

KINGDOM OF  
THE GHOULS™

Sample file



ADVENTURE BOOK ONE



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## INTRODUCTION

Something terrible escaped from Death's Reach, a graveyard of dead monstrosities and ancient weapons hailing from the Dawn War between the gods and the primordials. To prevent Orcus, the Demon Lord of Undeath, from profiting from this recent event, adventurers must follow a trail of destruction to the lair of the Ghoul King.

*Kingdom of the Ghouls* is a DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® Roleplaying Game adventure for characters of 24th to 26th level. You need the *Player's Handbook*®, *Monster Manual*®, and *Dungeon Master's Guide*® to play. *D&D™ Dungeon Tiles* and *D&D® Miniatures* can also be used to enhance your play experience.

### HOW TO USE THIS ADVENTURE

*Kingdom of the Ghouls* is designed to take a party of five player characters (PCs) from 24th to 26th level. You can use this adventure as a sequel to *E1: Death's Reach* 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 *Kingdom of the Ghouls* as a player, don't read any further.

The *Kingdom of the Ghouls* adventure contains these components:

1. *Adventure Book One* (this booklet) provides a background and synopsis of the adventure, hooks to interest the PCs, an overview of each of the main sections of *Adventure Book Two*, illustrations to show to players, new monsters, and new magic items.

2. *Adventure Book Two* contains the many possible encounters that make up the adventure. The encounters take place throughout five areas: Sigil, the Embassy of Ghouls, the White Kingdom, and two sections of Doresain's lair (the outer palace and the inner fane).

3. A poster map depicting three of the adventure's important encounter areas, rendered in a scale that allows you to place your *D&D Miniatures* directly on it.

4. A folder to hold the booklets and the poster map.

### If You're the Dungeon Master

Read *Adventure Book One* first and then familiarize yourself with the Sigil encounters in *Adventure Book Two*. Read the rest of *Adventure Book Two* at your leisure.

### Getting Started

Select an adventure hook from "Starting the Adventure" (page 4) or create your own. After providing the hook to bring the PCs into the adventure, be prepared to run **Encounter S1: Surprise Assault** (page 4 of *Adventure Book Two*) when the characters arrive in Sigil.

## BACKGROUND

Thanatos, a realm festering in the Abyss, is a dim, murky gravescape. One of its domains is a place called the White Kingdom, bright in the moonlight that shines forever above it. The White Kingdom is inhabited mostly by ghouls and other flesh-eating undead. It received its name because its structures are made of the stripped bones of the inhabitants' victims. Walking through the streets kicks up clouds of bone dust, forming a fog that covers everything in a shroud of chalky white.

Doresain the Ghoul King rules the White Kingdom. His palace is poised on the edge of the domain, where the Lake of Black Blood boils over a precipice to fall into the lethal central vortex of the Abyss. In the inner fane of the palace, Doresain and the swarming ghouls that make up his Court of Teeth consume feasts of flesh of the innocent and the guilty.

Doresain labors toward the culmination of a secret project, an undertaking designed to catapult his lord and master—Orcus, the Demon Prince of the Undead—into a position of unfettered power over the souls of every creature in existence. To this end, Doresain marshals a web of allies and servitors across the natural world and its echoes.

One of his most successful projects involved the Shadowfell. The Ghoul King sought to discomfit the Raven Queen and imperil her divine office of Death, and he enjoyed varying degrees of success. An early and spectacular accomplishment was the bridgehead his servant Elder Arantham extended into the banned realm of Death's Reach. For a while, at each midnight, a handful of souls that should have fallen to the Raven Queen instead found their way to Death's Reach, where they sputtered out, gone forever. Because the Raven Queen failed to judge these souls, her position grew tenuous. However, adventurers working in her name foiled the plot.

Still, the breach of Death's Reach achieved its deeper, hidden objective. From that ancient prison, Elder Arantham acquired the primordial Timesus, an ancient entity of apocalyptic power. At the moment, Timesus is in stasis. It once possessed more power than the combined might of several gods. Timesus was more potent than most primordials, and its power lay in death and dissolution—an ancient influence that monsters, demons, and deities wish to gain for themselves.

