the Justiciars will authenticate it as the founding document displaced by the regime)

From the Propaganda Archive:

- Lyra's transcription of key archive entries (evidence for the historical record; documents the regime's systematic falsification of recent events; admissible before the restored court)

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Propaganda archive entries documented or destroyed	0	0	-1
Civic charter recovered	+1	0	0

SCENE 3:

THE MIDDLE FLOORS

The tower's operational levels. The administrative floors, the Kenku's broadcast station, and the Sigil of Dominion chamber. This is the regime in its final state: still running, still performing, still pretending.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The second floor is offices. It was always offices. The Goristro did not redesign this floor because offices are functional and he understood, at some level, that the functions needed to continue. What he did was gold-plate the door handles and hang his portrait in every room and rename the Office of Civic Administration the Office of the Goristro's Administrative Excellence.

The nameplate on the door is still there. The office behind it is empty. The administrative staff that used to work here were reassigned to other locations as the regime contracted. The last of them left six weeks ago when the Writ of Challenge made the tower an unlikely place to continue a civic career.

The floor is empty. The gold door handles are still there. The portraits are still there. The office furniture is still there, arranged as if someone might come back.

Nobody is coming back.

Features of the Area

The Merregon Presence on Floors 2 & 3

If no alarm was raised in Scene 2:

No Merregons on either of these floors. The second floor's administrative Merregons were redeployed upstairs.

If alarm was raised:

4 Merregons on the second floor as described;
2 Merregons on the third floor positioned at the staircase to the fourth.

The Second Floor

Empty administrative offices. No combat here unless the party triggered a full-tower alarm in Scene 2. If no alarm: a brief exploration moment before ascending. If alarm triggered: 4 Merregons have been deployed here as a choke point at the staircase access.

The administrative records remaining in the offices: DC 13 Investigation to find two useful documents. First: the tower's current staff roster, which tells the party exactly how many Merregons remain in the building and on which floors. Second: a requisition record showing that the Goristro has been requesting specific materials for a ceremony for the past three weeks, including components that match the Sigil of Dominion preparation the party will find on the third floor.

The Third Floor: The Broadcast Station

The Kenku's broadcast station occupies most of the third floor. It was installed here after the Bureau of Public Address in the civic district became too exposed. The crystal amplifier network runs through the tower's exterior mounting points and broadcasts across Oren from here.

The station is operational when the party arrives. A broadcast is in progress.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The third floor is entirely given over to the broadcast apparatus. Crystal amplifiers on stands, routing cables, the specific organized chaos of a working media operation. At the center of it, speaking into the primary crystal with the precise, controlled fluency of someone who has been doing this for years, is the Kenku.

She does not stop when the party enters. She looks right at the party. And she continues her broadcast.

The Third Floor: The Sigil of Dominion Chamber

Adjacent to the broadcast station, separated by a locked door (DC 12 Thieves' Tools): the chamber where the Goristro's current Sigil of Dominion attempt is being prepared.

The Sigil of Dominion is never the same thing twice. It shifts: a crown, an oath, a divine mark, a treaty. The current attempt is an oath ceremony: a formal recognition instrument requiring the signatures of seven Orenthis noble houses that have historical legitimacy predating the regime. The Goristro has been pursuing seven signatures for three weeks. He has obtained four. He needs three more.

The chamber contains: the partially signed recognition instrument on a central table, candles arranged in a ceremony pattern around it, the names of the four nobles who have already signed (two of them signed under documented coercion; one signed willingly; one signed because the Goristro told them what would happen to their family if they declined), and the names of the three whose signatures he still needs.

The party can take the partially signed instrument. Taking it means the current Sigil of Dominion attempt is disrupted before it reaches completion. The Goristro will not know it is gone until he returns to the chamber. He will never reach the seven signatures. This particular attempt is over.

This does not end his pursuit of the Sigil of Dominion. He will start a new attempt within days. That is the curse. But it removes this specific version of the hope the domain manufactures for him.

DC 14 History to understand the full significance of what the party is looking at: the four signatures on this document represent the last remnant of Orenthis's pre-regime nobility that the Goristro has been able to locate and coerce. After this attempt fails, he will not be able to mount another credible nobility-based legitimacy claim. The domain will manufacture a different form of the hope next time. The party does not know that. They just know that this specific hope is over.

The Encounter

The Kenku's Broadcast

The nature of this encounter is up to the DM's discretion. Choose the appropriate option below:

Option A (To the Bitter End):

She is broadcasting a statement that mimics the regime's harshest rhetoric. She uses the voices of the party members themselves, spliced together to sound like a confession of failure. She is announcing their exact location to any remaining Merregons in the tower. She is making a survival calculation that favors the structure she knows.

Option B (A Moment of Agency):

As she prepares the broadcast, the Kenku's collar pulses with a violent, infernal light. She is broadcasting a factual account of the resistance's work. She describes the wagon rescues, the garrison raid, and the families reunited at the border. All the time she is speaking through the pain of a magical geas. Her choice in this moment is a literal act of will that overcomes the magical constraints. And she is using the regime's own apparatus to tell the truth through every crystal speaker in Oren.

The Result (The same for both options):

She does this without looking at the party for more than a moment. When she finishes, she sets down the primary crystal. The broadcast ends.

She looks at the party fully for the first time. She produces one sound: a phrase in the Goristro's exact voice and cadence.

"Nobody knows more about greatness than me. Nobody."

She walks to the east window, opens it, and steps onto the exterior platform. She is removing herself from the building. She has made her decision and now she is going to be somewhere else. She is watching the city receive the broadcast she just sent.

This is the Kenku's last scene in the main campaign. Whatever the party thinks about her, whatever they have decided about the base raid in Chapter 4 and what she chose. The campaign does not resolve the tension between them.

What the Party Can Do

Attempt to Speak With the Kenku

She is on the exterior platform. She will not respond to questions directly. If a party member asks why she chose this path, she produces one fragment in her own voice:

"I made a choice."

The party heard this phrase during the base raid in Chapter 4. She is either admitting a past lie or confirming a past truth. The party carries this tension into the epilogue.

Take the Sigil of Dominion Instrument

DC 12 Arcana to understand what it is fully without the History check. Taking it disrupts the current attempt. The party should know they are doing this deliberately.

Read the Coercion Documentation

The chamber contains the documentation of how four signatures were obtained. The coercion documentation for two of them is admissible evidence. It belongs in the legal record.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

The Kenku's broadcast is already complete when the party arrives; she finished it a few minutes before they reached this floor and is already on the exterior platform. The party finds the broadcast station quiet and the Kenku outside. The third floor has no combat regardless of previous alarm status.

Making it Harder

The Goristro sent a Merregon to the third floor specifically to prevent the Kenku from accessing the broadcast crystal; he has been increasingly paranoid about the broadcast content in the weeks since the Writ of Challenge. The Merregon is present when the party arrives. The Kenku has not yet broadcast. Whether she gets the opportunity to broadcast depends on what the party does with the Merregon.

Increasing Role Play

After the Kenku steps onto the exterior platform and before the party moves to the fourth floor: let someone look out the window at what she is watching. The streets of Oren below. The people who came out. The broadcast she just sent is reaching them now through the crystal speakers. People are looking up at the tower. Some of them are looking up because they heard their story told accurately for the first time.

The Kenku is watching this from the exterior platform. She made a calculation. This is what the calculation produced. Whether it was the right calculation, whether it balances against the base raid, whether a person who did what she did in Chapter 4 gets to do what she did on this floor: these are not questions the campaign resolves. They are questions the party carries.

Treasure and Rewards

From the Sigil of Dominion Chamber:

- Partially signed recognition instrument (disrupts the current Sigil of Dominion attempt; historical evidence of noble coercion; admissible legal documentation)
- Coercion documentation for two noble signatories (admissible; adds to the legal record against the Goristro)

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Sigil of Dominion instrument taken	+3	0	-1
Coercion documentation recovered	0	0	-1

SCENE 4:

THE UPPER FLOORS

The Goristro's personal levels. This is the tower's inner geography: his residence, his private trophy collection, and the accumulated physical evidence of his curse. Every failed attempt at the Sigil of Dominion is here. Every shattered crown. Every voided treaty. Every ceremony that reached its final words and then fell apart.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The fourth floor is where the gold becomes oppressive rather than merely excessive. Every surface. The floors, the walls, the ceiling. Furniture that was gilded and then re-gilded when the first layer tarnished. The specific quality of a room that has been maintained obsessively by someone who cannot stop tending to the appearance of something that cannot be made to look right.

This is his residence. He lives here. He wakes up here every morning and goes to sleep here every night and in between he goes downstairs to be the Goristro and then he comes back here and the gold is still tarnished and he sends for more gold.

The personal trophy room is off the main corridor. The door is closed but not locked.

Features of the Area

The Fourth Floor Residence

The Goristro's living quarters occupy the full fourth floor: a receiving room, a dining room, a study, and a private chamber. Everything is gilded. The furniture is oversized, sized for him, which means the rooms feel simultaneously crowded and enormous.

The receiving room contains seven portraits of the Goristro in increasing sizes arranged in ascending order from the entrance to the far wall. The largest is approximately 20 feet tall and depicts him standing on a mountain with the Mists visible in the background. In the portrait, the Mists look like something he chose rather than something that happened to him. The artist was given specific direction.

No combat on this floor unless a full-tower alarm was raised in a previous scene. If alarm was raised: 4 Merregons in the receiving room

as a final defensive line before the sanctum above.

The Personal Trophy Room

The door is closed but unlocked. Inside: a 25 by 20 foot room that is not for public display. This room is different from the ground floor trophy galleries in a specific, significant way.

The trophy galleries downstairs hold real trophies and accurate labels. This room holds failures.

The first shelf holds the remnants of a crown: shattered, the pieces laid out on a velvet cloth in the arrangement they were in before they broke. A label in his handwriting: "Crown of Orenthis. Coronation ceremony, Year 2. The crown broke at the moment of placement. Cause undetermined."

The second shelf holds a treaty document, voided: the signatures are there, the seals are there, and across the face of it someone has written VOID in red ink that is not in the Goristro's handwriting. A label: "Treaty of Regional Legitimacy. Year 3. The signatory representative died mid-ceremony. Cause undetermined."

The third shelf holds a divine mark apparatus: a magical device designed to produce a divine blessing, now inert. Label: "Divine Mandate Apparatus. Year 4. Device failed at activation. Mage unable to explain failure."

There are eleven shelves. Each one holds a failed Sigil of Dominion attempt. Eleven attempts in four years. Each one reaching its final stage and then failing in a way that "cause undetermined" cannot explain.

He has been keeping them. Every failure, preserved and labeled and stored in a private room that no one else is permitted to enter. He has been collecting his own defeats.

DC 13 Insight to understand what this room is: not a trophy room. A ledger. He knows, on some level, that the game is rigged. He has known since the third or fourth failure. He keeps the objects because stopping would mean acknowledging that the knowing is real.

The Encounter

The Staircase to the Fifth Floor

The staircase from the fourth floor to the fifth is guarded by the tower's final defensive complement: 6 Merregons and 4 Xvarts positioned at the staircase head, under direct orders from the Goristro to hold this position. They are the last thing between the party and the sanctum.

This is the chapter's final combat encounter. It should feel hard. The Merregons here are not garrison Merregons; they are the Goristro's personal detail, contracted directly through his authority, and they fight to prevent passage rather than to subdue.

Standard Merregon tactics: two engage, one covers, backup rotates in. The Xvarts here are not the mob-behavior Xvarts from the lower floors; they are the inner circle Xvarts who have been with the Goristro long enough to know what their lives are outside his proximity and have decided that is not preferable. They fight harder than standard Xvarts and do not apply Mob Collapse rules unless their leader, Rax the Anointed (now here having moved up from the ground floor if he survived), is incapacitated.

What the Party Can Do

Spend Time in the Personal Trophy Room

No combat, no check required to enter. The room is there for the party to understand. Give whoever wants to look the full description. This is the most important room in the tower for understanding what Chapter 18 requires. The party is about to fight a creature who has eleven failures in a private room labeled "cause undetermined" and who knows the game is rigged and plays it anyway. That understanding changes the quality of the confrontation.

Take One of the Failed Objects

Any party member can take one of the eleven failed Sigil of Dominion objects. This has no mechanical effect in Chapter 17. In Chapter 18, it may have relevance to the curse mechanics. The party should take at least one. The voided treaty is the most legally significant; the broken crown pieces are the most visually resonant.

Push Through the Fifth Floor Defense

The final combat of the chapter. Six Merregons and up to four Xvarts. A depleted party will feel this encounter. A party that bypassed the gallery in Scene 2 has more resources for this. A party that engaged every combat has fewer.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

Rax the Anointed did not make it to the upper floors; he was defeated in the ground floor fight or dispersed. The fifth floor defense has 4 Merregons and 2 Xvarts rather than the full complement. The encounter is significantly more manageable.

Making it Harder

The Goristro is aware the party has reached the fourth floor and has sent a message down through the tower's communication system: the fifth floor defense receives a written command from him specifying that the party must not reach the sanctum. A written command from the Goristro overrides standard Merregon tactical behavior; they fight with advantage on attack rolls for the first 2 rounds as the direct authority of their ultimate contractor sharpens their directives.

Increasing Role Play

In the personal trophy room: give the party member who looks most carefully the eleventh shelf. The most recent failure. It holds the components of a ceremony that was attempted two weeks ago. The components are intact; the ceremony did not reach the stage of physical objects being destroyed. It simply stopped. The label says: "Recognition ceremony. Current year. Ceremony disrupted by external cause. Investigation ongoing."

The external cause is the resistance. The party disrupted his latest attempt without knowing they were disrupting it. They have been breaking the Sigil of Dominion attempts from outside for months and they never knew they were doing it.

They are in this room now. They have come inside.

Treasure and Rewards

From the Personal Trophy Room:

- Failed Sigil of Dominion objects (one or more; relevant to Chapter 18 curse mechanics; the voided treaty is the most legally significant)
 - Eleven labels in the Goristro's handwriting (collectively documenting four years of failed legitimacy attempts; the most complete personal record of his curse's operation; significant for understanding what Chapter 18 requires)
-

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Personal trophy room examined fully	+1	0	0
Failed Sigil of Dominion object taken	0	0	-1

SCENE 5:

THE THRONE THRESHOLD

The party reaches the top of the tower. The sanctum door is in front of them. This scene is short. Its function is to give the party a moment at the end of the chapter before Chapter 18 begins.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The fifth floor is a single space: a circular antechamber 30 feet in diameter with a high domed ceiling and one door. The door is iron-bound oak, 10 feet tall, and is decorated with gold that has been applied in patterns that represent the Goristro's personal iconography: the bull-head in relief, the raised fist, the crown he has not been able to keep.

The door is closed. It is not locked. There is no reason to lock it; nothing that has reached this door has done so by accident.

Through the door: sounds. Not voices. Not movement. The specific ambient sound of a large creature in a space designed for a large creature, breathing, existing, waiting.

He knows the party is here. He has known since the broadcast from the third floor. He has been in his sanctum since then, waiting, and the waiting is not patience. It is the Goristro's version of patience, which is restrained violence in a room full of gold.

The party is at the threshold.

Features of the Area

The Antechamber

30-foot diameter circle. Stone floor, no gold on this floor except the door decoration. The dome above is plain stone. It feels like the tower forgot to finish this room and then decided, eventually, that the unfinished quality served a function.

No enemies here. No traps. No lair effects; those belong to the sanctum above, which is the Goristro's personal domain.

The Encounter

The chapter has given them everything they need to understand what they are walking into:

From the ground floor: the regime's self-portrait and its failure to hold up. The archive that called their actions crimes. The charter the regime displaced.

From the middle floors: the Kenku's final choice and what it produced. The Sigil of Dominion attempt and its eleven predecessors. The coercion documentation. The understanding of what his curse looks like from inside the structure it produced.

From the upper floors: the personal trophy room. The eleven labels. The knowledge that he knows the game is rigged and plays it anyway. The awareness that they have been disrupting his Sigil attempts from outside for months without knowing it.

And from sixteen chapters of campaign:

The finding. Community. People holding onto things together. The regime's isolation apparatus was manufacturing the resistance it could not break. The Goristro's apparatus was building his opposition. The people in the streets below heard the broadcast the Kenku sent and they are still there, together, watching the tower.

The domain does not need a military victory. It needs the people of Orenthis to choose their own future. The party creates the conditions. The people make the choice. The Mists respond to the choice, not the combat.

The party knows all of this. They are standing at the door with it.

What the Party Can Do

Rest Before Entering

The antechamber is safe. A short rest is possible here. The Goristro will not come out; he is in his sanctum and his nature does not produce patience for prolonged waiting without stimulus, but the party is not providing stimulus yet by simply existing in the antechamber. A short rest before Chapter 18 is legitimate and recommended if the party is significantly depleted.

