

DEATH'S REACH™

Sample file



ADVENTURE BOOK ONE

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INTRODUCTION

Powerful entities threaten reality's foundation as they seek to usurp the Raven Queen's position. To prevent this cosmic coup, adventurers must enter the Shadowfell's timeless core, where all things find their end.

Death's Reach is a DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® adventure for characters of 21st to 23rd level. You need the *Player's Handbook*®, *Monster Manual*®, and the *Dungeon Master's Guide*® to play. *D&D™ Dungeon Tiles* and *D&D® Miniatures* can enhance your play experience.

BACKGROUND

While the Shadowfell presents a dark echo of the world, significant variations exist between the two. One of the more terrible differences exists at the shadow plane's fabled core, a place called Death's Reach. Once a place of purity, Death's Reach is now the spiritual nadir of existence. Before the rise of the Raven Queen, before the founding of Pluton (where Nerull once trapped the dead), departed souls simply moved on to a place beyond all reckoning. One of the doorways they used was Death's Reach. When the primordials first crafted the world, they had little regard for the fate of souls. Still, some among them recognized life force as a potent power and hungered for it. These entities arrived in Death's Reach and shut the doorway. Souls continued to be drawn to the Shadowfell's core. With nowhere to go, they were either consumed by insatiable primordials or, finding no further path or final purpose, simply dissipated.

During the Dawn War, when primordials and gods battled over the world and existence, deities descended on Death's Reach to weaken their primordial enemies. They established a beachhead—Nerull's Gate—through which they could attack with massed armies. The battle was lengthy and vicious, but the deities triumphed in the end. Still, they were unable to cleanse Death's Reach of its taint. So they sealed the core and devised other fates for souls.

Given its inaccessibility, the gods found Death's Reach the ideal place to hurl the troublesome detritus of the ages. They used it to store dangerous enemies and artifacts. Such transfers required elaborate and powerful rituals, but, in the right circumstances, the gods felt such efforts were necessary. Over time, disposal or internment in Death's Reach fell into disfavor. Despite being nearly forgotten, the Shadowfell's core yet endures.

Death's Reach is a graveyard of dead warriors and damaged weapons hailing from the Dawn War and other prehistoric events. At the close of the Dawn War, powerful entities, including the primordial Timesus the Black Star, were relegated to this barren place, where they are held in stasis by the location's spiritual undertow.

Divine safeguards, put in place by ancient deities, long served to prevent entry into Death's Reach. But the hidden doors have not proven invulnerable. Orcus's minions have found a way into Death's Reach. Now narrow passages allow defilers to enter and a dribble of power to be accessed. This meddling has created a soulfall: a handful of souls that should go to the Raven Queen now find their way to Death's Reach instead.

Although the Raven Queen knows Orcus is behind this evil, she does not know who his followers are, their number, or their exact plans. No deity, primordial, demon lord, or exarch can enter Death's Reach, as they are blocked by a divine ban that, over time, has come to possess the weight of cosmic law. Yet, the continuing soulfall makes it clear that outsiders have arrived in the Shadowfell's core. These interlopers are disinterring relics—ancient weapons perhaps, but also the remains of primeval warriors of unknown strength and power. The Raven Queen believes an army is being gathered against her—an army composed of Dawn War soldiers roused from a sleep as old as the beginning of time.

ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

This adventure has four distinct parts, with various side treks and resting points scattered throughout. The four parts are Zvomarana, Citadel of the Raven Queen, Death's Reach, and the Reliquary of Timesus.

After a mysterious attack and summons, the adventurers must seek out Letherna, the Realm of the Raven Queen. They enter Letherna through Zvomarana, the Temple of Temples, where powerful servants of the Raven Queen dwell. The adventurers arrive to find terrible forces laying siege to the temple grounds—the spiritual tests they would have undertaken become a series of brutal battles against Orcus's elite.

If the characters break the siege, they have the opportunity to speak with the Raven Queen among the sky-piercing icy mountains of Letherna, where souls of the world's dead congregate to learn their fates.

The Raven Queen provides a method for the adventurers to travel into Death's Reach. A soul gate is one of the few passages to that dark place left open by the gods. If the adventurers manage to traverse this perilous route not meant to be used by living creatures, they arrive in a vast crater filled with the debris of the Dawn War. Charged with finding and stopping the intruders that have invaded this place, the adventurers must make their way through a blasted landscape punctuated by horrifying undead, war monsters, relics of an earlier age, mighty servants of Orcus, and secretive servants of another power who has an interest in this conflict—Vecna. Upon reaching Nerull's Gate and liberating it from its guardians, the adventurers summon the Raven Queen's aspect to point them further along their way. It is then they discover that they have roused the wrath of Orcus!