If Timesus were allowed to return to its full power, few creatures, whether mortal or divine, could stand against it. Elder Arantham arranged the transfer of the primordial-in-stasis to Sigil, the City of Doors, where others moved it on to the White Kingdom. There, Doresain oversees the preparations necessary to send the primordial to Orcus. The Demon Lord plans to restore the primordial to its original state with one major exception. It will become an undead servant of Orcus.

## ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

This adventure has four distinct parts, with various side-lines and pauses throughout.

At the start of the adventure, the player characters (PCs) must seek a portal to Sigil, following leads introduced in *E1: Death's Reach* or other hooks described on page 4. In the opening encounter, the adventurers arrive in Sigil and are ambushed.

**Sigil:** If the adventurers survive their rude greeting, they get to explore Sigil, continuing to follow the leads that initially brought them to the City of Doors. To find the secret drop point for smuggled slaves and the path used to transport Timesus, the adventurers must track down a former exarch of Vecna. In the process, they have the opportunity to help the citizens of Sigil eradicate an infestation of planar slavers.

**Embassy of Ghouls:** Using Sigil and its multitude of portals, the Embassy of Ghouls transfers a prodigious number of slaves from various planar locations to the White Kingdom. The adventurers must infiltrate this secret base and shut it down. Along the way, they discover that the embassy contains a portal to the White Kingdom, and they find evidence that Timesus was moved through this portal to Doresain's domain.

**White Kingdom:** The adventurers travel through the embassy portal to reach the White Kingdom, which lies in the realm of Thanatos in the Abyss. Their first glimpse of the location reveals a terrible scene: living victims falling from the sky into a vast chasm of feasting ghouls.

The adventurers cannot simply travel directly to Doresain's palace—the army of ghouls and other flesh-eaters that fill the domain would rise up to stop them. Instead, the adventurers must hide their presence as much as possible, making their way through the City of the Hungry Dead and the Mountain of Mouths. Along the way, they might be able to rescue kidnapped residents of Sigil.

**Doresain's Palace:** The palace of the Ghoul King, which looks more like an elaborate mausoleum than a castle, clings to a stony outcropping above the central vortex of the Abyss. With help from an unlikely ally, the adventurers can cross the Lake of Black Blood, avoid the falls, and slip into the palace. Inside, they must face great peril before invading the inner fane and confronting Doresain and his Court of Teeth.

Unfortunately for adventurers on the trail of Timesus, the Ghoul King has already sent the primordial on to Orcus using a *chaos ship*. But the adventurers can still strike a blow against the Demon Lord of Undeath by depriving him of his most favored exarch, Doresain the Ghoul King.

# STARTING THE ADVENTURE

Bringing the player characters into the adventure can be straightforward, and it might even be the logical consequence of previous play. Several potential hooks are described below, and they grant the PCs opportunities to gain additional experience by completing associated minor quests. Use one or more of these hooks, or fashion a new hook that serves the needs of your game.

## HOOK: PREDATORS IN SIGIL

A player character who is already familiar with Sigil, the City of Doors, discovers a scourge troubling the metropolis. Provide that PC with the following hook, or play it out in the adventure.

*A male human who wears a scintillating yellow robe introduces himself as Nerbethar the Messenger. An armada of gleaming jewels orbit around his head. He says:*

*"I bear a message from those who speak for the Lady of Pain, she whose mere presence prevents gods and demons alike from entering Sigil. The Lady, however, allows much to take place within the confines of her city, and those with an interest in day-to-day law and order have become concerned with recent events. Something stalks the streets of Sigil. People are disappearing, from the Hive as well as from the more refined wards. But no one knows what is taking them. Even a well-performed ritual of Consult Oracle fails to reveal the hunter, which gives us pause. Any presence capable of blocking this ritual must possess powers that are formidable indeed. Will you help?"*

Nerbethar is a member of the city's Advisory Council, a group of self-styled administrators that has no real political power in Sigil. He offers the adventurers the gratitude of the Lady of Pain, noting that "Having a favor owed you by a legendary being of her status is nothing to scoff at." Whether he actually has the ability to offer this reward is up to the Dungeon Master.