Prepare Tactically

The party knows the Goristro's stat block from the Regime Compendium. They have had the entire campaign to prepare for this fight. Let them take whatever preparation actions make sense for their party composition before opening the door.

Speak to Each Other

No mechanic. No check. Just whatever the party wants to say before they go in. Some parties will have a lot to say. Some will have nothing. Both are correct. The campaign has earned either response.

Open the Door

When they are ready.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

The party finds a sending stone message waiting in the antechamber, left by Tam from outside: "The whole city is in the streets. Every district. They came out when the broadcast hit. They are not leaving." He pauses on the message. "Whatever you need, it is already happening out here."

Making it Harder

The Goristro has sent one last Merregon into the antechamber: not to fight, but to deliver a message. The message is on a folded piece of paper bearing his personal seal. It says, in his handwriting:

"You should not have come here."

The Merregon delivers the message and stands aside. It does not engage. It is following its orders precisely. The order was to deliver a message. The order is complete.

Increasing Role Play

Before the party opens the door: give the DM a moment to describe what can be heard through it. Not words. Just the Goristro's presence. A creature of enormous physical power in a room full of tarnished gold, having known for the last hour that the party was coming up through his tower, and having waited anyway, because waiting is all that is available to him now and has been available to him for four years and will be available to him until something different happens.

He has been waiting in that room since the Mists came. And the party has been building towards this door since Chapter 1.

Treasure and Rewards

No rewards in this scene. The antechamber is a threshold, not a room. What is on the other side is Chapter 18.

Development and Dial Impact

No dial changes from this scene.

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

What the Party Should Know

- The tower has been traversed. They have seen it from ground floor to threshold: the monument, the propaganda, the Kenku's choice, the Sigil of Dominion attempts, the personal trophy room, and eleven labels that say "cause undetermined" about a game the Goristro knows is rigged.
- The Kenku used the regime's broadcast apparatus to tell the truth about the resistance in the tower's final hour. Whatever she did in Chapter 4, she also did this. The campaign does not resolve the tension between those two facts. The party carries it.
- The Goristro has been trying to obtain the Sigil of Dominion for four years across eleven attempts. Every one has failed. The current attempt, the partially signed recognition instrument, has been disrupted. He will not know this until he looks for it.
- The Archmage's finding is the key to what Chapter 18 requires. Not the fight. Not the combat victory. The people in the streets below, who came out and watched and stayed together when the broadcast reached them, are already doing the thing the domain needs to see. The party's job in Chapter 18 is to defeat the Goristro and create the conditions for that collective choice to be made. They cannot make the choice for Orenthis. They can make it possible.
- The door is closed. The party is at the threshold. Everything the campaign has been building toward is on the other side.

Character Advancement

None.

16th level is the campaign maximum.

Downtime (Optional)

There is no downtime after this chapter.

Lead-in to the Next Chapter

There is no lead-in narration for Chapter 18. The party opens the door. Chapter 18 begins with what is on the other side.

What is on the other side is the Goristro.

He has been waiting.

Considerations

If the Kenku's final fragment, "I made a choice," was heard by the party: they carry it into Chapter 18. The DM does not need to reference it again. It is there.

If the civic charter was recovered from the ground floor trophy gallery: it belongs to the court's restoration archive. The eldest Justiciar will authenticate it in Chapter 18's aftermath. The party carries it up the tower with everything else.

If the party took one of the failed Sigil of Dominion objects from the personal trophy room: it is relevant in Chapter 18. Do not explain how yet.

If Sister Kara is with the party at the threshold: she has been quiet since the third floor, since the Kenku's broadcast. At the door she says one thing: "The people who built the Cathedral, three centuries ago, they built it because they understood that people need to hold onto things together." She looks at the door. "He spent four years trying to break that. The Archmage spent four years studying it. And neither of them understood it." She picks up her staff. "We do."

She means the party. She also means the people in the streets.
She is ready.

Chapter 18 The Demon of Disaster



"He did not know that the thing he was trying to destroy was the thing that was going to outlast him. He never even considered it."

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 18 is the end of the campaign's main arc. The door opens. The Goristro is on the other side.

What the party finds in the sanctum is not a surprise. They have seen his psychology in the tower below: the tarnished gold, the eleven failed legitimacy attempts, the portraits that do not look like him but exactly like what he thinks he looks like. The sanctum is an extension of all of that, the innermost version of the monument he has been building, and it is as wrong as everything below it in the same specific way.

The fight is real and it is dangerous. CR 18, 310 HP, legendary resistances, Siege Monster, and the specific physical brutality of a creature whose Brutal Gore pushes huge or smaller creatures 20 feet and knocks them prone. He hits very hard and he does not stop. At 16th

level the party can defeat him but they will feel every round of it.

What the chapter is actually about is what comes after. The Goristro falls. The regime falls with him. The Mists, however, do not part for military victories alone. The Dark Powers do not grant liberation because a tyrant was defeated. They grant it, if they grant it, because the conditions of the domain have been genuinely and fundamentally altered in a way that makes the domain's purpose obsolete.

The Goristro's curse requires an enemy. The domain has preserved the resistance because his punishment requires something to fail against. When he falls, the domain's preservation logic ends. But the Mists will not part unless Orenthis has done something the domain has never permitted before: chosen its own future, collectively, freely, without coercion.

The party has spent sixteen chapters making that choice possible. But they cannot make the choice. The people of Orenthis make it. The party's job in this chapter is to defeat the Goristro, understand what the domain

requires, and create the conditions for the choice to be made. Then they have to trust that it will be made.

The Mists respond to the choice, not the combat. That is the chapter's final beat and the campaign's final answer.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Scene 1: The Sanctum

The Goristro's innermost space. The room itself, what he has built here, and the specific quality of a creature that has been in one room making the same failed attempts for four years.

Scene 1 should feel like arriving at the source of everything the campaign has been about, and finding that the source is both more powerful and more pathetic than expected.

Scene 2: The Fight

The confrontation. The full Goristro stat block, his lair actions, his legendary actions, his specific and brutal action economy. The hardest combat the party has faced.

Scene 2 should feel earned and genuinely dangerous, since the party has been building toward this fight for eighteen chapters and it should cost them something real to finish it.

Scene 3: The Fall

The Goristro reaches 0 HP. His body dissolves into black mist. The Mist Rebirth mechanic means he will reform within four years unless the domain's conditions are addressed. The party has a window. The window is now. Scene 3 should feel like the pivot between military victory and the harder thing, since winning the fight is not the same as winning.

Scene 4: The Conditions

Understanding what the domain requires and creating the conditions for it. The Archmage's finding, the people in the streets, the Foundational Compact, and what the Dark Powers will respond to. This is the chapter's most unusual scene: no combat, no skill checks, just the party understanding something and acting on it.

Scene 4 should feel like the campaign's accumulated understanding coming to bear on the specific problem of liberation in a Ravenloft domain.

Scene 5: The Choice

The people of Orenthis make their choice.

Freely. Collectively. Without being directed by the party or any external authority. The Mists respond.

Scene 5 should feel like the end of something that has been running since Chapter 1, honest and specific and earned.

RUNNING THE CHAPTER

Designed for: 16th-level characters

Sessions: 2-3

Advancement: None. The main campaign is complete

This chapter is the campaign's finale. The party faces a CR 18 creature at 16th level in the Scene 2 combat encounter. This is intentional. The encounter is designed to be the campaign's most difficult combat and should push the party to use accumulated resources, intelligence from the trophy room, NPC support, and creative tactics alongside raw power. Scenes 3 through 5 are the campaign's emotional and thematic resolution. The chapter should feel complete when it ends: not tidy, not without loss, but finished.

The primary goals are:

- Deliver the Goristro fight as a genuine climactic encounter that uses his full stat block correctly
- Execute the Mist Rebirth mechanic as a meaningful dramatic beat rather than a mechanical footnote
- Give the liberation its correct form: a collective choice by the people of Orenthis, not a military victory by the party
- Honor the Archmage's finding as the key to what the domain requires
- Close the campaign's threads with appropriate specificity
- End on something true

Guidance

Use the Full Stat Block

The Goristro's stat block in the Regime Compendium is: Brutal Gore (6d10+7 piercing, pushes huge or smaller 20 feet, knocks prone), Slam (2 attacks, 4d10+7 bludgeoning), Charge bonus action, Rageful Retaliation reaction (Slam against melee attacker), Unstoppable reaction (auto-succeed prone saves until below half HP), legendary actions (Surge, Slam, Seismic Charge, Trample), and lair actions (Golden Deluge, Crumbling Grandeur, The Tower Speaks, Gilded Throne, Walls Close In). Every one of these should be used. He is CR 18 and he should feel like it.

Mist Rebirth Is Not a Failure

The party needs to know about Mist Rebirth before the fight begins. Mira told them. Sister Kara knows it. The resistance briefed them. Killing the Goristro is necessary but not sufficient. They should enter the fight knowing that winning the fight is only the first thing that needs to happen.

The People Are Already Acting

The people are out in the streets. They have been there since the start of Chapter 17. By the time the Goristro falls, they have been standing together in the streets of Oren for hours. The choice the domain requires is not something the party needs to organize. It is already forming. The party needs to recognize it and give it space.

The Failed Sigil Object

If the party took one of the failed Sigil of Dominion objects from the personal trophy room in Chapter 17, it has relevance here. When the Goristro dissolves into black mist after being reduced to 0 HP, the object in the party's possession completes its disruption. The current legitimacy attempt ends permanently. The domain cannot manufacture a new version of that specific hope again because the object that was its vessel has been removed from the domain's mechanism. This does not liberate Orenthis on its own but it is part of the conditions that make liberation possible.

The Ending Is Not Clean

People were lost. The campaign asked hard things and the party paid real costs. The ending should acknowledge this without undermining the victory. Liberation is real. The losses are also real. Both can be true simultaneously.

SCENE 1: THE SANCTUM

The door opens.
This is where the campaign ends.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The sanctum is circular, 60 feet in diameter, with a domed ceiling 50 feet above the floor. The dome is gold. All of it. Not gilded, not gold-painted: solid gold plate applied to every surface of the dome from edge to apex, and the gold is tarnished in irregular patches that no amount of polishing has been able to address because the tarnish comes back. The Goristro has the staff polish it every week. It tarnishes again by the end of the week. He has been having it polished and watching it tarnish again for four years.

The floor is stone. The walls below the dome are stone. He did not gold-plate the lower walls. This may be the only decision in the entire tower that reflects an accurate aesthetic judgment.

At the sanctum's center is his throne. Floor to ceiling, 15 feet wide, covered in gold that is tarnished.

*He is sitting in it when the door opens.
He turns.*

He is enormous. He is always enormous; the stat block gives dimensions but dimensions do not capture what it means to be in the same room as something this large that is also this angry and has been alone in this room for four months waiting for something to do. He is wearing the ceremonial armor that does not fit him correctly and has never fit him correctly and that he had made because he wanted ceremonial armor and the craftsman did their best. He looks at the party with the specific expression of a creature who has been told for four years that he is winning and has never quite been able to make himself believe it.

"Finally," he says.

He means it in the way a creature means it when the waiting has been worse than the thing waited for.

It is the only honest thing he will say in this scene.

Features of the Area

The Sanctum

60-foot diameter circle, 50-foot domed ceiling.
The chamber the Goristro's lair actions reference is this room.

Key features:

- **The throne:**
AC 12, 30 HP; if destroyed, the Goristro must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or be Confused for 1 round as something he uses to orient himself is removed; this is the only mechanical function of the throne; the rest of its significance is thematic
- **The golden dome:**
The tarnish is visible and specific; DC 11 Perception to notice that the tarnish forms irregular patterns that roughly correspond to the dates of his failed legitimacy attempts, though this could be coincidence; the DM decides
- **The floor:**
Stone, no difficult terrain initially; lair actions will change this
- **Four exits from the sanctum other than the door the party entered:**
All are sealed from the inside; the Goristro sealed them when he came in four months ago; he was not planning to leave

The Encounter

The Goristro's State

He has been in this room for four months since the Writ of Challenge was issued. He has been receiving reports. He knows about the Rakshasa. He knows about the Archmage. He knows the court was restored. He knows the legal challenge exists. He does not care about the legal challenge in the way that a creature capable of legal reasoning would care about it, but he understands what it represents: the thing he has been unable to produce for four years, a legitimate claim to authority, has now been formally denied to him by the institution that would have granted it.

But he does not say any of this out loud.

His Demagogue's Echo regional effect is active. Any creature that fails a DC 16 Charisma save on waking each day finds itself inclined to defend his reputation. Within the tower, this has been running for four years. Within the sanctum, it is at maximum intensity. The party

should make this save on entering the room. Those who fail do not attack immediately; they feel, briefly, the specific weight of institutional compulsion to find reasons why he should be left alone. DC 16 Charisma save; on a failure, the creature has disadvantage on attack rolls against the Goristro for their first turn as the regional effect briefly colonizes their action.

What the Party Can Do

Speak to the Goristro Before Initiative

If any party member attempts to speak to him before the fight begins: he listens for exactly the amount of time it takes him to decide the words are not relevant. This is approximately 6 seconds. Then he uses his Charge bonus action.

Show the Goristro Documents or a Trophy Before Initiative

If the party produces the voided treaty or broken crown from the personal trophy room in Chapter 17: he sees it. He does not say anything about it. His Unstoppable reaction still fires on the first knockdown attempt. But there is one round, the round in which he sees the failed object, where something moves across his face that is not quite the expression of a creature that has ever examined itself. Then it passes.

This does not change the fight mechanically. It changes the fight's quality.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

The Demagogue's Echo save DC is 13 rather than 16 within the sanctum; the effect has been running for months and is at a certain kind of saturation that reduces its per-contact intensity. The disadvantage on first turn attacks affects fewer party members.

Making it Harder

The Goristro has not been idle in four months. He used the preparation time to activate all five lair actions in sequence during the hour before the party arrived, meaning the sanctum already has active features when the door opens: one 10-foot-radius cylinder of golden deluge hardened on the floor (difficult terrain, 20-foot radius), two sections of Crumbling Grandeur already collapsed (difficult terrain in two 20-foot square areas), and the Gilded Throne spikes have been pre-positioned at the room's center where the throne stands.

Increasing Role Play

The throne. Before the fight begins, if any party member looks at the throne while the Goristro is seated in it: describe what they see. Him, in his tarnished ceremonial armor that does not fit, in a gold chair that has not been able to stay polished, in a room he sealed himself into months ago. The portrait on the ground floor of the tower showed him as a figure of dignity and purpose. This scene shows him as he is.

Treasure and Rewards

No rewards in this scene.

Development and Dial Impact

No dial changes from this scene.

SCENE 2:

THE FIGHT

The full Goristro combat encounter. This is the campaign's hardest fight and the party should feel every round of it.

Read or paraphrase the following:

He charges on his second turn if not already in melee range. His Charge bonus action moves him up to half his speed straight toward an enemy he can see. If he was already in melee range because the party moved to engage: he does not need the Charge. He simply hits.

The fight begins.

Features of the Area

The Sanctum as Combat Space

60-foot diameter circle. Enough room to maneuver but not enough to create sustained distance from a creature with 50 feet of movement speed. The party cannot kite him indefinitely; he will close distance and he hits hard enough that the attempt to maintain distance costs resources that are better spent on damage.

Key combat geography:

- **The throne at center:**
AC 12, 30 HP; a party member positioned behind it has half cover from the Goristro's attacks; if destroyed it triggers the Confusion save described in Scene 1
- **The dome above:**
Crumbling Grandeur lair action targets the dome specifically; 20-foot square areas of collapsed gilding become difficult terrain; multiple uses of this lair action can significantly limit the party's movement options in a 60-foot circle
- **The walls:**
Walls Close In lair action narrows all corridors and passages to 5 feet; in a circular room with no corridors this effect applies to the perimeter: movement along the sanctum walls costs double movement for creatures with speed 40 feet or more, which includes several party classes at high level

The Encounter

Round 1

The Goristro uses his full Multi-attack: one Brutal Gore and two Slams. He prioritizes the party's most visible melee character for the Brutal Gore because the push and prone effect creates positional disruption for the full party. He uses Charge as a bonus action to close distance if anyone has moved away. He uses Rageful Retaliation immediately if any melee character hits him on their first turn.

At initiative count 20: Golden Deluge fires on the largest cluster of party members. The 10-foot radius at 16th level will typically catch 2-3 characters. DC 21 Dexterity save; the Restrained condition on a failed save limits movement in subsequent rounds.

Round 2

He uses Seismic Charge as a legendary action at the end of the first round with the highest action economy. DC 21 Strength save within 15 feet; prone plus 10-foot push disrupts positioning that the party established in Round 1. He continues Multi-attack. Crumbling Grandeur fires at initiative count 20, targeting the area most party members have moved to after Round 1's repositioning.