Following their divine patron's direction, the adventurers find and explore the Reliquary of Timesus, the place where the interlopers are making their greatest discoveries. The Reliquary, a necropolis complex that contains many surprises, is the prison of the primordial known as the Black Star. Timesus was imprisoned in Death's Reach with his terrible blackstar host. In an ancient lair of death and incarceration, among many ancient horrors, the adventurers must defeat Orcus's greatest worldly servant, the self-proclaimed exarch Elder Arantham. The adventurers can find a measure of victory by vanquishing Arantham. However, the triumph is darkened by the discovery that Timesus is no longer imprisoned here.

HOW TO USE THIS ADVENTURE

Death's Reach, an epic tier adventure for the *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* Roleplaying Game, consists of four parts. It takes a group of five player characters (PCs) from 21st to 23rd level. You can use this adventure as the start of a series of epic tier adventures, as a continuation of the adventures detailed in H1–H3 and P1–P3, or as a stand-alone adventure in your own campaign.

The two booklets included in this adventure are for the Dungeon Master (DM). If you're planning to experience the adventure as a player, stop reading now.

Death's Reach contains these components:

1. *Adventure Book One* (this booklet) provides the Dungeon Master (DM) with an overview of the adventure. This includes descriptions of the four adventure areas—Zvomarana, Citadel of the Raven Queen, Death's Reach, and the Reliquary of Timesus. This booklet also provides illustrations of key locations and adversaries for the DM to show to the players, descriptions of several new monsters, and new magic items.
2. *Adventure Book Two* contains the bulk of the adventure, including many possible encounters within the four adventure areas described in *Adventure Book One*.
3. A poster map depicting two of the adventure's most important encounter areas, rendered in a scale that allows you to place your *D&D Miniatures* directly on the map.
4. A folder to hold the booklets and the poster map.

Getting Started

Begin the adventure by providing your players with one or more hooks from "Adventure Hooks" (page 4), and then proceed to **Encounter A1: Death Calls** on page 8 of this book.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

This section provides a series of adventure hooks that you can use to involve the player characters in the events that are about to unfold. The minor quests are tied to epic destinies, and one or more of them can be distributed among the characters. If a character has an epic destiny other than the ones presented below, use these to model a new hook more in keeping with the specific epic destiny.

Hook: STUDIES OF THE ARCHMAGE

Provide a character with the Archmage epic destiny the following quest, playing it out as the character performs a ritual.

Instead of the result you expected, as the ritual is completed the image of a cloaked humanoid standing in a pile of broken skulls appears before you. In a cracked voice reverberating with veiled power, the figure speaks:

“Pay heed, mortal. I sense great potential in you. It would please me to witness such potential come to fruition, so mark my words well.

“A secret place exists that contains relics of primordial vintage. This place has been walled away from creation since the elder gods willed it so, but its walls have been breached. Even now, fell creatures loot this ancient trove of its treasures. If you would secure any of its wonders before they are all carted away to serve an abyssal master, seek the Raven Queen in Letherna. Claim for yourself and yours a relic of the dawn time, a place lost since the first days, and move closer to unlocking the secrets of reality. In doing so, you help many besides yourself... including me.”

This arcane vision is sent directly by Vecna, though the god is able to cover his tracks well enough that determining its origin is impossible. The PC recognizes that the message wasn't unlike a Sending ritual, though vastly more powerful, and vastly more significant.

Quest XP: 3,200 XP (minor quest) for traveling to Death's Reach and claiming any artifact within.

Hook: A DEADLY TRICKSTER'S REWARD

Provide a character with the Deadly Trickster epic destiny the following quest, playing it out as the character wanders around any settlement.

One of your many contacts approaches you and nonchalantly offers the following tale:

“As sly-fingered and silver-tongued as you are, I'm surprised you didn't already know this. Something big is going down. Mauglurien the Black Dragon, dwarven leader of the Ebon Riders

hasn't been seen for months. A one-eyed stranger whispered this secret while we drained tankards at the Broken Sword. Word is, Mauglurien is leading a force against Zvomarana, the Raven Queen's holiest temple! The Raven Queen or her exarchs would give much to learn about this plot. Of everyone I deal with, I believe you can best work this news to your advantage. Perhaps you can even procure a favor from Fate herself.”