If the adventurers agree to look into the situation described by Nerbethar, he gives them the names of five prominent missing individuals: Corus Ilprot, Maleem

### DESTINY'S JOURNEY

As the adventurers gain levels in their chosen epic destinies, existence continues to resonate with their journey. This might have no apparent effect, or it could include foreshadowing dreams or visions experienced while the adventurers are still at the lower end of the epic tier.

For example, the adventurers might see a great city built on the interior of a vast ring whose many doors lead to every place in existence and beyond, or a churning arena where the living are consumed screaming by a swarm of ghouls, or they might dream of the skull of the Wand of Orcus. An adventurer with the archmage destiny might see a one-eyed beggar laughing, as if at a private joke.

Skyraven, Whitten Ormandus, Narak, and Esmerana Delrain. He also provides the location of a nondescript door and gives the PCs a key that turns the seemingly ordinary passageway into a portal to Sigil's Hive Ward. Unfortunately, Doesain's agents are aware of Nerbethar's intent and they stand guard at the Sigil end of the portal. Use **Encounter S1: Surprise Assault** (on page 4 of *Adventure Book Two*) when the adventurers are ready to travel to Sigil.

**Quest XP:** 6,050 (minor quest) if the adventurers uncover the kidnapping operation and defeat its leaders in Sigil. If they later journey into the White Kingdom and ultimately slay Doesain, they gain an additional 6,050 XP.

## HOOK: FOLLOWING ARANTHAM

If the adventurers participated in *E1: Death's Reach*, it's possible that the primary villain, Elder Arantham, escaped through a portal that only undead travelers could utilize. Adventurers who figure out how to activate the portal (perhaps by carrying an undead creature as they walk through it) or who otherwise follow Arantham in a timely manner find that his point of entry into the City of Doors is well defended. Use **Encounter S1: Surprise Assault** (on page 4 of *Adventure Book Two*) when the adventurers step through the portal.

**Quest XP:** 6,050 (minor quest) if the characters catch up to and permanently dispatch Elder Arantham.

## HOOK: VENGEANCE OF THE GHOUL KING

For a past transgression against the Ghoul King or Orcus, the adventurers are targeted by Doesain's forces. The adventurers are lured through a portal by deceit, by promise of great reward, or by a ruse that you create to meet the needs of your campaign. Once the adventurers arrive in Sigil, they are ambushed (use **Encounter S1: Surprise Assault** on page 4 of *Adventure Book Two*). The attackers try to render the adventurers unconscious rather than kill them. If successful, the attackers try to take the captive adventurers to the Embassy of Ghouls and send them to the White Kingdom, where they will serve as food for the endless feast.

**Alternative:** One or two adventurers are lured into the ambush. Overmatched, the adventurers are likely rendered unconscious and spirited to the Embassy of Ghouls, where they are held captive. The other adventurers must track down their missing companion(s).

**Quest XP:** 6,050 (minor quest) if the characters ultimately slay Doesain—or, for the alternative hook, if they find and save their companion(s).

## HOOK: DIVINE ENVOY

If one of the adventurers is a particularly devout servant of a deity, provide the following hook as a minor quest to that character. Customize it as necessary to suit the god in





question, and provide the hook after the adventurers have already entered Sigil. This event occurs when the character is alone.