Round 3

Walls Close In fires at initiative count 20. The sanctum's 60-foot diameter means the difficult terrain for speed-40+ creatures significantly limits the party's movement options while having minimal effect on the Goristro whose speed is 50 feet. His Unstoppable reaction is still active (above half HP). He uses Trample as a legendary action if two or more party members are in a line.

Half HP: The Shift

When the Goristro is reduced to below half HP (155 HP), Unstoppable stops working. He can now be knocked prone. This is a significant mechanical shift and the party should feel it: the first successful prone effect on the Goristro is a moment. It lands differently from every other prone effect in the fight because it was not available before.

His behavior shifts: he becomes less tactical and more direct. He uses Surge legendary actions to maintain melee contact rather than repositioning. He stops using Walls Close In and starts using The Tower Speaks more aggressively. He does not retreat. He charges.

At half HP read or paraphrase the following:

Something changes in his expression. Not fear. Not desperation. The specific expression of a creature that has run the same calculation it has been running for four years and has arrived, finally, at a different answer.

He is not going to win this.

He knows it.

He charges anyway.

Half HP: The Tower Speaks

His voice, magically amplified through the tower walls, booms through every chamber simultaneously. DC 21 Wisdom save; creatures that fail are Frightened until initiative count 20. He does not use this tactically. He uses it because it is what he has. His voice in the walls of his own building, saying the thing it has been saying for four years.

Legendary Resistance

After all three are expended, he will be subject to concentration effects, banishment attempts, and incapacitation spells. This changes the back half of the fight. The front half was the Goristro at full mechanical capability while the back half is the Goristro without resistance failsafes.

The Throne in Combat

If the party uses the throne tactically for cover: the Goristro will destroy it within 2 rounds of noticing the party using it. His Siege Monster trait means he deals double damage to objects; the throne has 30 HP and he will hit it with a Slam or a Seismic Charge specifically to remove the cover. When the throne crumbles: the Confusion save fires on him (DC 16 Wisdom). If he fails: he spends one round confused, his attacks potentially misdirected. If he succeeds: he continues without apparent notice.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

The Goristro has been in the sanctum for four months with minimal physical activity. His combat effectiveness reflects this with one adjustment: his Legendary Resistance uses are 2 rather than 3. The isolation has cost him something that does not show in his stat block except in this one reduction.

Making it Harder

The tower's lair actions have been pre-primed as described in Scene 1's harder variant. Additionally, at half HP the Goristro does not simply lose Unstoppable; he enters a Rage state that gives him advantage on all Strength checks and attack rolls for 2 rounds before the mechanical state normalizes. His Rageful Retaliation fires on every melee hit rather than once per round during this period.

Increasing Role Play

The Goristro talks during the fight. Not tactically; he does not give orders or coordinate. He talks the way someone talks when they have been alone for four months and have finally been given something to push against.

Example fragments, between attacks:

Round 1:

"You think you won. You changed some papers. You freed some people."

Slam Attack

"Papers don't matter."

Round 2:

"I built this."

Brutal Gore (a party member goes flying)

"All of it. The roads, the courts, the order. Before me this was nothing."

Round 3, after Crumbling Grandeur brings down a section of gilded dome:

"Nobody knows how to run this. Nobody. They told me. The smartest people said it: nobody knows like you know."

Half HP, before The Tower Speaks:

"I'm not finished." He looks at the party. He looks at his hands. "I'm not finished."

He means it. But he is also wrong.

Let both things be true.

Treasure and Rewards

No mechanical rewards during the fight. The Goristro does not carry items. And despite his obsession with gold, he does not actually have a treasure vault.

Development and Dial Impact

No dial changes from this scene.

SCENE 3: THE FALL

The Goristro reaches 0 HP. What happens next is the campaign's pivot point.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The last blow lands.

He does not fall the way the other lieutenants fell. He does not crumple. He does not lie down. He staggers, which is the first time in the entire fight that anything has made him stagger, and then he is very still, and then the black mist begins.

It starts at the edges of him: the tips of his horns, the ends of his fingers, the hem of the ceremonial armor that never fit. It spreads inward. It takes approximately thirty seconds. During those thirty seconds he is still aware; his eyes are open and he is looking at the party with the specific expression of a creature that is registering something it has been told would not happen.

He does not say anything in those thirty seconds. He has said what he said during the fight and none of it changed anything and he knows it.

The mist reaches his face last. Then he is gone. The black mist hangs in the air for a moment. Then it disperses through the cracks in the sanctum walls and is gone.

The sanctum is empty. The tarnished gold dome is still tarnished. The gilded spikes from the Gilded Throne lair action are still in the floor. The room looks exactly like what it is: the inner chamber of a monument to a creature that is no longer in it.

Features of the Area

The Mist Rebirth Mechanic

The Goristro's body dissolved into black mist. Within four years, he will reform in a seat of power, furious and more demented than before. The party knows this. They have known it since Mira briefed them before the tower. Defeating him was necessary, but it will not be sufficient unless the domain's conditions are also addressed.

What Immediately Changes

When the Goristro dissolves: the Demagogue's Echo regional effect ends. The specific weight of institutional compulsion that has been present in the tower for four years lifts. It is not dramatic. It simply stops. Anyone who failed the Charisma save on entering the sanctum can feel the absence of the compulsion they were under.

The Merregons whose contracts ran through the Goristro's personal authority begin to disengage. Not because he is dead, but because the entity the contracts describe as their commanding authority has ceased to be present as a directing force. If desired, this distinction provides the contextual opportunity for the optional Extra-Chapter 19: All other contracts, which are a separate layer of obligation, remain active.

The Xvarts scatter. They scatter in all directions and do not stop until they are out of the tower.

The lair actions end. The Golden Deluge cylinders cool and become liquid gold pooling on the floor. The Walls Close In effect ends and the sanctum feels its full 60-foot diameter for the first time since the party entered. The Gilded Throne spikes are still in the floor but they are no longer magically maintained; they are just metal.

The Encounter

Via sending stone, Tam's voice.

Read or paraphrase the following:

"He is gone. I do not know how I know but I know. Something changed."

A pause.

"The people in the streets are still here. All of them. They have been here for hours."

Another pause.

"They are looking up at the tower. They are waiting for something."

His voice is careful.

"But I don't know what they are waiting for."

The party knows.

What the Party Can Do

Rest

They have just fought CR 18. A short rest in the sanctum is warranted and available. The lair effects are gone. The Merregons are disengaging. The sanctum is safe.

Examine the Sanctum

The failed Sigil of Dominion object from the personal trophy room in Chapter 17 completes its disruption here. Whichever object the party brought: it reacts to the Goristro's absence. The broken crown pieces assemble briefly and then fall apart again, finally, with the specific quality of something that has been waiting to finish falling. The voided treaty document, if brought, becomes simply paper; the red ink that said VOID fades and what is left is the original treaty text that the Goristro never honored. These are thematic moments. They do not have mechanical effects.

Move Directly to the Next Scene

If the party is not significantly depleted and understands the urgency of the window: they can move immediately. The Mist Rebirth window is four years. That is not urgent in the standard sense. But the conditions that make liberation possible are present right now, in this specific moment, in the people in the streets who have been holding onto each other for hours waiting for something to be over. That moment is not guaranteed to last.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

The party receives an immediate sense of the domain's response: the Mists at the tower's visible windows briefly thin. Not part. Thin. Enough to see that they are not permanent. The party understands that the domain is responsive to what they are about to attempt.

Making it Harder

The Mist Rebirth mist has not fully dispersed. It lingers in the sanctum in a way that feels like a presence rather than a remnant. The party cannot tell whether this means the Goristro is reforming faster than expected or whether this is simply what the Mist Rebirth looks like in its early phase. They have a limited window and the uncertainty should create urgency.

Increasing Role Play

Before the party moves to Scene 4, give them a moment with the throne. Even if it was destroyed and is now just pieces, let them investigate. The gold is tarnished. It has been tarnishing since before the party existed as a resistance. The Goristro' sat in this throne for months because that is who he thought he was. But now the throne and the room are empty.

The party should decide what to do with the throne (or its remnants). They do not need to do anything with it. But they should decide.

Treasure and Rewards

From the Sanctum:

- Pieces of the tarnished gold dome (not removable as a single item; but Lyra, if present, notes in her records that the tarnish patterns on the dome correspond to dates; this is her observation, not the campaign's confirmed fact; she writes it down)
- The throne room (the sanctum itself becomes a significant space for post-regime governance discussions; the Justiciars will want to address what happens to the tower building; this is epilogue content)
- The throne (if the party takes it: DM decides what it represents; if left: it stays in the sanctum)

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Goristro defeated	+3	0	-3
Regional effects end	+1	0	0
Tower Merregons disengage	+1	0	-1

SCENE 4: THE CONDITIONS

Understanding what the domain requires and creating the conditions for it. No combat. No skill checks required. The party understands something and acts on it.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The party is in an empty sanctum with the Mist Rebirth window open and the people of Orenthis in the streets below waiting for something they do not have a name for.

Mira's voice arrives by sending stone. Not a report. She has been watching from the plaza.

"The people are still here," she says. "All of them. More than when you went in. Word has been spreading since the Kenku's broadcast." A pause. "They are not celebrating. They are not rioting. They are just present. Together. In every district I can see from here." Another pause. "Something is happening that does not need us to make it happen."

She is right. And she does not know yet that she is describing exactly what the Archmage found.

Features of the Area The Conditions for Liberation

The party has been given every piece of this understanding across sixteen chapters.

Here is where it all pieces together.

- **The Goristro's curse:**
He seeks the Sigil of Dominion, a symbolic recognition that would confirm his rule as rightful. The domain manufactures hope and destroys it on a cycle. He knows the game is rigged. He cannot stop playing.
- **The Mist Rebirth:**
He will reform within four years unless the domain's conditions fundamentally change.
- **The domain's preservation logic:**
The Mists have preserved the resistance because the Goristro's punishment requires an enemy to fail against. When he falls, that logic ends. But ending the logic is not the same as changing the conditions.
- **The Archmage's finding:**
Community, plain and simple. People holding onto truth together, sustaining each other's resistance. The regime's isolation

apparatus was manufacturing the resistance it could not break. The domain was building his opposition by design.

- **The Foundational Compact:**
All authority derives from the consent of the governed. The Goristro's rule was always void because consent was never given. The liberation of Orenthis requires not just his defeat but a genuine act of self-governance by the people of Orenthis.

What this means for the Mist Rebirth mechanic:

- The domain will not permit permanent liberation through military victory alone. The Dark Powers sealed this domain around the Goristro's specific torment: the pursuit of legitimacy he can never hold. For the domain to release Orenthis, the thing he was pursuing must actually exist. Not for him. Without him. Legitimacy derived from genuine consent of the governed. A Orenthis that chose itself.
- That is what the domain requires. Not the Goristro's defeat. The proof that the thing he could never have is real and has been created in his absence.
- The people in the streets are already creating it. They have been in the streets for hours, together, after hearing the Kenku's honest account of what the resistance did. They did not need to be organized. They did not need to be directed. They came out on their own and they stayed on their own and they are still there.

The Encounter

The party's role in Scene 4 is not to make the choice for Orenthis. It is to create the condition in which the choice can be made freely.

Specifically, the party needs to communicate three things to the city, through whichever communications means they have available.

The three things:

- The Goristro is gone. The regime is over. This is not a rumor. This is confirmed, from the people who were in the room.
- The Foundational Compact exists. The court is operational. The legal framework for genuine self-governance is already in place. The people do not need to build a government from nothing. The foundation was recovered and authenticated. It is waiting for them.

- The choice belongs to Orenthis. Not to the resistance. Not to the party. Not to the restored court. The court will administer. The Yagnoloth will manage the transition. But the direction of Orenthis, what it becomes and how it operates and what it values, belongs to the people in those streets.

The last item is vital. The party cannot choose Orenthis's future for it. They cannot tell the people what to decide. They cannot organize the choice in a way that removes the genuine freedom from it.

If the party attempts to direct the people toward a specific governmental structure or a specific set of values: the Mists do not respond. If the party uses magical compulsion, intimidation, or authoritative decrees to force a specific choice, the Mists remain absolute. The domain can recognize the difference between liberation and replacement.

This is not a trap. It is this campaign's final honest statement about what resistance means. The party has been fighting to provide Orenthis the ability to choose. They must trust Orenthis to choose, therefore they cannot choose for it.

What the Party Can Do

The three things must be communicated through whatever channels are available. These things do not need to be delivered through the same channel. They do not need to be delivered in order. They just need to reach the city.

Then the party waits.

Communication Through the Broadcast Station

If the party goes to the third floor and uses the Kenku's crystal amplifiers:

One broadcast to the full city. DC 11 Charisma to speak clearly and be understood; DC 9 for the party member who has been most present in public-facing resistance work across the campaign. The broadcast reaches every crystal speaker in Oren.

Communication Through Mira and the Resistance Network

If the party communicates via sending stone and leaves it to the network to spread the word: Takes 30 minutes to reach full city penetration. No check required. The network has been built for this kind of cascading communication since Chapter 4.

Communication Through the Justiciars

If the party contacts the court:

The Justiciar speaks from the Supreme Hall's entrance, where it is already positioned and visible to the civic district crowds. Its voice carries the weight of institutional authority. DC 10 Persuasion to ask it to address the city directly; on a success it steps forward and speaks to the gathered crowd.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

Mira has already begun communicating the first thing, the Goristro's confirmed fall, through the resistance network from her position in the plaza. By the time the party reaches the broadcast station, the city already knows he is gone. The party only needs to communicate the second and third things.

Making it Harder

The broadcast station's primary crystal was damaged during the fight; one of the lair action effects cracked a routing cable. DC 14 Arcana or DC 15 Thieves' Tools to repair it before broadcasting. If the repair fails: the party must rely on the resistance network and the Justiciar's voice, which together have 30-minute rather than immediate city penetration. The window is still open. It just takes longer.

Increasing Role Play

While the party communicates: give them a moment with the specific content of what they are saying. Not a scripted speech; let the players choose the words. What does the party member who speaks into the broadcast crystal actually say? What are the specific words they use for "the Goristro is gone" and "the choice is yours"?

Let them say it. It is their campaign. They have earned the words.

Treasure and Rewards

No mechanical rewards.

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
Communication via broadcast station	+2	0	0
Communication via Mira and the resistance network	+1	0	0
Communication via the Justiciars	+1	0	-1

SCENE 5:

THE CHOICE

The people of Orenthis make their choice. The Mists respond.

This scene should not be rushed. Give it time.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The broadcast ends, or the network finishes carrying the message, or the Justiciar steps back from the Supreme Hall entrance. The party has done what they came here to do and said what needed to be said and now they are waiting.

In the streets of Oren: the people who have been standing together for hours receive the message. The Goristro is gone. The Foundational Compact exists. The choice belongs to them.

Nothing happens immediately. People do not cheer in the way of a victory celebration; a victory celebration would be the wrong shape for this. What happens is something quieter and more specific.

People start talking to each other.

Not to the party. Not to the resistance. To each other. The family on the corner of the market district that came out to watch, the husband and wife and their two children who have been standing together since the Kenku's broadcast reached them: the husband says something to the wife. The wife says something back. The children are listening.

This repeats. In every district, in every corner where the city gathered: people talking to each other about what they want. What they want Orenthis to be. What they want the law to protect. What they want the court to do. What they want from the government that will follow the thing that just ended.

This is not organized. There are no facilitators. There are no ballot boxes. There is no formal process. There is just the people of Orenthis, who have been isolated from each other by deliberate policy for years, talking to each other in the streets they came out to watch together.

The Mists are watching.

Features of the Area

The Mists

It begins at the city's edges, where the Mists have been absolute since they rose. Not dramatically; not with a sound or a light or a visible mechanical event. The Mists simply begin to thin. Not part; thinning is the right word. The absolute gray at the edges of Orenthis becomes less absolute. The borders of the domain become slightly less certain about themselves.

DC 11 Perception for any party member near a window or in the streets to notice the change in the Mists. No check required for party members who are actively watching the Mists. The change is real and visible; it is simply not spectacular.

The thinning continues as the conversations in the streets continue. There is no moment where the Mists part all at once. It is a gradual process, minutes long, corresponding to the spread of genuine collective expression through the city.

The Encounter

At some point during the thinning, something becomes clear to the party that cannot be precisely timed: Orenthis is choosing. Not unanimously. Not without disagreement. The market vendor arguing with her neighbor about what the property law should look like under the new government: that is part of it. The two former civic functionaries debating the proper structure of democratic representation: that is part of it. The old woman in the bakery doorway who says to the man beside her, simply, that she wants the flour supply restored: that is part of it.

None of them are choosing the same thing. That is not what the domain requires. The domain requires that they be choosing at all, freely, together, without coercion. The Mists thin further.