The PC who receives this message can begin to investigate this rumor, with the help of the other PCs (see page 6).

Minor Quest: 3,200 XP (minor quest) for bringing whatever the character discovers of this plot to the Raven Queen and successfully bargaining for a favor in return.

Hook: ASCENSION OF A DEMIGOD

Provide a character with the Demigod epic destiny the following quest, playing it out as the character prepares to take an extended rest.

As sleep closes in on you, you suddenly become aware of a presence. Sitting beside you is a figure with glowing golden flesh and a divine aura that you know you will someday share. It takes a moment, and then you realize that this divine visitor looks just like you. The visitor smiles at your realization and says:

“You might one day achieve what I represent, but your destiny is by no means certain. Challenges lie before you, some of which may seem, at first glance, beyond your power and skill to deal with. Perhaps you will succeed, perhaps not. Either way, one task is surely set before you, a deed all who seek godhood must do. You must petition the Raven Queen to acknowledge your destiny and relinquish her claim on the ultimate disposition of your soul. Seek out the Raven Queen at Zvomarana, the Temple of Temples.”

A PC who receives this vision knows that it is true, and that it comes from a being that transcends time—a being the character might soon become. The character should begin to seek knowledge about Letherna, the Raven Queen's dominion, and the Temple of Temples, before the adventure begins.

FOOTPRINTS OF DESTINY

Consider foreshadowing some or all these epic destiny hooks while the adventurers are still in the paragon tier. Such revelations stress the fact that as each character approaches his or her epic destiny, the universe begins to resonate with that fate. You might ask the players to choose a destiny earlier than level 21 to facilitate this preview.

At mid-paragon tier, the adventurers might begin to have dreams and visions of the icy peaks of Letherna, the burned-out crater of Death's Reach, and the skull of Orcus's wand. A character likely to choose the Archmage destiny might see an old, one-eyed beggar ranting about a place that later can be recognized as Death's Reach.



Minor Quest: 3,200 XP (minor quest) for traveling to Letherna and convincing the Raven Queen to relinquish her power over the potential Demigod's soul.

HOOK: THE ETERNAL SEEKER'S PATH

Provide a character with the Eternal Seeker epic destiny the following quest, playing it out as the character sleeps and dreams.

An ominous dream comes to you in flashes as you sleep.

You see a temple on a mist-covered mountain, where thousands of ravens circle above its slender spires.

The scene shifts to inside, where a knight in black armor atop a black steed pounds on a doorway beyond a mirrored altar. His crimson shield is adorned with the head of a black dragon.

The scene shifts, and you see yourself and your companions locked in battle with an ebony dragon as ghosts wail in agony and the dragon cuts you down one by one.

The scene shifts, and you are alone in an endless darkness. After long moments, you spot a dimly lit corridor containing a succession of seven locked gates. You try to open the first gate and the scene shifts.

Now you are on a wide, desolate plain, watching helplessly as a great black rock the size of the moon hurtles out of the sky. It strikes the land with a world-shattering impact.

Sweat soaked, you awaken, these scenes of future doom still bouncing within your mind.

The PC can investigate the visions. Certain rituals, such as Consult Oracle, are effective, as is finding a sage to explain the dream symbols (see page 6).

Minor Quest: 3,200 XP (minor quest) if the PCs successfully discover the meaning of the dream and its disturbing symbology, and if they learn that the great black rock is the primordial Timesus.

HOOK: DEATH CALLS

Regardless of other options, the exploits of the adventurers have garnered the attention of the Raven Queen. She sends a representative to summon the adventurers to an audience in order to offer them an opportunity to perform a service for the spinner of fate and the patron of winter. As this encounter unfolds, the Ebon Riders attack.

See **Encounter A1: Death Calls** on page 8 for details.

CUSTOMIZING TREASURE

Some treasure in this adventure is specific, and some is general. For general treasure identified by item level, choose an item appropriate for the player characters. You should also feel free to change specific treasure to fit your needs. For example, Mauglurien's battleaxe *Boneshredder* can be a bastard sword, or Uganon's *pact blade* can be a wand.