*A small glow that you took to be a stray reflection suddenly brightens toward blinding brilliance. The brilliance resolves until before you stands a winged creature—an angel. In a voice of celestial clarity, the figure reads from a burning scroll:*

*“Destiny has snared you in her tapestry, and your actions are the fulcrum on which much depends. Fate can see multiple futures and pulls on the threads of providence, hoping to steer toward her preferred reality. But think not that your efforts go unseen by the gods. I bear a message from [PC’s god], who asks only this: Bear witness to all that transpires. In your daily prayers, describe the events that you have witnessed. In this way, you will know that divine eyes are upon you, even in your darkest hour. And when that dire moment comes, as it certainly shall before you travel this road to its end, pray, and perhaps you will find aid.”*

*The angel disappears into the same brilliance that birthed it.*

The messenger is sent directly by the PC’s god. (The angel entered Sigil through a portal, the same as every other visitor to the City of Doors, then teleported to the character’s location.) The god wants to be among the first to know whether the Raven Queen will eventually lose her status as purveyor of souls or hold onto it for another age. If Orcus gains the power he ultimately seeks, other gods might be dismayed, but they also will need to strike an accord with the new god—or prepare for war.

**Quest XP:** 6,050 (minor quest) if the adventurer describes each day’s events over the course of this adventure in his or her daily prayers as the angel requested. However, if the god aids the character in his or her darkest hour (by sending a 24th-level angel of vengeance ally to assist), the adventurers gain no experience points from describing events in prayers. The divine assistance is reward enough.

## HOOK: NIGHTBRINGER

The sword *Nightbringer*, introduced in *P2: Demon Queen’s Enclave*, is actually the embodiment of a primordial beast. It was trapped in its current form by the gods during the Dawn War, and later it was found and forced into service by Orcus. *Nightbringer* hates Orcus, and it seeks to form its own domain of undead and demons in the natural world and the Elemental Chaos.

If one of the PCs still carries the sword, then *Nightbringer* begins to set its plan in motion to supplant Orcus as lord of the undead. It wants to find and unite with Timesus, the great destroyer, so that together the two primordials can depose Orcus. It uses dreams to compel the PC to track down Timesus.

If the adventurers used the sword at the end of *P2: Demon Queen’s Enclave* (either by placing it in Orcus’s hand or plucking it into his eye), then the hook changes, as described below.

If *Nightbringer* was returned to Orcus at the end of *P2: Demon Queen’s Enclave*, the weapon seeks revenge upon the adventurers. It appears in the hands of Kor-Karnaar in **Encounter W4: Devouring Pit**. Part way through the encounter, *Nightbringer* transforms into its primordial beast form and attempts to destroy the adventurers.

If *Nightbringer* was plunged into the eye at the end of *P2: Demon Queen’s Enclave*, it returns to further advance its goals and schemes. It returns unexpectedly to the PCs, offering its services in exchange for help in gaining vengeance against Orcus.

**Quest XP:** 6,050 (minor quest) if the PCs carry the sword to the inner fane of Doresain’s palace as they track down Timesus. Use this version of the quest XP if the sword has been or is returned to the hands of one of the PCs. If the sword is used by Kor-Karnaar, then the PCs earn XP for destroying the primordial beast as part of **Encounter W4: Devouring Pit**.

## CUSTOMIZING TREASURE

Some of the treasure in this adventure is specific, and some of it 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 the needs of your campaign.

The only items you shouldn’t change without careful consideration are the *White Kingdom boneclaw* and *Audaviator*. These items play important parts in the story. Unless you’re prepared to alter the story, keep them.

# SIGIL OVERVIEW

A multitude of portals connect Sigil, the City of Doors to the rest of the multiverse. The enormous planar metropolis exists outside the ordered structure of existence. The city rises from the interior surface of an immense hollow ring that has no outer side. The residents consider Sigil to be the true center of the multiverse. Sigil is a city of juxtapositions. Some of its alleys are more smoke-filled and some of its streets more crowded than the most pestilential village, while other avenues gleam with as many shining palatial manors as even the grandest terrestrial or Feywild crown city.

## ENTERING AND EXITING SIGIL

Seemingly numberless portals connect Sigil to other planes, but they usually are not specially marked, and no one but the Lady of Pain knows how many portals exist or where each one leads. Any bounded space big enough for somebody to walk or wriggle through—from a sewer entrance to a closet—could double as a portal to another plane.