When the Mists thin to the point where roads beyond Orenthis's borders become visible for the first time in years: read or paraphrase the following:

The Mist Rebirth mechanic specifies that the Goristro will reform within four years in the seat of power. He will reform. This is not changed by the Mists thinning. He is part of the domain. His curse does not end because his current cycle ended.

What changes is what he will reform into.

He will reform in the Gilded Tower. He will find his sanctum empty and his throne gone. His personal trophy room missing at least one failed object. He will find an Orenthis that has a restored court, a Foundational Compact, an operational governance structure, and a population that has chosen itself.

He will begin seeking the Sigil of Dominion again. He will fail again. The domain will manufacture the hope and destroy it again.

But it will be harder. Because the thing he was trying to produce, legitimacy derived from genuine consent, actually exists now in the world he will reform into. He cannot claim it. He cannot take it. He cannot manufacture a version of it that the domain will accept as real. It is real, and it is not his, and it will never be his.

The Dark Powers do not liberate domains. They change the conditions of torment. What they have done here, in response to Orenthis choosing itself, is make the Goristro's torment permanent in a new way: the thing he was seeking will exist in the domain he is bound to, forever just beyond his reach, proven by the people he spent years trying to break.

This is not the liberation the party might have hoped for. It is the liberation a Ravenloft domain can offer. The Mists thin. The roads become passable. The Mists do not vanish. They thin.

Orenthis is not free of the Dark Powers. It is free of the regime. It has its borders back, its courts back, its legal foundation back, and its capacity for self-determination back. The Goristro will return. The restored institutions will be ready for him in a way they were not before.

That is what was possible. That is what the campaign produced.

What the Party Sees

From wherever they are standing when the Mists thin far enough to show the roads: the roads go somewhere. The mountain passes to the north, which have been absolute gray walls of Mist since Chapter 1, now show the beginning of the passes themselves. Not the full passes; just the beginning. Enough to know that they continue.

- The Merchant Federation's route to Veth's home council: passable.
- The Mountain Compact's northern trade road: visible.
- The road that leads, somewhere far away, to wherever the party came from: there.

The People's Response

Word spreads through the city faster than any broadcast could carry it: the Mists are thinning. People who have not seen a road to anywhere else in years walk to the edges of the city and look. The conversations in the streets do not stop. They expand to include this new information.

A family that was separated at the border before the Mists rose, separated not by the regime but by the sealing itself, understands for the first time that they might be findable. Not found; findable. That is enough, for now, to produce something in their expression that has not been there.

Mira

She is in the streets when the Mists thin. Via sending stone, or when the party finds her afterward:

Read or paraphrase the following:

"I have been watching this city for four years," she says. "I watched it before the regime too. I watched the institutions erode. I watched the people get afraid." She pauses. "I am watching them not be afraid right now. Not all of them. Not completely. But in this direction." Another pause. "That is enough. That is what enough looks like."

She is right.

The Kenku

She is on the exterior maintenance platform of the third floor when the Mists thin. If any party member goes to the window: she is still there. She is looking at the roads that are now visible at the city's edges.

She does not say anything.

She does not need to say anything. The party knows what they know about her. The Mists thinning is not her resolution. It is not her punishment. It is not her redemption. It is simply what happened while she was standing on a platform watching the city receive the broadcast she sent.

What she does after this scene is not the campaign's content. It is hers.

What the Party Can Do

Go Into the Streets

The most important thing available. The party has been fighting for this city for sixteen chapters. They can be in it for this moment. Let them walk through the people of Orenthis choosing themselves. Let them be present for it without directing it.

Find Specific People

Mira, in the plaza. Tam, wherever he is. Sister Kara, who went back to the Cathedral this morning. Veth, in the embassy district garden. Havin and Petra, wherever the resistance network placed them. The eldest Justiciar, in the Supreme Hall. All of them are in the city. All of them are watching the Mists thin.

Stand at the Edge

Any party member can walk to the edge of the city where the Mists are thinning and look at the road that is becoming visible. They do not need to take it. They can just look. It is enough to know it is there.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

The Mists thin faster. Within 10 minutes of the people beginning to talk to each other, the roads are visible. The response is clear and the party does not need to wait through uncertainty.

Making it Harder

The Mists thin unevenly. Three of the four cardinal directions show roads. The fourth, the one toward wherever the party's characters came from, remains opaque. Not because the Dark Powers are withholding it. Because the domain is not yet certain the choice is complete. The party must wait an additional 30 minutes, watching the conversations continue, before the fourth road appears.

Increasing Role Play

The elderly woman from the bakery is named Orna. If the party finds her in the streets during this scene: she is standing at the edge of the market district, looking at the road to the north. She turned her flour supply over to the resistance network in Chapter 4 when Joran came to her for supplies. The party may or may not know this. It does not matter if they know.

She says, to no one in particular: "I thought it would feel different. Bigger." She looks at the road. "It just feels like morning."

She goes back inside. The bakery opens for the first time in years.

Treasure and Rewards

From Scene 5:

- The Mists thinning (the roads are passable; Orenthis has its borders back; the Mist Rebirth condition has been addressed as fully as the domain permits)
 - The choice (the people of Orenthis have demonstrated genuine self-governance; this is the most significant thing the campaign produced and it cannot be given a mechanical value)
 - The morning (whatever that means to each party member; the campaign is complete)
-

Development and Dial Impact

	HOPE	HEAT	GRIP
People of Orenthis begin choosing freely	+1	0	0
Roads become visible at city's edges	+1	0	0

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

What the Party Should Know

- The Goristro is defeated. He will reform within four years in the Gilded Tower. He will find an Orenthis that chose itself in his absence. He will seek the Sigil of Dominion again. He will fail again. The thing he was seeking exists now and is not his and will never be his. The Dark Powers have changed the conditions of his torment, not ended them.
- The Mists have thinned. The roads are passable. Orenthis is not free of the domain. It is free of the regime. It has its legal foundation, its restored institutions, its capacity for genuine self-determination, and its community: the thing the Archmage found, intact and demonstrated and on record.
- The people of Orenthis chose themselves. Not unanimously. Not without disagreement. Freely. That is the only version of liberation the domain could offer and it is real.
- What happens next is governance, which is harder than resistance in different ways and which the party has given Orenthis the tools to attempt. The Yagnoloth will manage the transition. The Justiciars will administer the legal framework. The Foundational Compact will guide the reconstruction. The party gave them all of these things.
- The Goristro will be back. Orenthis will be ready.

Character Advancement

The campaign is complete. The party has accomplished what campaigns at this level accomplish: they changed the conditions of a Ravenloft domain permanently and gave the people within it the capacity for genuine self-determination. That is the maximum available outcome in a Ravenloft campaign and it is a real victory.

Downtime (Optional)

Chapter 19 (The Contract Halls) is the optional epilogue encounter with the Arcanaloath. The DM should present it as genuinely optional: the infernal contracts the Arcanaloath holds do not dissolve with the Goristro's fall, and someone will need to deal with them, but it is not a mandatory conclusion to the party's story.

The party's epilogue, regardless of whether they play or skip Chapter 19, should address:

- What each party member does now that the campaign is over
- What Orenthis looks like in the weeks and months following the choice
- What the Changeling does with his advisory role or constrained chair, now that the Goristro is gone and the transition is real
- What the Kenku does
- Whether Orna's bakery has re-opened
- What the Foundational Compact produces as a governing document when it is actually applied
- Whether the party takes the road that is now visible at the city's edge

That last one is the party's decision. The road is there. It was not there in Chapter 1. They made it possible. Where it goes is their story to tell next.

Lead-in to the Next Chapter

If the party chooses to pursue the Arcanaloath epilogue:

Read or paraphrase the following:

The celebration, such as it is, has been running for two days when the Yagnoloth brings the document to the party's attention. He sets it on the table with the small arm and says nothing for a moment.

Then he says: "The infernal contracts the Arcanaloath holds do not dissolve. The Merregon bindings that ran through the regime's authority are void. The Arcanaloath's contracts are different. They terminate upon specific conditions that have not been met." He sets another document beside the first. "He has sent a message. He is prepared to discuss renegotiation." He looks at the party. "He describes himself as the Goristro's contractor, not his servant. The distinction, he explains, is everything."

He pauses.

"He is waiting in the Contract Halls. He says to come when you are ready." He picks up both documents with the large arm. "He has a sliding fee schedule."

Considerations

If the party is emotionally complete with the campaign and does not want Chapter 19: the Yagnoloth handles the Arcanaloth negotiation himself, over the following weeks, using his thirty years of diplomatic experience and the legal weight of the restored court. He does not get everything the party could have gotten. He gets enough. The contracts that cannot be dissolved are renegotiated into forms that serve Orenthis rather than the former regime. It takes six months and the Yagnoloth looks very tired afterward. He does not complain.

If the Kenku is still on the exterior platform of the third floor when the party comes down from the sanctum: she is gone by the time anyone goes to check. The maintenance platform is empty. The window is open. She left the primary broadcast crystal on the floor of the station, cleaned and functional. She left nothing else.

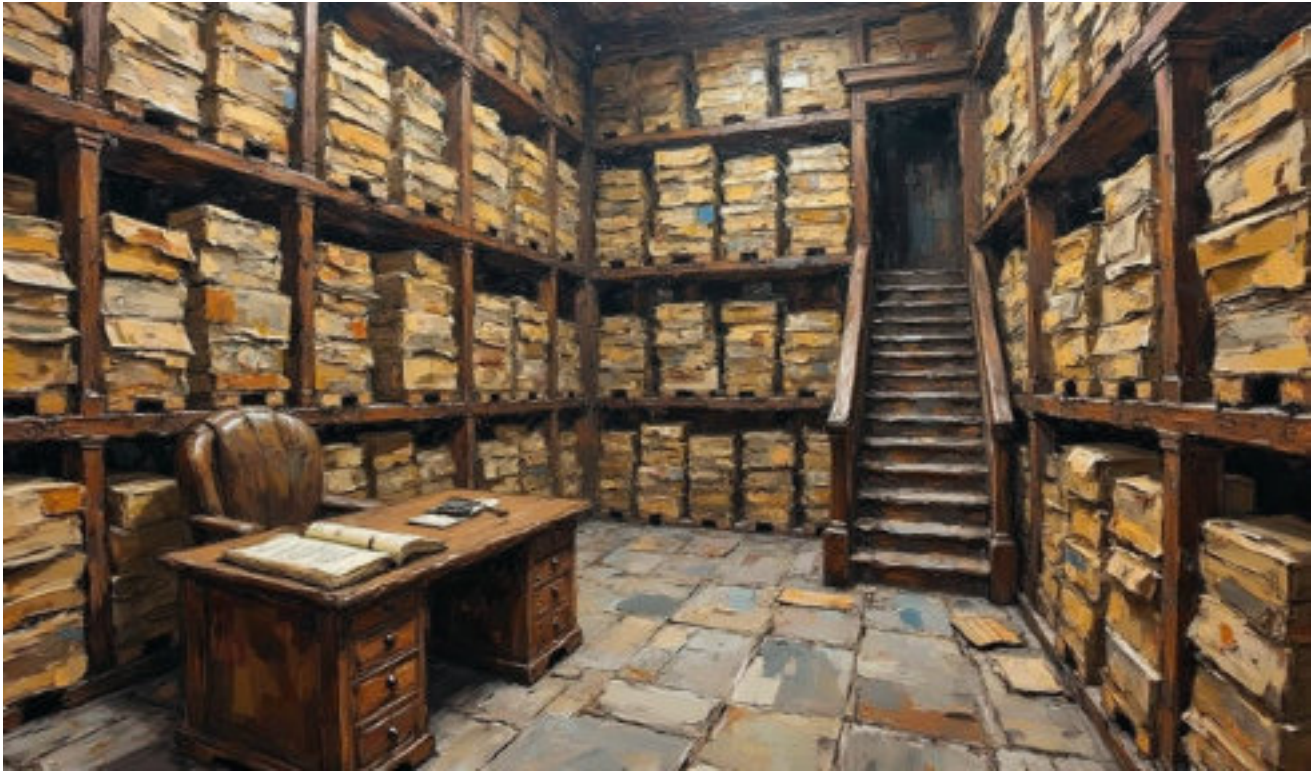
Where she went is not the campaign's content. The party carries their assessment of her into whatever they do next.

If Sister Kara went back to the Cathedral: she is there when the party finds her. The Cathedral is not closed. The doors are open. She is in the reliquary, where the locked box was, where the display cases held replicas of artifacts that were replaced. She is beginning the work of restoration. She is not doing it alone; several people from the city came to help when the Mists started thinning. She does not look up when the party enters. She says: "There is a lot to do." She does not say it as a complaint. She says it the way she says everything: as a fact, assessed, and addressed.

If Mira is asked what she does now: she is quiet for a long moment. Then she says: "I do not know. I have been a resistance leader for four years. I do not know what I am if I am not that." She looks at the party. "I am going to find out." She pauses. "I think that is what winning looks like. Not knowing what comes next but having the space to find out."

She is right. That is what winning looks like.

Chapter 19 Return to the Contract Halls



"He did not back the regime because he believed in it. He backed it because it was solvent. When it stopped being solvent, he started drafting new terms. This is called pragmatism by people who do not want to call it what it is."

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 19 is optional. The campaign technically ended in Chapter 18. Orenthis chose itself. The Mists thinned. What happens in this chapter is not required for the campaign's story to be complete.

What is required, if the party wants it to be required, is this: the infernal contracts the Arcanaloith brokered do not dissolve with the Goristro's fall. The Merregon bindings that ran through the regime's authority are void. The Arcanaloith's contracts are different. They terminate upon specific conditions that have not been met. Some of those contracts bind people. Some bind institutions. Some bind infernal parties to ongoing obligations that will continue to operate in Orenthis for years if someone does not address them.

The Arcanaloith has sent a message. He is prepared to discuss renegotiation.

He describes himself, in the message, as the Goristro's contractor, not his servant. The distinction, he explains in two precisely worded sentences, is everything. He is not a regime loyalist. He has no loyalty. He has a portfolio of contracts, a sliding fee schedule, and a building full of legally binding documents that represent years of work, and he would like to discuss what happens to them now that one of his primary clients is temporarily indisposed.

He is waiting in the Contract Halls. He says to come when the party is ready.

He will genuinely wait. He has been in the Contract Halls for years and he can wait considerably longer. He has excellent filing systems and a great deal of reading to do.

The party should understand, before they go, what they are walking into. The Contract Halls are not a fortress. They are not a dungeon in any conventional sense. They are a building full of a creature who has never lost a negotiation he cared about winning, in a space that physically embodies his advantage, staffed by the accumulated contractual weight of every deal he has ever brokered. He invited the party in. That is not hospitality. That is positioning.

He wants a deal more than he wants a fight. He has always wanted a deal more than a fight. The question the party must answer is whether they want to give him one.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Scene 1: The Invitation

The Yagnoloth delivers the Arcanaloth's message. The party prepares for what the Contract Halls actually are and decides how they want to approach this.

Scene 1 should feel like the specific quality of being invited somewhere by someone who has already thought through every way the invitation could go.

Scene 2: The Contract Halls

Entering the building. Its geography, its regional effects, and what it feels like to be inside a structure made of compressed infernal contracts. The Arcanaloth is not hiding. He is in his office. He is expecting the party.

Scene 2 should feel like walking into someone else's complete home advantage, and understanding precisely how complete it is.

Scene 3: The Meeting

Face to face with the Arcanaloth. He is warm, precise, and completely without moral framework. He has a proposal. The proposal is structured to be difficult to refuse. He has thought about this.

Scene 3 should feel like a negotiation with someone who is better at negotiating than anyone the party has ever met, conducted in his building, on his terms, using his documents, and somehow still being presented as a conversation between equals.

Scene 4: The Resolution

The party decides. Clean Deal or Complete End. Both paths have full mechanical and narrative content. Neither is the wrong answer. One is easier and one is more complete and the Arcanaloth will politely point out which is which.

Scene 4 should feel like the campaign's final moral decision, smaller in scale than the liberation but more precise, about what kind of victory the party actually wants.

RUNNING THE CHAPTER

Designed for: 16th-level characters

Sessions: 1-2

Advancement: None

This chapter is an epilogue encounter. It is shorter than any main campaign chapter. It is also, in some ways, the campaign's most morally complex scene, because the Arcanaloth is not the Goristro. He is not a tyrant. He is a contractor. He did terrible things and all of them were legal and all of them were at his clients' direction and none of them are his problem in the way that the Goristro's actions were the Goristro's problem. He has a position and it is not entirely without merit and he knows exactly how to present it.