The only treasures you shouldn't change without careful consideration are the artifacts. These items play an important part in the story of the adventure. Unless you're prepared to alter the story in an appropriate manner, keep the artifacts as they are presented herein.

After the initial destiny introductions (as presented in Adventure Hooks on page 4), and even more so after the Ebon Riders attack (see Encounter A1 on page 8), the adventurers might want to engage in some research to find out more about what's going on. This section reveals what they can learn through their efforts.

Investigating any of these topics openly might attract the attention of powerful beings who want to make sure that certain information remains secret. You can add encounters with such forces if you wish, or to build tension simply have word get back to the curious PC that he or she has aroused the suspicion or interest of someone with more than a modicum of influence and power.

The lore in this section offers clues to who might care about those investigating specific topics, as well as those that might seek to avenge the deaths of servants dispatched by the adventurers along the way. In fact, the research done by the Eternal Seeker or the Deadly Trickster might be the cause of the Ebon Rider attack in the opening encounter of this adventure.

The lore addressed in this section crosses over in numerous ways, opening new avenues of investigation and research. For simplicity's sake, the information is presented in alphabetical order.

RITUALS

If the adventurers' skills fail them, there are powerful rituals that can help them uncover more information. Consult Mystic Sages provides a method for using Religion to determine what the adventurers couldn't figure out using the History or Arcana skills. Consult Oracle allows the adventurers to learn any fact they want, as long as they can formulate solid questions based on what they already know. In this adventure, information helps build tension, so reward wise and clever uses of rituals.

ASHEN COVENANT LORE

A character knows the following information about the Ashen Covenant with a successful Arcana or Religion check.

DC 22: Orcus, the Demon Prince of the Undead, has inspired numerous and varied cults. Rarely do any of these groups deal with the others, but recently a disturbing movement has arisen among Orcus's most devoted followers. Several cult leaders have banded together with the express purpose of finding a way to replace the Raven Queen with their Blood Lord. This movement among the faithful is known as the Ashen Covenant.

DC 27: Elder Arantham leads the Ashen Covenant. Other cult leaders in accord with the covenant include Mauglurien of the Ebon Riders (a dwarf warlord); Ghovran Akti the Planeweaver (an eladrin necromancer); Sithas

Tyrr the Blood Knight (a human paladin); Kielno Varim the Mad (a tiefling warlock); and Shonvurru the Blood Serpent (a marilith rewarded with undeath through service to Orcus). Each of these leaders advances his or her own scheme to elevate Orcus.

DC 29: The Ashen Covenant has found a cause the factions can unite behind. Elder Arantham has breached Death's Reach and even now unearths terrible secrets from the time of the Dawn War when the gods battled the primordials. Elder Arantham has purposefully excluded some of the covenant's members from this plot, so the entire movement won't be wiped out if he fails.

DC 31: The ultimate hand behind this movement is Orcus himself, who has been working on a grand scheme of conquest and power since the events that happened at the Keep on the Shadowfell several months ago.

DEATH'S REACH LORE

A character knows the following information about Death's Reach with a successful Arcana check.

DC 24: Death's Reach is a mythical place. It was once a doorway for the souls of the dead that led to an unknown final reward, but primordials corrupted it. They trapped souls there so they could consume them. The gods waged war against the primordials at Death's Reach, but they could not undo what had been wrought. So the gods sealed the place forever, leaving the fallen and the machines of war behind. Some of the abandoned are primordials.

DC 29: Although sealed, Death's Reach has access points. Although the gods, their exarchs, and beings of similar power can't fully enter the place, mortals can. Furthermore, the gods use doorways into Death's Reach to discard what cannot or should not be destroyed.

DC 31: Orcus's followers breached Death's Reach, where they now unearth unspeakable power. Their meddling has caused some souls to fall into Death's Reach, where they are beyond the power and influence of the Raven Queen.

EBON RIDERS LORE

A character knows the following information about the Ebon Riders with a successful History or Streetwise check.

DC 14: A black dragon on a crimson field serves as the symbol of the Ebon Riders. This elite mercenary company consists mostly of heavy cavalry and shock troopers. A dwarf known as Mauglurien the Black Dragon leads the Riders.

DC 22: Combat magic specialists, such as Ghovran Akti and the cambion Tannerli, are important members of the Ebon Riders. Certain Riders have special mounts. Ebon Riders fight for the highest bidder, and they've been known to change sides in the middle of a battle if their