Each portal in Sigil is activated with a portal key, a specific object that has some affinity for whatever lies on the other side of the portal. The key can be a physical object, but it might be merely a word, a gesture, or the right state of mind. Without the correct key, a portal is just a bounded space. Many of the city's natives are happy to sell keys to specific portals or at least sell the knowledge of a key's nature.

If the adventurers participated in *E1: Death's Revolt* and come into this adventure using the "Following Arantham" hook, they might arrive in Sigil through a portal that Arantham created—one that collapses soon after. Regardless, if they want to leave or enter Sigil, they must use a portal. They can't use travel rituals to get in or out, and they can't call or summon creatures into or out of the city.

## THE WARDS

Sigil has six wards. No walls divide them from one another, but everyone in Sigil knows the difference between one ward and the next.

**Lower Ward:** Foul-smelling smithy smoke wreathes the Lower Ward. Many of the city's artisans live and work here, and the place is full of forges, mills, warehouses, and workshops.

**The Lady's Ward:** Despite the ward's name, the Lady of Pain doesn't live here. Instead, it houses rich citizens and most of Sigil's temples.

**Market Ward:** In the Market Ward, everything is for sale, especially in the Grand Bazaar, an immense plaza filled with shops, tents, and stalls offering wares from dozens of planes and strange worlds.

**Guildhall Ward:** Many merchants who hawk their wares in the Market Ward during the day sleep in the

Guildhall Ward at night, and many who deal in services (rather than selling finished goods) live and work in the Guildhall Ward.

**Clerk's Ward:** This ward is the domain of bureaucrats, scribes, sages, and scholars, though the Civic Festhall is also found here. Run by the Society of Sensation, the Festhall combines the best aspects of a concert hall, museum, and tavern while serving as the centerpiece of an artistic neighborhood that draws travelers from across the multiverse.

**The Hive:** A chaotic, sprawling slum, the Hive is home to those who are poor, wanted, or just down on their luck. The ward boasts taverns and inns aplenty, entertainment, and services from pawnbrokers to sellswords in the Gatehouse Night Market.

## FIRST VIEW OF THE CITY

When the adventurers first venture onto the busy streets of Sigil, show them "View of Sigil, City of Doors" on page 26 of this book, and read:

*A fantastic city stretches in all directions. Layers of smoke and haze distort the middle distance, but not enough to conceal the fact that the buildings and streets slowly curve up and around, farther and farther, until they meet high overhead. This city appears to be built on the interior of a great ring, and you can see the rooftops of other buildings hanging far overhead.*

*Structures vary greatly, and no two are exactly alike, though many are barnacled with ostentatious metallic blades and stone spikes. Sculpted faces and figures similar to gargoyles perch over lintels, fanciful iron grillwork covers many windows, and evil-looking vines sporting serrated leaves grow wild in the shadowed side streets.*

*The main thoroughfare, though dingy and dilapidated, teems with all manner of creatures. Humans, dwarves, eladrin, elves, and other humanoids are plentiful, and here and there more monstrous creatures saunter, including a fiery angel, a smoke-shrouded devil, and a metallic concordant.*

## GATHERING INFORMATION

After the adventurers arrive in Sigil and deal with Elder Arantham in his warehouse (see **Encounter S1: Surprise Assault** on page 4 of *Adventure Book Two*), they have one or more goals to achieve. They might be on the trail of missing friends or clients, or they might want to learn where Elder Arantham sent the primordial-in-stasis, Timesus. The adventurers can learn about Sigil by consulting their own knowledge or by asking folks on the streets.

In most cases, a Streetwise check can be used to gather information through legwork and questioning the locals. The adventurers can do this sort of legwork carefully (which increases the DC of a lore check by 5) or openly (which uses the DC of a lore check as noted below). Of course, an open investigation might attract the attention of those who wish to keep certain information regarding these topics secret. You can add encounters with such forces if you wish, or simply have word reach the snooping