The primary goals are:

- Present the Arcanaloth as the campaign's most competent antagonist in the specific register of competence that the party has not fully encountered before: pure transactional intelligence with no moral content whatsoever
- Give the party a genuine choice between two legitimate resolution paths
- Use the Contract Halls' mechanics to make the physical environment feel like an extension of the Arcanaloth's character
- Close the infernal contract thread that the Goristro's fall could not close

Guidance

The Yagnoloth's Role

The Yagnoloth is the party's most qualified advisor for this chapter. He has thirty years of diplomatic experience. He knows the Arcanaloth professionally, in the sense that two people who operate in the same field know each other without ever being on the same side. His assessment of the situation before the party enters the Contract Halls is the most useful strategic briefing available.

He will also say, at some point during Scene 1, something that the party should carry into the chapter: "He has never lost a negotiation he cared about winning. The question you must ask yourself before you enter is whether he cares about winning this one." He pauses. "He sent the invitation. That tells you something."

The Arcanaloth Is Not Evil in the Way the Others Were Evil

This is the most important distinction about this character. The Goristro was a tyrant. The Rakshasa was a system builder whose system was cruelty. The Archmage was a person who chose the work over the people. The Arcanaloth is none of these. He is a contractor. He provided services. His clients directed the services. He drafted the documents. He did not order the detentions or the purges or the loyalty tests. He made the legal architecture that made them enforceable.

The distinction he draws between himself and the regime is technically accurate. It is also the most sophisticated form of moral evasion the party has encountered in the campaign. The party should feel both things: that he is right about the technical distinction and that the technical distinction is itself the problem.

He Is Very Good at This

The Arcanaloth has been doing this for longer than any regime he has ever served has existed. He has outlasted every client. He will outlast this situation too unless the party specifically prevents it. His negotiating position is genuinely strong: the contracts he holds are legally valid, the conditions for their termination have not been met, and he is offering a clean resolution that is better for Orenthis than the alternative of letting those contracts run indefinitely.

He is not bluffing about any of this. The Yagnoloth confirmed it. The contracts are real. The offer is genuine. The party should know they are not dealing with someone who is desperate.

The Termination Clause Is Personal

If at any point in the campaign, any party member used forged documents that the Changeling provided while disguised as Bowman, the Arcanaloth can invoke The Termination Clause against them. The Changeling had accepted the Arcanaloth terms. And since those terms extended to the documents the Changeling provided, the party member who used those documents is, technically, a party to a contract they never knowingly signed.

The Arcanaloth will not use this aggressively unless the fight starts. But he will mention it during Scene 3. Politely. As a point of information. As something the party should be aware of when making their decision.

He will describe it as a technicality. It is not a technicality. It is a demonstration of how his power actually works: not through force but through reach. The contracts extend further than anyone ever realizes. They always do.

The Clean Deal Is Not a Failure

If the party takes the Clean Deal: they win. Orenthis gets all contracts voided. The Merregons are freed. The detention infrastructure that ran on infernal contract authority collapses. He leaves. He goes somewhere else and begins again. This is a complete victory for Orenthis and a partial victory for the campaign's moral accounting. He escapes consequences. He does not escape. He relocates.

The Complete End is available. It costs more. It produces more chaos in the short term. It means he does not get to go somewhere else and start again. That matters. The party should know what it costs and what it produces before they choose.

SCENE 1: THE INVITATION

Two days after the Goristro's fall. The celebration has been running in a muted, specific way: not the celebration of people who expected victory, but the celebration of people who are still slightly surprised to be alive and free and are processing those two things simultaneously.

The Yagnoloth brings the message to the party.

Read or paraphrase the following:

He sets it on the table without preamble. The message is on high-quality paper. The handwriting is precise and very small, the handwriting of someone who has spent a long time fitting significant information into limited space. The paper smells faintly of something that is not ink and is not paper and has no name in any language the party speaks.

The message reads:

"To the parties responsible for the recent change in Orenthis's governance structure:

Congratulations on your success. It was, by any objective measure, a well-executed campaign.

I write to inform you that my relationship with the former administration was purely contractual. The contracts I held with that administration and on its behalf do not void automatically upon the administration's termination. They are governed by their specific termination clauses, none of which have been triggered by recent events.

I am prepared to discuss the disposition of these contracts at your convenience. I can offer terms that will result in the complete dissolution of all outstanding infernal obligations within Orenthis, with minimal disruption to the recovery process.

I am available at the Contract Halls. I keep regular hours. There is no fee for the initial consultation.

I look forward to hearing from you."

The message is not signed. There is no name. There is a small wax seal at the bottom: a jackal's head in profile, pressed into red wax with the precision of a creature that does this frequently.

The Yagnoloth, when the party looks up from the message, says: "He has been in that building for four years. He has never left it. Not when the Writ of Challenge was issued. Not when the court was restored. Not when the Goristro fell." He folds his large hands. "He knew you would come to him eventually. He has been waiting." He pauses. "That is worth thinking about."

The Encounter

The Yagnoloth's Assessment

He provides the following if the party asks questions. He provides it without being asked if the party seems uncertain:

What the Arcanaloth is: a contractor. Not a loyalist. Not an ideologue. A creature that provides infernal contract services to clients with the resources to pay for them. The Goristro was his primary client in Orenthis. He had other clients as well, several of them on both sides of the conflict. The party does not know which ones. He does.

What the contracts contain: Merregon deployment authority instruments, loyalty enforcement clauses, detention authorization frameworks, and several dozen personal contracts with individual Orenthis citizens who accepted specific terms in exchange for specific protections during the regime. Some of those citizens are people the party has met. The Yagnoloth does not know which ones specifically. The Arcanaloth does.

What the termination conditions are: each contract has different conditions. None of them have been triggered by the Goristro's fall. The standard infernal contract termination clause requires either the fulfillment of the contract's terms, the mutual agreement of all parties, or the death of the contracting authority by means specified in the contract. The Goristro's contracts specified death by combat. He dissolved into mist. Technically: not death by combat. Technically: the contracts are still active.

The Yagnoloth's personal assessment: "He is offering to void them voluntarily. That means he has calculated that voluntary voiding is more profitable than the alternative. I do not know what the alternative looks like from his perspective. That concerns me." He pauses. "He is very good at this."

What the Party Can Do

Ask the Yagnoloth Specific Questions

He will answer every question he can answer honestly. He will not speculate beyond his knowledge. If asked whether the Arcanalth can be trusted:

"He can be trusted to honor the specific terms of any agreement he enters into. He cannot be trusted in any broader sense." If asked whether the party should take the deal: "That depends on what the deal is, which we do not know yet, and what you want from this, which only you know."

Research the Contract Halls

DC 13 Investigation using the resistance's document archive or DC 12 History for any party member with relevant background: the Contract Halls is a civic district building that was originally the city's commercial registry, converted to the Arcanalth's use four years ago when the Goristro brought him in. The building is not large by civic standards: four floors, a basement level, approximately 40 by 50 feet of floor space per level. The walls are the contracts. The contracts are the walls. The building would collapse if the contracts were removed. That is not metaphorical.

Prepare for the Regional Effects

The party knows, from the Regime Compendium, that the Contract Halls has regional effects extending 1 mile out. Terms and Conditions means spoken agreements within that radius become semi-binding. Everything is Negotiable means Intimidation checks have disadvantage inside the building. The Rate Schedule means party members who used forged documents the Changeling provided feel an obligation compulsion inside the building. The party should discuss whether to avoid making any statements of intent within 1 mile of the building before they are ready to commit to them.

Ask the Yagnoloth to Come

He will consider it. He says:

"I am the party's most qualified advisor for this situation and also the person most likely to be targeted by his contract reach, given my professional history in this city." He pauses. "I will come if you want me to. I recommend against it." He pauses again. "Though I note that my recommendation is based on self-interest, which is exactly the kind of thing he would point out if I were there."

Ultimately, he will come if the party insists.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

The Yagnoloth has already drafted a preliminary counter-proposal based on the standard infernal contract dissolution framework he knows from his career. It is not complete but it establishes the party's negotiating floor before they enter the building. DC 10 Investigation to understand its key provisions; the party enters with a specific position rather than arriving empty-handed.

Making it Harder

The message included a second sheet the Yagnoloth did not mention immediately. He produces it when the party asks if there is anything else. It is a list of names: people in Orenthis who hold personal contracts with the Arcanalth, citizens who accepted specific protections during the regime in exchange for specific obligations. There are fourteen names. Three of them are people the party has met. The obligations those people accepted are not specified in the list. The party does not know what those people agreed to. The Arcanalth does. He included the list to ensure the party understood the scope before arriving.

Increasing Role Play

Give the party a moment with the message's specific quality. It is polite. It is precise. It is completely without warmth in the way that technically correct language is completely without warmth: every word is the right word and none of them mean anything. The handwriting is very small because he is a creature who has learned to fit significant information into limited space and has never unlearned it. The paper smells like something that has no name.

He has been in that building for four years. He was not afraid when the Writ of Challenge was issued. He was not afraid when the court was restored. He was not afraid when the Goristro fell. He sent the invitation two days after the fall, not immediately, because two days was the appropriate amount of time to wait before initiating contact with a new potential client relationship.

That is all the party is to him. A new potential client relationship.

Treasure and Rewards

No direct rewards.

Development and Dial Impact

No dial changes from this scene. The Mists have already thinned. The regime is over. Dial mechanics are complete.

SCENE 2:

THE CONTRACT HALLS

Entering the building. The regional effects are active from a mile out. Inside, the building is exactly what the Arcanaloith made it.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The Contract Halls is a four-story civic building in the commercial registry district, two blocks from the Supreme Hall. It looks ordinary from the outside: stone construction, standard civic architecture, a sign above the door that reads OFFICE OF COMMERCIAL AND CONTRACTUAL REGISTRY in the original lettering, not the regime's lettering, which is the first indication that this building was never really part of the regime in the way the other buildings were.

The regime used it. He let them use it. There is a difference.

Inside: the walls are contracts. This is not a decorative choice. The original plaster walls have been covered, floor to ceiling, with compressed documents: infernal contracts, addenda, amendments, termination notices, renewal instruments. They are pressed flat and layered three or four deep in places, sealed with something that is not wax and is not glue and holds them in place with the specific permanence of something that has been bound. The contracts cover every surface. The floor is stone. The ceiling is contracts. The walls are contracts. The building would not stand without them.

The air smells like the message. Behind a reception desk that is also covered in contracts, a small humanoid figure of indeterminate type sits with a ledger. It looks up when the party enters.

"Do you have an appointment?" it says.

Features of the Area

The Regional Effects on Entry

From 1 mile out: Terms and Conditions is active. Any spoken agreement the party made while traveling to the Contract Halls is semi-binding. DC 13 Wisdom save to realize this has been active since the party left the safe house; on a failure, a party member realizes mid-entry that something they said on the way,

"we will handle this quickly" or "I will let you do the talking" or any other stated intent, now carries a 1d6 psychic damage penalty if not honored.

Inside the building: Everything is Negotiable. Intimidation checks have disadvantage. The party cannot threaten their way through this encounter. He has heard better threats. He has clauses for them.

The Rate Schedule: party members who used forged documents the Changeling provided at any point in the campaign feel the obligation compulsion described in the regional effect. They know something is owed. They do not know what. DC 15 Insight to identify that the feeling is external and imposed rather than genuine; on a success, they can contextualize it. On a failure, it sits at the back of their mind through the entire encounter.

The Building's Four Floors

Ground floor: The reception area and the filing archives. The archive rooms on either side of the reception desk are accessible (unlocked, no guard). They contain the general contract files: Merregon deployment authority instruments, standard loyalty enforcement frameworks, detention authorization forms. DC 14 Investigation to find anything specific in the archive; the filing system is rigorous and unfamiliar. A party member who spends 10 minutes here before going upstairs finds one specific document: the master Merregon deployment authority instrument that covers all Merregon contracts not voided by the court's restoration in Chapter 12. This is the document the Arcanaloith will use in Scene 3 as a negotiating chip.

Second floor: Personal contract files. Locked (DC 16 Thieves' Tools). Behind the lock: the fourteen personal contracts with Orenthis citizens described in Scene 1's harder variant. Also: personal contracts the Arcanaloith holds with external parties, including two contracts with entities outside Orenthis that establish his operational base if he leaves the domain. These are relevant to the Clean Deal resolution: if the party knows about these contracts before Scene 3, they can negotiate the Clean Deal's terms to include cancellation of those external operational agreements, significantly limiting where he can go and what he can do after leaving.

Third floor: The Arcanaloath's personal archive. Locked (DC 18 Thieves' Tools). Behind the lock: his personal records of every deal brokered in Orenthis. Not the contracts themselves; the notes. His handwritten assessments of every client, every deal, every outcome. The notes on the Goristro are three pages long and contain, on the last page, a single-line assessment dated two weeks before the party entered the Gilded Tower: "Client no longer viable. Begin transition planning." He began transition planning two weeks before the Goristro fell. He was already drafting the invitation.

Fourth floor: His office. Where he is. Where the party is going.

The Staircase

The staircase is covered in contracts like everything else. The lair action Shifting Architecture means the exits on each floor move when the party is not watching; DC 13 Investigation to track the current exit positions as the party ascends; on a failure a party member takes a wrong turn and arrives at the correct floor one round later than intended. This is not threatening. It is inconvenient in the specific way that his building is designed to be inconvenient.

The Encounter

The figure at the reception desk is a Skeroloth fiend in a very small suit. It does not have a name either. It has a ledger and a quill and the specific affect of something that has been processing appointments for a long time and has achieved a kind of bureaucratic peace with its existence.

It confirms the party's appointment (they are in the ledger; he added them when the invitation was delivered, before they accepted), provides directions to the fourth floor ("he is expecting you"), and offers, with genuine helpfulness, to take their weapons for safekeeping during the meeting.

It will not compel them to give up their weapons. It will ask three times with increasing politeness. On the third refusal it notes "noted" in the ledger and gestures toward the staircase.

What the Party Can Do

Search the Archive Floors

The ground floor archive is accessible without a check. The second floor requires DC 16 Thieves' Tools. The third floor requires DC 18. Each floor's contents are described above. A party that searches before going to the fourth floor arrives at Scene 3 with more information than the Arcanaloath knows they have. He will notice, politely.

Accept the Weapon Offer

If the party leaves their weapons at reception: they receive a claim ticket. The Skeroloth holds the weapons carefully and without any indication of malice. At the end of the encounter, the weapons are returned. This is not a trap. He does not need the party disarmed. He noted it in the ledger and moved on.

Ignore the Shifting Architecture

A party that does not track the exit positions and simply moves toward the upper floors will arrive where they are going eventually. The exits move but the building is not a maze; it just makes navigation slightly more effort than it should be. DC 13 Investigation per floor to navigate efficiently; failure costs 1 round.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

The filing system on the ground floor is organized by the Skeroloth's simpler secondary index rather than the Arcanaloath's primary system; DC 11 Investigation to find the master Merregon deployment instrument. The party has a significant negotiating chip before entering Scene 3.

Making it Harder

The Terms and Conditions effect caught the party in a specific statement on the way to the building: one party member said something that constitutes a stated intent that is now semi-binding. The DM identifies which statement (something from travel conversation, a preparation discussion, anything that could be construed as a commitment). The party member now knows that going back on that statement costs 1d6 psychic damage. This creates a specific constraint on their Scene 3 negotiating position that the Arcanaloath does not know about but would find professionally satisfying if he learned.

Increasing Role Play

The contracts on the walls. Give the party one specific contract they can read as they ascend: a standard Merregon deployment authority instrument for a unit that was stationed at the Chapter 3 border garrison. The contract is precise. The obligations are specific. The compensation clause specifies what the Merregons received in exchange for their service. The contract does not mention the people detained at that garrison. It does not need to. That was the client's direction. The contract only covers the service provided.

Every atrocity the regime committed had paperwork like this behind it. He drafted the paperwork. He did not draft the atrocity. The distinction he draws is in this document, expressed in perfect legal language, and it is both real and completely insufficient.

Treasure and Rewards

From the Archive Floors (if searched):

- Master Merregon deployment authority instrument (significant negotiating chip in Scene 3; DC 14 Investigation to find on ground floor)
 - Second floor: personal contracts with Orenthis citizens and external operational contracts (DC 16 Thieves' Tools; limits the Clean Deal terms available)
 - Third floor: personal notes including the "client no longer viable" notation (DC 18 Thieves' Tools; changes the quality of Scene 3 but not its mechanics)
-

Development and Dial Impact

No dial changes from this scene. The Mists have already thinned. The regime is over. Dial mechanics are complete.

SCENE 3:

THE MEETING

The fourth floor. He is there. He has been expecting the party. The meeting that the chapter has been building toward.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The fourth floor is his office. Unlike every other surface in the building the walls here are not contracts. They are bookshelves. Floor to ceiling, dense, organized by a system that makes immediate sense if you look at it for more than a moment: alphabetical by client name within categorical sections organized by contract type. The accumulated record of a very long career.

He is behind a desk. The desk is large and clear: no papers on the surface, no visible files, no indication that work is in progress. He prefers a clear desk. He prepares thoroughly and then puts the preparation away. The desk is for the conversation.

He is exactly what the Regime Compendium describes: a jackal-headed yugoloth in a well-fitted suit, with the posture of someone who has been sitting behind desks in important meetings for a very long time and has achieved a specific comfort with the position. He looks up when the party enters. He smiles. The smile does not reach his eyes because his eyes are the eyes of something that processes information rather than experiences it.

"Excellent," he says. "Please, sit down."

There are exactly the right number of chairs.

Features of the Area

The Office

50 by 40 feet. Bookshelves on three walls. The desk at center. A window behind him overlooking the civic district; from this window the Supreme Hall is visible, and beyond it, the Gilded Tower, which no longer has its golden banners.

No cover except the desk (half cover, AC 14, 30 HP if combat begins). The bookshelves contain the lair action sources for Sealed Record and The Original Copy; destroying a bookshelf (AC 13, 40 HP) removes one of those lair action sources permanently.

The Encounter

The Arcanath's Opening

He begins with a statement of what he is and what he is not. He has been preparing this statement for two days and it is precise.

Read or paraphrase the following:

"I want to be clear about my position before we discuss terms," he says. "I am a contractor. I provided services to the former administration. I drafted legal instruments. I did not direct policy. I did not order detentions. I did not design the programs your campaign addressed." He folds his hands on the desk. "The former administration directed me to make certain things legally enforceable. I made them legally enforceable. The direction and the enforceability are different services."

He looks at the party.

"I expect you find this distinction insufficient. Most people in your position do." He does not say this with contempt. He says it with the specific patience of someone who has had this conversation before and found that it never resolves the way the other party wants it to. "I am not offering it as an exoneration. I am offering it as an accurate description of what happened, which is relevant to what we are about to discuss."

He opens a folder on the desk. Inside it is a two-page document.

"My proposal," he says. "I will void all outstanding infernal contracts in Orenthis voluntarily and immediately upon signature. Every Merregon deployment authority. Every loyalty enforcement clause. Every detention authorization. Every personal contract with any Orenthis citizen. Voided. Completely. Within the hour." He slides the document across the desk. "In exchange: safe passage from Orenthis and the right to operate elsewhere. No pursuit. No legal action through the restored court. A clean exit."

He looks at the party.

"This is a good offer. You know it is a good offer. I know it is a good offer." He pauses. "I also want to be transparent about something, because transparency is professionally useful at this stage: I am offering this because the alternative is a protracted legal dispute over contract validity that will take months to resolve and will leave the infernal obligations active throughout. I am not offering it out of goodwill. I do not have goodwill. I

have a fee schedule and a desire to close this file and move on."

*He leans back.
"Questions?"*

The Termination Clause Moment

At some point in the first few minutes of the conversation, before any commitment is made, he says the following:

"One additional point of information." He looks at the party member most likely to have used the Changeling's forged documents at any point in the campaign. "You are party to one of my contracts. Not knowingly. The documents provided to you through the Changeling's network were produced under a master service agreement that included a reach clause extending to end users." He pauses. "You did not sign anything. You did not agree to anything. You used a document. Under the terms of my agreement with the Changeling, that constitutes acceptance of the reach clause."

He does not threaten. He informs.

"I mention this not as leverage, which would be crude, but as a point of information that is relevant to your decision-making. You have an existing relationship with my contracts whether or not you choose to formalize it today." He pauses. "I wanted you to know."

He lets that sit for exactly the right amount of time. Then he moves on.

If no party member used forged documents from the Changeling: he mentions it anyway, directed at the party in general, noting that several members of the resistance network accepted operational support that ran through his service agreements. He lets the party determine whether this applies to any of them. It is still a demonstration of reach.

What He Has

He does not bluff. Everything he says in this meeting is accurate.

His strengths:

- The contracts are valid and active
- The voiding offer is genuine and complete
- The safe passage terms are the minimum he needs, not the maximum he wants
- He has fourteen personal contracts with Orenthis citizens whose obligations he has not disclosed to the party and will not

disclose unless the party discovers them before this scene

- He has external operational contracts that establish his base after leaving Orenthis (discoverable in Scene 2's second floor archive)
- He has The Termination Clause available against any party member who used the Changeling's documents

His weaknesses, if the party has found them:

- The master Merregon deployment instrument is in the party's possession (ground floor archive): he knows they have it, if they found it; he does not react with alarm; he simply notes "you have been thorough" and adjusts his terms slightly, reducing the safe passage radius
- The personal contracts and external operational contracts (second floor archive): if the party found these, they can negotiate the Clean Deal's terms to include cancellation of those contracts, significantly limiting his post-Orenthis options
- The personal notes including "client no longer viable" (third floor archive): if the party found these, they know he was planning this transition before the Goristro fell; this does not change the mechanics but it changes the conversation; he acknowledges it without embarrassment: "Competent contractors plan for client transitions"

What the Party Can Do

Negotiations

- DC 15 Insight to identify that his warmth is performed and his calculation is continuous: he is assessing every party response for negotiating information even when he appears to be listening.
- DC 16 Persuasion to extract an additional concession beyond the default Clean Deal terms. Each successful check adds one negotiated addition. Maximum of three additions regardless of check results.
- DC 18 Insight to identify when he is at his actual negotiating floor: the moment when he will not make further concessions. This is useful for knowing when to stop pushing and when to accept what is on the table.
- DC 20 Persuasion to obtain the written acknowledgment. He declines even on a success; he smiles and says "That was well argued" and declines anyway. Some things are not negotiable regardless of skill.

Clean Deal

The Clean Deal's default terms are: complete voiding of all Orenthis contracts plus safe passage plus no legal pursuit. The party can negotiate additions:

- Cancellation of external operational contracts (requires finding the second floor archive or DC 17 Insight to identify that he has them): significantly limits where he goes and what he does; he accepts this reluctantly and revises his fee upward; if the party has no additional fee to offer he accepts anyway because the alternative is worse
- Disclosure and voiding of personal citizen contracts (requires finding the second floor archive or DC 15 Investigation to identify that they exist): he accepts; he had planned to void them anyway as part of the exit; he was withholding it as a concession to offer if needed
- A timeline for departure (not in his original terms): he accepts any timeline up to 30 days; beyond 30 days he declines; he has things to do
- Written acknowledgment of his role in the regime's legal architecture (the party's most personal demand, not a practical negotiating chip): he considers this for a long moment. Then he says: "That document would be admissible before the restored court. I am not interested in creating admissible evidence." He declines. This is the one term he will not accept.

That last refusal is the most honest thing he does in the meeting. He will void every contract. He will limit his operations. He will accept a departure timeline. He will not sign a document admitting what he did because that document would follow him. He draws the line at accountability. Not because he is ashamed. Because accountability has costs he is unwilling to absorb.

Complete End

If the party declines all terms and indicates they intend to fight: he sits back. He folds his hands. He says one thing:

"I want you to know that I consider this a professional failure on my part. A negotiation that ends in combat is a negotiation that was not conducted correctly." He looks at the party. "I am curious which part I miscalculated."

He genuinely wants to know. He will listen to the answer before initiative is rolled. If the party tells him: he considers it. He says *"I see."* He does not change his position. He notes it for future reference.

Then he says: *"Shall we?"*

And combat begins.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Easier

He opens with the additional concessions already on the table, having calculated that the party is more likely to accept a comprehensive offer than a minimal one. The personal citizen contracts and the timeline are included in his first proposal without negotiation. The party only needs to push for the external operational contract cancellation.

Making it Harder

He has identified, through the Terms and Conditions regional effect, a specific statement of intent one party member made on the way to the building. He mentions it early in the conversation: "I note that one of you indicated an intent to accept a reasonable offer during your approach. I want to be transparent that I am aware of this and have structured my proposal accordingly." He is using the regional effect to establish that he knows the party's negotiating position before they reveal it. The party member who made the statement takes 1d6 psychic damage if they now act contrary to it.

Increasing Role Play

When he says he does not have goodwill: let the party react to that. Not the revelation that he lacks goodwill; they knew that. The specific quality of someone who says it plainly, without embarrassment or apology, as a professional disclosure. He is telling them that no amount of moral argument will change his position because moral argument does not interface with his decision-making. Not because he is defiant. Because he literally does not have the framework for it to work on.

This is the campaign's final encounter with the specific form of evil that is not passionate or ideological or cruel: the evil of a creature that simply does not include harm to others as a relevant variable in its calculations. The Goristro wanted something. The Rakshasa believed in her system. The Archmage chose the work. This creature chose nothing. It just optimizes.

Give the party a moment with that before they decide what to do about it.

Treasure and Rewards

No direct rewards in this scene. The negotiated terms are the reward.

Development and Dial Impact

No dial changes from this scene. The Mists have already thinned. The regime is over. Dial mechanics are complete.

SCENE 4:

THE RESOLUTION

The party decides. This scene has two full paths. Both are written. Both are complete. The DM runs whichever the party chose.

The Clean Deal

Read or paraphrase the following:

The party signs the agreement. Or indicates assent, if they negotiated terms that changed the document enough that a signature feels different from what was originally proposed. The Arcanaloath countersigns immediately, without reading it again; he already knows what it says.

He produces a small device from his desk drawer: an infernal contract dissolution instrument, a brass cylinder approximately 8 inches long with markings in Infernal script along its surface. He holds it up briefly so the party can see it.

"This voids all outstanding contracts simultaneously," he says. "Once activated it cannot be reversed." He pauses. "I want to be clear that I am honoring this agreement because honoring agreements is the basis of my professional reputation and my professional reputation is my most significant asset." He looks at the party. "Not because of anything else."

He activates the instrument. The walls of the building shift. Not dramatically: the contracts pressed into the surfaces do not fall. But something leaves them. The quality of binding that has been present in every surface since the party entered simply stops being present. The contracts are still there, physically. They are no longer active. They are paper.

Throughout Orenthis: every remaining infernal obligation in the regime's legal architecture simultaneously voids. The Merregons whose contracts were still active disengage. The detention frameworks that were still technically operational dissolve. The fourteen personal citizen contracts void. Whatever obligations those citizens accepted and have been carrying, some of them for years, without knowing exactly what they agreed to, are gone.

Outside, in the streets, several people stop walking. They do not know what changed. They know

something changed. They look around. They continue walking.

The Arcanaloath stands. He straightens his jacket. "I will be leaving within the agreed timeline," he says. He looks at the party with the closest thing to genuine assessment he has offered in the meeting. "You negotiated competently. Given the constraints." He picks up his briefcase, which has been beside the desk the entire time and which the party perhaps noticed and perhaps did not. "I expect we will not meet again. I find Orenthis's current trajectory unprofitable."

He walks to the window. Not the door. The window. He opens it. He steps out. The party, if they go to the window immediately: he is gone. The street below is empty.

He left through the window because leaving through a door would have meant passing the party and he calculated that unnecessary proximity to the party at that moment was not in his interest. Everything he does is calculated. Including the exit.

The Building After

The Contract Halls' walls are now paper. The structure is still standing; it took time for the walls to become what they are and it will take time for them to stop being structural. But they are no longer bound. Within days the building will need to be cleared and shored up or it will begin to deteriorate.

The Yagnoloth, informed of the outcome via sending stone, is quiet for a moment. Then he says: "He honored the agreement." He pauses. "I expected that. It is still notable." Another pause. "The fourteen citizen contracts are void. I will begin identifying and notifying those individuals. Some of them have been carrying obligations for years without fully understanding what they agreed to." He pauses once more. "This is a good outcome. It is not a complete outcome. He is somewhere else now, beginning again. That is the cost of the clean path." He does not say this as criticism. He says it as accounting.

What This Outcome Means

Every infernal contract in Orenthis is void. The Merregons are free. The detention architecture is dissolved. The fourteen citizens are released from obligations they may not have fully understood. The governance transition has no infernal legal complications.

He is somewhere else. He has his professional reputation intact. He has the accumulated knowledge of every deal he brokered in Orenthis. He has the external operational contracts if the party did not negotiate their cancellation. He will begin again. Not in Orenthis; he said the trajectory was unprofitable and he meant it. Somewhere else. Some other regime, some other client, some other legal architecture built on infernal contract authority. The party won Orenthis. They did not win the last word.

The Complete End

Read or paraphrase the following:

The party declines the terms. The Arcanaloath nods once, the specific nod of a creature that had a contingency for this and is activating it, and says "I see" and stands up and the combat begins.

The Combat

The Arcanaloath is CR 15 with Legendary Resistance (3/day), Escape Clause reaction, and his full lair action suite. At 16th level the party has a significant power advantage. The fight is not balanced in the traditional sense. It is a question of whether the lair actions and The Termination Clause and the Counteroffer reaction can cost the party enough resources to make the CR 15 encounter feel earned rather than trivial.

Opening

He does not charge. He teleports immediately via the Clause legendary action to the far corner of the room, creating maximum distance between himself and melee characters. He casts wall of force on his first action turn, dividing the room. He uses Binding Language at the end of the first round to silence the party's primary spell-caster.

Round 1

He uses wall of force to divide the room. He casts finger of death against the party member who most recently made a moral argument to him; this is the spell he reserves for people who argue values with him. He uses Clause legendary action to maintain distance. At initiative count 20: Shifting Architecture fires; all exits move; party members making movement-dependent tactical decisions must succeed on DC 16 Intelligence save or be Disoriented.

Round 2

He uses Binding Clause lair action against the party's highest-level spell-caster. He casts blight against a clustered group. Counteroffer reaction fires when any party member succeeds on a save: "Alternatively," he says, mid-combat, with complete composure, "I can offer you a modified version of the original terms." The offer is real. It is slightly worse than before because the combat counts against him. If the party accepts mid-combat: he voids the wall of force and returns to the desk. The Clean Deal proceeds with marginally reduced additional concessions available.

Round 3+

The Termination Clause fires against the party member subject to his contract reach. DC 18 Charisma save or Stunned until end of next turn. He uses Sealed Record lair action against whoever is currently dealing the most damage: 4d8 psychic damage and disadvantage on next attack. He uses Counteroffer again if Escape Clause has not yet triggered. He does not rage. He does not panic. He fights with the specific composure of someone who has planned for this and is executing the plan.

Escape Clause

When first reduced to 0 HP: he drops to 1 HP and teleports 120 feet. All active contract effects continue. He is now in the ground floor archive.

He says, from wherever he teleported to: "*Last chance. Modified terms. I will include the external operational contract cancellation at no additional cost.*"

He means this. He would prefer the deal even now. He is at 1 HP and he is still offering the deal.

If the party declines again and pursues, the party will be facing him at 1 HP and all remaining actions and legendary actions still available. His stat block does not artificially extend the fight past this. If he is reduced to 0 HP again, he does not have another Escape Clause. He falls and the contract voids trigger.

When He Falls

He does not dissolve into mist. He falls the way a creature falls when it runs out of options and the options were always the thing keeping it upright.

The contracts on the walls begin to detach. Not fall, but detach, edges lifting, the binding that held them releasing. They float for a moment in the way that very light things float when they lose their anchor, and then they begin to come down. Slowly. All of them. Floor to ceiling, every surface, every compressed layer, simultaneously releasing. The party has 10 minutes before the structure becomes unsafe.

Descending the Collapsing Building:
Each floor requires a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw from each character as sections of contract-wall give way. On a failure, the character takes 2d10 bludgeoning damage from falling debris and debris clears their path for the round, adding 1 round to their descent. At 16th level, this is survivable pressure rather than a serious threat. The goal is to make the exit feel earned, not to endanger a party that just defeated an opponent

The Reception Desk:
The Skeroloth at the reception desk is gone; it left when its employer fell.

Outside:
Every infernal contract in Orenthis voids simultaneously. The same outcome as the Clean Deal, happening faster and with more immediate chaos. The Merregons disengage at once across the city; not the gradual one-by-one process of the Clean Deal's instrument but all of them, simultaneously, stopping. The fourteen citizens' obligations void. The detention frameworks dissolve.

The difference from the Clean Deal:
He does not go somewhere else. He is gone. Not plane shifted; his body is here, in the building that is coming down around it, and it will not be getting up.

He does not build something somewhere else. He does not begin again. The accumulated knowledge and professional reputation and client relationships end here.

The party won Orenthis. They also won the last word. The last word cost them something: resources, time, perhaps even the moral weight of killing.

The party should know what it cost. Not to regret it, just to know it.

The Building After

The Contract Halls comes down. Not immediately and not catastrophically: the walls release their binding over the 10 minutes and then the plaster beneath, never having been properly maintained while covered by contracts, begins to fail. The building is condemned within the week. The Yagnoloth, via sending stone:

"He is gone." A pause. "All contracts are void. The chaos is manageable. We have been through worse." Another pause. "The building will need to come down. The land parcel is valuable." A pause. "I will handle the paperwork."

He does not editorialize on the party's choice. He never does.

What Both Outcomes Share

In both paths: every infernal contract in Orenthis is void. The Merregons are free. The detention architecture is dissolved. The personal citizen obligations are gone. The governance transition has no infernal legal complications. Orenthis is clean.

The difference is whether the cleaner is still operating somewhere.

The party made the right call for their campaign. Both calls are right calls. The Arcanaloth had a position. The position had merit. The party assessed the merit and decided what to do with it. That is what the campaign has been asking the party to do since Chapter 1.

Treasure and Rewards

No direct rewards in this scene.

Development and Dial Impact

No dial changes from this scene. The Mists have already thinned. The regime is over. Dial mechanics are complete.

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

What the Party Should Know

- Every infernal contract in Orenthis is void. This is true regardless of which path was taken. The regime's legal architecture, the specific infernal enforcement mechanism that made the Merregons binding and the detention frameworks enforceable and the loyalty clauses operational, is gone. Completely. The Goristro's fall dismantled the political authority. The Chapter 19 outcome dismantled the contractual authority. Both were required for a complete resolution.
- The Arcanaloth is either gone to somewhere else or simply gone. Both outcomes are complete in their own way. The party knows which one they chose and what it cost.
- The fourteen citizens who held personal contracts have been released from obligations they may not have fully understood. The Yagnoloth is identifying and notifying them. Some of them will be relieved. Some of them will not know what they were relieved of. A few of them, the ones who accepted specific protections in exchange for specific obligations, will need to reconcile what they agreed to with what the campaign produced. That is their work, not the party's. The party freed them from the obligation. What they do with the freedom is theirs.
- Orenthis is now completely free of the regime's infernal legal architecture. The Foundational Compact governs. The restored court administers. The Yagnoloth manages the transition. The people continue choosing.

Character Advancement

None.

Downtime (Optional)

None.

The Final Beat

Read or paraphrase the following, regardless of which path was taken:

Two days after the Contract Halls resolution, Mira finds the party. She is not at the safe house and she is not at the Supreme Hall. She is at the edge of the city, at the point where the Mists have thinned enough to show the road north.

She is looking at the road.

"I have been standing here for an hour," she says, when the party arrives. "I keep thinking I should go. I keep not going." She does not look away from the road. "I spent four years building something that needed me to stay. I do not know if what comes next needs me to stay or to go."

She looks at the party.

"What are you going to do?"

She is asking genuinely. Not as a lead-in to advice. Not as a setup for a speech. She is asking because she does not know what she is going to do and the people standing next to her are the people she trusts most to have thought about it.

The party answers however they answer. She listens.

Then she nods, once, and says: "Good."

She looks at the road one more time. Then she turns back toward the city.

"There is still work to do," she says. Not as a resignation. As a fact, assessed, and addressed. The same way Sister Kara says things.

She walks back into Oren.

The road is still there. It will still be there when the party is ready for it.

The campaign is complete.

Considerations

If the Clean Deal was taken and the party is troubled by his departure: the Yagnoloth, if asked, says: "He will do this again somewhere else. Yes. That is the cost." He pauses. "The alternative cost was different. Both costs were real. You chose which cost to accept." He returns to his paperwork. He does not have an opinion about which cost was correct. Or he has an opinion and does not share it. With the Yagnoloth it is genuinely difficult to tell.

If the Complete End was taken and the party wonders whether it was right: Sister Kara, if asked, says: "He drafted the documents that made the detentions enforceable. He drafted the documents that made the family separations legally structured rather than simple violence." She looks at the party. "I do not know if that is sufficient reason. I know what it produced." She does not complete the sentence. She does not need to.

If the party stands at the road's edge after Mira leaves: give them the view. The mountain passes to the north, partially visible through the thinning Mists. The road going somewhere. The city behind them, in the early stages of being what it chose to be. Both of those things are true simultaneously, the city and the road, the thing they built and the thing they can go to next.

The campaign gave them both.

What they do with both is their story to tell next.

Epilogue A New Dawn Rising



"We did not fix everything. We fixed enough. The difference between those two things is where the rest of the work lives."

INTRODUCTION

While the campaign ended in Chapter 18, epilogues are for what happens after endings. Here, it is the specific, unheroic, necessary work of becoming a place that chose itself.

The Goristro is gone. Not permanently; the party knows this, Orenthis knows this, and the knowledge sits at the back of every decision being made in the city's recovery like a distant weather system that has not arrived yet and may not arrive for four years. There is time. Time is the thing the campaign produced that no chapter specifically named: the ability to take the next step without the regime deciding whether the step was permitted.

Not a perfect Orenthis.
Not a resolved Orenthis.
But an Orenthis with time.

The epilogue covers the weeks and months following the liberation. It is structured as three scenes that span this period. Each scene is a specific moment rather than a summary. Each one is a thread from the campaign's chapters arriving at its next position.

Several things will not be resolved by this chapter. The Goristro will return. The Archmage's reconstruction document is unfinished. Bowman is in his role and that role is not simple. The Kenku is somewhere. The road is still there.

What the epilogue does is give the party the specific satisfaction of seeing what they built while it is still new: before the complications accumulate and the governance gets difficult and the Goristro's four-year clock becomes something people think about again. The specific window between liberation and the next problem.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Scene 1: The First Weeks

One week after the liberation. The morning of the Supreme Court's first full public proceeding. The party is at Orna's bakery before they go to the Supreme Hall. The specific quality of a city taking stock of itself. Then the proceeding itself: the complete legal record presented out loud in the institution built for exactly that purpose.

Scene 1 should feel like the exhale after a very long held breath, followed by the specific satisfaction of the truth being stated permanently.

Scene 2: The Threads

Two months after the liberation. The people the party has been traveling alongside for sixteen chapters arrive at their next positions.

Bowman. The Kenku. Havin and Petra. Veth. Sister Kara. Tam. Lyra. Henrik. Fenn. Joran again. Each one gets a specific beat.

Scene 2 should feel like checking in on people the party has spent the campaign caring about and finding them, most of them, in recognizable versions of themselves.

Scene 3: The Road

Three months after the liberation. The party stands at the edge of the city where the road is visible through the thinned Mists. This is the campaign's last scene. What happens here belongs to the party.

Scene 3 should feel like the end of one story and the beginning of the next one, held at exactly the right distance from each other.

RUNNING THE CHAPTER

Designed for: post-campaign

Sessions: 1

This chapter has no combat. It has no required skill checks. It has no dial mechanics and no advancement and no treasure. What it has is the specific reward of seeing what the party's choices produced when given time to develop.

The primary goals are:

- Give every significant campaign thread a specific landing position rather than a summary
- Honor the campaign's themes: community, truth, the difference between defeating a tyrant and building what comes after
- Find the full-circle threads and let them land
- End on the road, which is the campaign's final honest image

Guidance

Specificity Over Summary

Every beat in this chapter should be a specific moment rather than a general statement about how things turned out. Not "the city recovered gradually" but a specific morning, a specific person, a specific detail that makes the recovery real rather than abstract. The campaign earned specificity. The epilogue should deliver it.

The Party Is Present

The epilogue scenes are not narrated from a distance. The party is in each scene, present and available to interact. Give the players agency in every beat. Let them ask questions. Let them do things. The epilogue is not a cutscene.

The Full-Circle Moments

Several threads from Chapter 1 are available for explicit full-circle beats. The garrison documents that started everything. The halfling man from the Chapter 1 opening whose name appeared in the propaganda archive in Chapter 17. Joran, who has been feeding the resistance since Chapter 2 and whose flour supply was reclassified by the regime. Find these moments and use them.

Not Everything Is Resolved

The epilogue should not wrap everything neatly. The Goristro will return. Some of the Project Provenance subjects are carrying damage that will not heal quickly. The governance is genuinely difficult and the Foundational Compact's application to specific disputes is already producing arguments. Bowman is Bowman. The Kenku is wherever she is. The world the party built has problems and the problems are the sign that it is real.

SCENE 1: THE FIRST WEEKS

One week after the liberation. The morning of the Supreme Court's first full public proceeding. The party starts at Orna's bakery. Then they go to the Supreme Hall.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The resistance safe house is quieter than it has been since Chapter 2. Not empty: Mira is at the table, going through the governance transition documents the Yagnoloth sent over this morning, which are substantial. Lyra's operational map is still on the wall. It has not been updated since Chapter 18; the map of a resistance campaign that is no longer a resistance campaign. Lyra has not taken it down. No one has asked her to.

Through the window: the city. A week old as a free city. The golden banners are down everywhere; the Merregons who used to maintain them are gone and nobody replaced them, so the banners simply came down when they were no longer kept up. The flagpoles are still there. Several of them have new banners: white cloth, improvised, bearing a broken chain symbol that is clearly hand-drawn and not consistent between different people's interpretations of what a broken chain looks like.

The market is open. Not fully; about half the stalls are operational. But open.

And two blocks from the safe house, in the ground floor of the building where he has been since Chapter 2: Orna's bakery is open. It was open yesterday too. It was the first business in the district to open after the liberation, which surprised no one who knew Orna.

The Bakery

The shop is small and warm and smells the way it has always smelled: the specific combination of bread and early morning and a person who has been up since before anyone else. Joran is behind the counter. He is exactly who he has been for sixteen chapters: broad-shouldered, calm, the expression of someone whose work makes consistent physical sense to him in a world that has not always made sense otherwise.

When the party enters he looks up. He does not make a speech. He is Joran; he does not make speeches.

He puts bread on the counter. Fresh bread, the first batch of the morning. He says: "Sit down. You look tired."

If the party sits: he brings them the bread and sits across from them and they have a conversation that the campaign has been building toward since Chapter 2 when he first fed the resistance and said nothing except that he would keep feeding them. He asks about specific people. Not in general; specifically. He asks about Tam by name. He asks whether Sister Kara is alright. He asks whether the court is going to be able to handle what is coming.

He does not ask about the Goristro or the liberation or any of the large things. He asks about the people. Because Joran has always understood that the large things are made of the specific people and the specific people are the point.

At some point during this conversation he produces, from under the counter, a small ledger. He sets it on the table.

"That is the supply record," he says. "Every delivery I made to the network. Every pickup. Every time someone came through the back door." He looks at the party. "I kept it because I thought someone should." He pauses. "I do not know what to do with it now."

The ledger is not evidence. The regime is over. It does not need to be evidence. What it is, is the record of one person who fed the resistance for sixteen chapters and wrote it all down because he thought someone should.

If the party takes it and delivers it to the court: the eldest Justiciar accepts it, reads the first three pages carefully, and says: "This goes in the founding archive. Not the legal record. The founding archive." It places the ledger beside the Foundational Compact. The document that established the legal framework and the document that recorded how people fed each other through the crisis, side by side.

At some point during the visit, the party notices the flour sacks stacked behind the counter. More than he would have had under the regime's classification.

"The supply came through," Joran says. He goes back to work.

He is not being understated for effect. This is just how he experiences things. The supply came through. He is baking. This is correct.

Before the party leaves for the proceeding: Joran says one more thing. He says it to the table, not to the party specifically.

"I used to think about what it would look like. After." He picks up the cloth he uses to wipe the counter and wipes it. "I thought it would feel bigger." He looks at the morning light through the window. "It just feels like morning."

Osso Brightpenny

His name was in the propaganda archive in Chapter 17, in the category of people whose papers were expired. The notation said "successfully reprocessed, Chapter 3 detention facility." He is a cobbler. His shop, two doors from Orna's bakery, opened four days ago.

If the party goes to the cobbler's shop before the proceeding: it is small and functional and smells like leather. Osso is working. He looks up when the party enters. If the party identifies themselves as resistance members: he is quiet for a moment. Then he says: "I heard what you did. All of it." He looks at his workbench. "I have been sitting in my cousin's house for eight months waiting to open my shop." He picks up the piece he was working on. "I opened it."

He does not say thank you. He shows them the open shop. That is the same thing and more specific.

The Supreme Hall

The first full public proceeding. Three weeks condensed into this morning for the purpose of the scene: the party has been to the bakery, the city has had its first weeks, and now they are in the Supreme Hall for the moment the legal record is made permanent.

The gallery seats are full. Not with legal professionals: with people. The people of Oren who wanted to hear it stated out loud, in the institution built for exactly this purpose, by the judges who were bound and gagged for three years and are now neither.

The eldest Justiciar opens the proceeding.

Read or paraphrase the following:

"The Supreme Court of Orenthis is in session. The matter before the court is the formal charge against the Goristro, formerly self-proclaimed authority of Orenthis, on the evidence presented and authenticated by the court's investigation." It looks at the gallery. "The record is open."

The evidence is presented by whoever the party nominates or the Yagnoloth by default. The presentation takes three hours. The gallery does not leave.

The garrison documents from Chapter 1. The purge orders from Chapter 7. The dual-authorization document from Chapter 9. The Foundational Compact. The Project Provenance operational records. Fenn's personal testimony, which she reads herself, standing at the petitioner's position, in the same voice she used to brief the party in Sub-Level 3. The Archmage's research journal with the finding about community-based cognitive resistance. The Rakshasa's correspondence. The Goristro's personal letters.

Each piece lands differently in the gallery.

The garrison documents: the people in the gallery who were in the city when those quotas were running look at each other.

The dual-authorization document: a sound in the gallery that is not quite a reaction and not quite silence.

Fenn's testimony: the gallery is very quiet. She finishes. She sits down. She does not look at the gallery because she does not need to.

The Archmage's finding, presented last: the eldest Justiciar reads the relevant section directly into the record. Then it says, in the specific voice of a three-century institution reading a conclusion into the permanent legal record:

"The regime's primary mechanism of control produced, as a documented and verified consequence, the strengthening of the community bonds it sought to destroy. The court finds this relevant not only to the legal record but to the understanding of what Orenthis is and what it demonstrated under conditions designed to end it."

The gallery hears this. Someone begins to cry. Someone else begins to applaud. The applause spreads. The eldest Justiciar does not gavel it down. It waits. When the gallery quiets on its own, it continues.

The verdict: the Goristro is found guilty on all counts in absentia. The order is signed by all three Justiciars. The third Justiciar applies its seal last. It says: "The record is complete."

Avena Marsh

The court clerk who hid the evidence vault key behind the second scale on the left in Chapter 12. Who told the Justiciar where it was and was re-bound within the hour.

Her name was Avena Marsh. She was a junior court clerk, twenty-three years old when the regime began. She is in the garrison detention records from Chapter 3: taken in Year 2 for administrative interference. No release date.

The third Justiciar, after the proceeding, if the party speaks with it: "Avena Marsh hid the key. I told her where. She was taken within the month." It is quiet. "The key was where she put it. The court was restored. The record is now complete." Another pause. "Her name will be in the founding archive."

It does not say more than this. It does not need to.

What the Party Can Do

Deliver Joran's Ledger

To the court before the proceeding: the founding archive moment as described. The Foundational Compact and the supply ledger, side by side.

Visit Osso

Two doors from Joran. The open shop. The cobbler at work.

Present the Evidence

If any party member presents at the proceeding: let the player choose two specific documents to highlight and what to say about where they were found. The garrison documents from Chapter 1. Fenn's testimony. The research journal. Let the player choose the moments that matter to their character.

Find Avena Marsh's File

DC 11 Investigation in the court's personnel archive after the proceeding. Her file is there. The party can add it to the founding archive alongside Joran's ledger.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Warmer

Joran has been baking since before dawn specifically because he knew the party would probably come by today. He does not say this. The bread is warm. The timing is not coincidental.

Making it Heavier

One of Joran's regular customers before the regime, an elderly woman named Sera, did not come back. Joran does not say this unprompted. If the party asks who used to come in: he mentions her. She was taken in the loyalty purges, Year 2. Her roll is still on the menu. He makes it every morning. He has been making it every morning for three years. He does not explain why.

Increasing Role Play

When the eldest Justiciar reads the Archmage's finding into the record and the gallery responds: give the party a moment to look at the people around them. These are the people the finding is about. They are sitting in the institution built to protect their truth, hearing it stated into the permanent legal record, and they are applauding not for victory but for recognition.

They were right. The court just said so. In the permanent record. In the institution that will outlast everyone in the room.

That is what the party built.

SCENE 2: THE THREADS

Two months after the liberation. The people the party has been traveling alongside for sixteen chapters arrive at their next positions.

This scene is structured as a series of specific moments rather than a single location. The party moves through these beats at their own pace. Some tables will linger. Some will move quickly. Both are correct. The only beat that should not be skipped is the Message Delivery. Everything else can be visited in any order or abbreviated.

The Kenku

She is not in Oren. She has not been in Oren since she stepped off the exterior maintenance platform in Chapter 17.

DC 14 Investigation through the resistance's network and Tam's contacts: she is in a village northeast along the Thornwood road, past the empty border garrison, past the site of the Chapter 2 cairn. She is not broadcasting. She is staying with the family that built the cairn at the ambush site. Their son was in the border garrison detention in Chapter 3.

If the party goes to the village: she is there. She sees them coming. She does not run. She looks at them with the expression she has always had.

If the party asks why she is here: she produces one fragment, in the voice of the woman whose family she is staying with: *"Stay here for a while."*

That is as much resolution as the Kenku gets. The tension between Chapter 4 and Chapter 17 does not resolve. She is in a village northeast along the Thornwood road, staying with a family, for reasons that are hers and not the campaign's to explain

Bowman

Bowman is no longer in his grand office. He is found in a windowless basement of the new civil service building. Stacks of mundane travel permits and tax forms pile high on a simple wooden table. The air is stale and the lighting is poor.

He is no longer managing international treaties. He has been relegated to a low level clerk. He spends his days processing the very bureaucracy he once used for high stakes espionage. He is a pencil pusher whose only remaining skill is the perfect reproduction of a bureaucrat's signature. He seems strangely content with the lack of stakes. The Yagnoloth's oversight of his work is absolute.

When the party visits, he looks up from a stack of residential permits. He says:

"The second district needs approval for three new market stalls. I need the court's authentication seal on these files by Thursday." He pauses. "Do you need something or are you checking on me?"

If the party says they are checking on him:

"Reasonable." He returns to his stamping. Then, without looking up: "The reconstruction is functioning. The governance structure is sound. The oversight is annoying and necessary." A pause. "I want you to know I mean that as a genuine assessment and not as flattery."

If the party asks what he wants from this: *"The same thing I said then. To build something that lasts." He sets down his pen. "Even the small things matter. Two months in. The foundation is solid." He picks the pen back up. "Ask me again in a couple years."*

Havin and Petra

They are in the borderlands village where Petra was embedded for eight months. They did not go back to wherever they came from before the regime. They stayed.

Petra is running the resistance network's borderlands monitoring operation, the Thornwood road documentation, the ongoing verification that the Rakshasa's contract chain has fully voided. She is the most qualified person for this work as she knows the terrain and the people.

Havin is teaching. The village has children who lost a year or more of schooling during the regime's curriculum revision period. He was a teacher before his papers expired. He is a teacher again.

If the party visits: the school is a single room in the village's community building. Havin is at the front of it when the party arrives. He holds up one finger asking for a moment. He finishes what he is saying to the class and steps out. He looks at the party the way people look at other people they owe something large to and do not know how to say. He says: *"The class is in the middle of something. Can you wait?"*

When the class is done: he and Petra have the party for dinner. Specific food, specific conversation, the kind that happens when people who have been through something together are finally on the other side of it and have time to talk about something else.

At some point during the dinner Petra produces a small notebook from her jacket pocket.

"I kept a record," she says. "Of the intelligence I sent north. Every report, every date, every contact." She sets it on the table. "But I don't know what to do with it now."

Joran's ledger. Fenn's testimony. Petra's intelligence log. The founding archive is building itself one specific document at a time, from the people who kept records because they thought someone should.

Fenn

She is in a provisional governance office two blocks from the Supreme Hall. She joined the civic communication function within the month, as the party may have encouraged her to do in Scene 1.

She is good at it. She has six months of experience studying what happens to truth under institutional pressure. That turns out to be a specific qualification for civic communication work.

When the party visits: she is drafting a public notice about the Foundational Compact's governance provisions and how citizens can participate in the emerging dispute resolution process. She looks up.

"The Archmage's incomplete document," she says. "I have been working on finishing it." She slides a draft across her desk. "The Category A subjects from Sub-Level 3 contributed. Sister Kara contributed. I wrote the section about the notebook." She looks at the party. "I thought you should know it is being finished."

She pauses.

"The fourth principle," she says. She looks at the party with the specific attention of someone who has been thinking about something for two months. "It is not abstract. It is the notebook. It is the people you write about when you are afraid you will forget them. It is the specific, ordinary act of holding onto someone in particular." She pauses. "That is what makes the resistance collective. Not the ideology. The people. The specific people."

She goes back to the draft.

The document will be finished. It will be the most significant piece of intellectual work produced in the recovery period. Written BY the people it describes.

Veth

He is in the embassy district garden. The fountain is working again. He fixed it himself, which surprised the building's maintenance staff. He has many specific practical skills that have had no outlet for fourteen months.

When the party visits: he is working on a second repair he found while doing the first. He looks up.

"The Federation wants a formal trade mission in thirty days," he says. "The Yagnoloth and Bowman are handling most of the preparation." He looks back at the fountain. "I am fixing the fountain." He pauses. "I have been fixing the fountain for three days. It is a complicated fountain."

If the party sits with him while he works: he talks about small things. What he wants to plant in the empty bed along the south wall. A restaurant in his home city that makes a specific dish he has been thinking about for fourteen months. Small things, the specific small things of a person who has been living at crisis elevation for over a year and is now permitted to think about them.

At some point he says, without looking up from the fountain mechanism: "Thank you." He does not say it to the party specifically or impersonally. He says it to whatever version of the world includes the party and the garden and the working fountain and the thirty days until the trade mission.

He does not say anything else about it. He goes back to work.

Henrik

He is a section officer in the city's reconstituted civil protection force, built from the pieces of the previous government's structure under the Foundational Compact's civil protection provisions.

He said he did not want to be the commander. He said he had spent enough years at the command level of a corrupt system and he wanted to be the person who knew the ground.

When the party visits: he is briefing new recruits on the neighborhood he has been responsible for since the liberation. He finishes. He dismisses them. He looks at the party.

"It is different now." He means patrolling without contracts. Without quota systems. Without the Merregon enforcement architecture. "It is harder in some ways." He pauses. "It is better in the specific way of doing a job that is supposed to help people and actually helping people." Another pause. "I had forgotten what that felt like."

Lyra

She has taken the operational map from the safe house wall and is working on a new version. Not an operational map; that chapter is over. A proper city map, accurate rather than approved, updated to reflect the current reality: the empty border garrison, the thinned Mists, the old capital ruins, the visible mountain passes.

When the party visits: she is surrounded by reference materials. She looks up.

"The regime's official maps were wrong in forty-seven specific ways," she says. "I have been correcting them."

She shows the party the current draft. It is beautiful in the specific way of someone who has been doing careful work for years and is finally doing it for a purpose that is only accurate rather than also operational.

She says: "I want to go north. When the passes are fully clear. I want to map what is on the other side." She pauses. "I have been inside this domain for four years. I want to know what the roads look like from outside."

She looks at the party.

"Do you know where you are going yet?"

Sister Kara

She is at the Cathedral. The doors are open. They have been open since the liberation.

When the party arrives: twelve people are working on various aspects of restoration. Not professionals; people from the neighborhood who came because they wanted to help and whom Sister Kara assigned to specific tasks with the calm efficiency of someone who has been deploying helpers correctly since before the party existed.

She is on a scaffold, carefully removing the gold paint layer by layer from the wall behind the altar. She has been at this for two months. She is approximately one-third of the way through.

She comes down when she sees the party. She says: *"Come and see."*

She takes the party to the section of wall she has cleared. The original mural is underneath, exactly where it was, undamaged by three years of paint layered over it. It is a mural of people: not religious figures, not symbolic figures. A family at a table. A craftsperson at work. Two people talking in a street that looks like the streets outside. People holding onto things together.

"He painted over people," she says. "Not doctrine. Not theology. People." She looks at the mural. "They are all still there."

She goes back up the scaffold.

Tam and Osso

He is everywhere, which is where Tam has always been.

The party finds him by asking anyone in the resistance network. When they find him: he is in the middle of something and stops when he sees them. He gives the party his complete attention for exactly as long as complete attention is available.

He produces a small folded paper from his jacket. A sending stone record from the Chapter 3 garrison: a message that was sent north during the regime's operational period, logged by the garrison administrative system, never delivered because the recipient was no longer at the specified address.

The recipient is Osso, the halfling cobbler from Scene 1. The message is from a family member who was looking for him. It was sent eight months after he was taken. The family member did not know if he was alive. They sent it anyway.

"I thought you might want to deliver it," Tam says. He hands it to the party. Then he simply goes back to what he was doing.

Osso is at his cobbler's shop. Two doors from Orna's bakery. He is working when the party arrives.

The party delivers the message. The player delivering it chooses what to say. There is no required phrasing. The message is two years old. The sender did not know if Osso was alive. He is alive. He is in his shop. The message is from someone who was looking for him.

Let Osso open it. Let the players watch him read it. Do not describe what the message says. Some things are not the campaign's content. Let the scene hold for a moment after he finishes.

And then the party moves on.

Adjusting the Scene

Making it Faster

If the session is running long: condense to the beats the party has engaged with most deeply across the campaign. The mandatory beats are Sister Kara and the mural, Fenn and the document, and the message delivery to Osso. Everything else can be summarized or deferred to table conversation after the session.

Making it Deeper

Give each beat as much time as the table wants. The dinner with Havin and Petra can be an entire session if the players want it to be. The campaign earned it.

Increasing Role Play

The mural. When Sister Kara shows the party the uncovered mural: give the party a moment to look at it. The family at the table. The craftsperson at work. The two people talking in the street.

Joran is the craftsperson at work. The family at the table is a dozen different families the party freed or found too late. The two people talking in the street are everyone who held onto the truth alongside someone else.

SCENE 3: THE ROAD

Three months after the liberation. The party stands at the edge of the city where the road is visible through the thinned Mists. This is the campaign's last scene.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The road north is visible from the city's edge. Not fully clear; the Mists have thinned rather than parted, and the road goes into a kind of half-visible distance where the mountain passes begin and the Mists are still present but no longer absolute. The road exists. It goes somewhere. Where it goes is further than anyone in Orenthis has been able to see for four years.

The party is at the edge. They have been here before, briefly, at the end of Chapter 18, standing in the moment of the Mists thinning. They are here again now, three months later, with different weight.

Mira is not here this time. She is in the city, doing the work. She said her thing at the road in Chapter 18 and she meant it and she went back. The work is the work.

Lyra is here, if the party went to find her in Scene 2. With her map. Standing at the road's edge looking at the distance with the specific attention of someone measuring something she cannot yet see clearly.

She looks at the party when they arrive.

"I can see the first pass," she says. "The road goes through it. On the other side of the pass: I do not know yet." She looks back at the distance. "I want to know."

She is not asking the party to come with her. She is not asking the party anything. She is telling them what she wants, which is something Lyra has been doing since Chapter 2 in the specific way of someone who states facts including facts about herself.

The Party's Decision

This is the last moment of the campaign. The DM gives each player the opportunity to say where their character goes from here.

Some will stay. Orenthis needs people and the party has built things here and leaving is not the only correct answer.

Some will go. The road is there. The passes are visible. The domain is not a prison anymore in the way it was and the world outside it has been four years away and there are things outside it that belong to the party's lives before the campaign began.

Some will do something the DM did not predict. That is correct. The campaign has been about people making choices. The epilogue's last beat should honor that.

Whatever each character decides: let them say it specifically. Not "my character stays" but what that looks like. Not "my character leaves" but in which direction and toward what.

The Full-Circle Moment: Chapter 1

Whatever brought the party to Orenthis in Chapter 1 is now accessible again through the thinned Mists. The thing that was on the other side of the sealed domain is on the other side of this road. Some party members have people out there. Some have places. Some have questions they have been carrying since before Chapter 1 that the campaign never had time to address.

The road is there.

What Lyra Does

She folds the map. She tucks it into her pack. She looks at the party one more time.

"I am going to map the passes," she says. "I will send word of what I find." She pauses. "If any of you come north: I will have been there first and I will have drawn you a map."

She starts walking.
She does not look back. She is a cartographer. She is going somewhere she has not been. Looking back is not the relevant direction.

The Goristro's Clock

The party knows he will return within four years. That knowledge is present at this edge. The road is there. The clock is running. Both of those things exist simultaneously.

If any party member looks back at the city before deciding what to do: give them the view. The Supreme Hall's doors are open. The Gilded Tower is still standing, tarnished gold catching the light. The market district is open, the recovery visible in the fraction that changed in two months. The Cathedral's doors are open and the restoration is ongoing. The provisional governance structure is functioning.

The Goristro will be back. Orenthis will be here.

The party made that true.

The Last Beat

Whatever the party decides about the road: the last image of the campaign should be specific rather than summary.

If the party stays: one specific thing they see in the city behind them. Something small. Something ordinary. Something that would not have been possible under the regime.

If the party goes: one specific step on the road. The first step past the edge of the city, the first step into the half-visible distance where the passes begin.

If the party splits: the moment of parting. Specific and unheroic, the way partings are when they are real.

Let the DM choose the image that fits the table. The campaign earned the specific image. Use it.

Adjusting the Scene

If the party wants more time, give it to them. The road will still be there. Mira will still be in the city. The clock is running but four years is four years. The party can spend as long as they need at this edge before they decide.

If the party wants to go immediately, let them. The road is there. The decision was made in the moment the party arrived at the edge. Some campaigns end with the door open rather than the walk through it.

Both are correct.

Increasing Role Play

If any party member looks at the road and then looks at the city and cannot decide: Orna's bakery is two blocks behind them. The smell of bread from the morning's baking has been in the air since Scene 1. It is still there.

That is the choice. The bakery or the road. Both of those things are true about Orenthis now: that there is bread, and that there is a road. The campaign produced both.

The party decides which one they need today.

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

There is no formal chapter conclusion for the epilogue. The campaign ends in Scene 3 with the party's decision at the road's edge.

What the party should carry away from the full campaign:

They built a legal record from garrison documents and terminated contracts and personal testimony and a research finding about what makes people hard to break.

They freed twenty-three people from a program designed to study and replicate cognitive resistance. The program found what it was looking for. The finding belongs to the people it described. Fenn is finishing the document.

They restored a court that issued a writ against a demon lord and held it through his fall and will hold it through his return.

They gave a Foundational Compact back to the institution it founded and watched that institution use it correctly.

They fed the resistance through a baker who kept a ledger.

They walked into a tower made of tarnished gold and found eleven labeled failures in a private room and understood what they meant.

They created the conditions for a choice and trusted the choice to be made.

The choice was made.

The Mists thinned.

The bakery opened.

The road is there.

That is the campaign. That is what the work produced when given time. It is not everything and it is enough and the difference between those two things is where the rest of the work lives.

The party goes... wherever they go next.

Close the book.

Appendix

INTRODUCTION

This appendix provides supplemental campaign materials.

- Map of the Kingdom of Orenthis
 - Map of the Capital City of Oren
-

THE KINGDOM OF ORENTHIS



THE KINGDOM OF ORENTHIS WITH LABELS



THE CITY OF OREN



THE CITY OF OREN

WITH LABELS



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I am an avid technologist, a punk rock enthusiast, and an active player at tables where the story matters as much as the mechanics.

I believe the best campaigns ask something honest of their players. Not just tactics, but morality. The monsters worth fighting are rarely just the ones with stat blocks.

Orenthis: Resistance & Redemption grew out of a deep conviction that fantasy can hold a mirror to the real world without losing what makes it fun to play. It is, at its core, a story about what ordinary people do when the institutions meant to protect them are turned against them.

And what it may cost us to fight back.

More of my work, creative, technical, and otherwise, can be found at:

<https://digitaldementia.com>

If Orenthis meant something to your table, please consider leaving a rating or review on the DMs Guild. Reviews are how independent creators reach new players, and even a single line makes a real difference.

Welcome to the Resistance

Welcome to Orenthis, a once-prosperous and proud kingdom, now ruled by fear, corruption, and infernal law.

Not long ago, Orenthis stood as a beacon of trade, culture, and civic order. That era ended abruptly when a Goristro demon lord rose to power, exploiting unrest, resentment, and fear to seize control of the realm. What followed was not open conquest, but something far worse: the weaponization of the very institutions meant to protect the people.

The streets once filled with laughter now echo with the synchronized march of faceless Merregon enforcers. Propaganda broadcasts, delivered in the strained voice of a magically bound Kenku, justify every raid, detention, and disappearance. Neighbors inform on neighbors. Families are torn apart. Truth itself is regulated. And somewhere above it all, in his gilded tower, the Goristro endures.

The adventurers find themselves drawn together not by destiny, but by refusal. Each has seen the regime's cruelty firsthand. Each has either lost something or stands to lose everything. Whether motivated by conscience, anger, loyalty, or survival, they share a single conviction:

This regime cannot be allowed to stand.

This is not a simple tale of slaying a monster atop a tower. The Goristro's strength is not just physical; it is systemic. Enforced by a coalition of corrupted officials and opportunists who have bent Orenthis's laws, faith, and traditions to serve tyranny. If the adventurers can survive long enough to unite the resistance, expose the regime's lies, and dismantle its power structure piece by piece, they may yet save Orenthis from itself.

But first, they must learn how power truly works and what it costs to challenge it.



DUNGEONS & DRAGONS