

They eventually came to Vencarlo's Academy. Blackjack broke into the building through a back door and bade Trinia wait in a back room while he spoke to the school's master. Several minutes later, Vencarlo himself, appearing flushed and worried, introduced himself to Trinia as an accomplice of the legendary hero, explaining that he'd agreed to keep her in hiding at the academy until he could orchestrate her escape from the city.

Trinia is no fool—she strongly suspects that Vencarlo and Blackjack are the same person, but her gratitude and respect for Vencarlo is more than enough to ensure she only shares her suspicions with her most trusted companions. It's unlikely that the PCs qualify now, but eventually they might. Until then, she remains evasive on her suspicions, going so far as to say that she blacked out at times during her escape and can't clearly remember the events of that frenzied flight.

Even this early, blood veil is silently spreading through Korvosa. As the PCs move through Old Korvosa or North Point, an aggressive beggar stumbles up to them, hacking and wheezing, a splotchy red rash and blisters the size of ripe grapes covering his face and arms as he pleads for coins to buy food and medicine. PCs who keep alert for other signs of the disease as they travel through Old Korvosa and North Point can make DC 15 Spot checks to notice at least five other individuals—beggars, common folk, and even a merchant—who display familiar fiery rashes. These portents should serve to pique the PCs' concerns about the spreading disease, but shouldn't distract them from the task at hand.

As soon as the party escorts Trinia through the city gates and some safe distance away, Trinia wholeheartedly thanks them for their help and apologizes for any trouble she's caused them. She promises to make it all up to them someday and might give a PC she's come to favor a quick kiss, but for now, she's eager to be away from the city that wants her dead. Should the Guard somehow manage to recapture Trinia, the wily girl manages to slip her bonds and escape the city on her own, although her location should remain a mystery to the PCs until they encounter her again in "A History of Ashes" in *Pathfinder* #10.

PART THREE: OUTBREAK

Witnessing further evidence of blood veil in Korvosa, the PCs might grow concerned about the disease's spread. Already, more of Korvosa's citizens are falling ill, and what starts as a few random cases soon fills the local gossip with rumors of sick people with the distinctive red pocks on the face. While some are able to fend off the disease through simple resilience, magical means, or sheer luck, the number of sick quickly grows to beyond the city's combined priesthoods' ability to simply "magic it away."

For the remainder of the adventure, up until a cure is discovered, the number of sick in Korvosa grows. Hundreds, if not thousands, are destined to die, but as fortune would have it, the PCs can directly influence the body count claimed by the plague. As a priest of Abadar, Ishani Dhatri quickly finds his skills in increasing demand against the tidal wave of plague carriers. He needs all the help he can get, and with his brethren steeped in church procedure and tradition, Ishani turns to the PCs. A day after they escort Trinia out of the city, an acolyte from the Grand Vault of Abadar locates the PCs, telling them that Vaultkeeper Dhatri seeks a meeting with them at the temple.

The Grand Vault of Abadar

In a city as steeped in political scheming, decisive justice, and trade as Korvosa, it should be no surprise that the city's largest and most influential faith is the congregation of Abadar, god of cities, laws, and merchants. Presided over by Archbanker Darb Tuttle, the Bank of Abadar is one of the more potent moderating factors in the city, ever eager to remind the government and nobility of their responsibilities to their citizens. Although its acts might sometimes seem charitable, the church of Abadar is more concerned with the just enactment of the law and the continued flow of trade. (For full details on Abadar's faith, see page 64.)

The Grand Vault of Abadar, a meticulously well-kept structure of white marble and gleaming bronze friezes, stands in the North Point district of Korvosa. Within, the Vault serves several purposes. While the first floor holds a few small side shrines and counseling chambers, the majority of its airy halls are given over to the business of banking, with acolytes of Abadar eager to serve any with coin they would bestow in the god's trust, while armored clerics keep watch for ne'er-do-wells. The floor above holds the god's sanctuary and the quarters of a small number of resident priests, although most are encouraged to maintain their own addresses away from the temple. Finally, beneath the temple lies the physical vault, a heavily guarded storehouse where the clergy's considerable fortune—as well as the investments of thousands of citizens—are safely stored. So trusted and respected are the priests that for decades these lower levels have also housed the presses that mint Korvosan coins.

The Unwashed Masses

When the PCs reach the temple of Abadar, things might not be as they expected.

Towering over the surrounding buildings, the Grand Vault of Abadar offers a vision of divine luxuriance amid a sea of mortal troubles. Radiant, as its grey-veined white marble reflects the midday sun, there's little question that this place is the house of a god.

Yet, for a deity of law, the steep stairs and ramps leading up to the temple's great bronze doors offer a strangely discordant scene. Dozens of citizens—mostly of the working class, although the silks of a few merchants show through the crowd—throng the entry, scarcely being held back by a group of gold-armored Abadarian clerics. All seem intent on gaining entry to the temple, but the clerics turn away nearly all comers. The clerics' reasoning becomes clear as one desperate believer is turned away, his pitiful countenance mottled with violent red sores.

Although Brienna Soldado was the first to be stricken with blood veil, her case did not remain unique in Korvosa. As a result of her haphazard spending and the Abadarians' release of tainted silver, dozens of cases of the disease have appeared throughout the city—mostly among the residents of North Point. The clergy of Abadar has been inundated with pock-scarred patients, healing those with the gold to pay and recommending local herbalists for those without. The priests might have been able to help more, but they had their own troubles, since several of their acolytes, guards, and vaultkeepers developed symptoms of the same mysterious disease. What little magic was left among the clergy was quickly sold to a few wealthy and lucky worshipers, but in all, fewer than two dozen citizens were healed.

Upon arriving, the PCs witness the temple guards turning away all comers who show signs of blood veil. Others who have less urgent business in the temple must fight through the disease-ridden crowd and undergo the guards' brief questioning as to their purpose—twin gauntlets few healthy visitors dare to run. While the crowd remains relatively orderly in its pleading, the temple's protectors and a few Korvosan Guards gathered nearby eye the situation with unease.

If the party intends to meet with Ishani, it must navigate the desperate crowd. This proves troublesome, forcing each PC to make a DC 14 Strength check to strong-arm through the assemblage. If any PC is obviously a cleric, the crowd turns its attentions to the party, begging for healing and divine aid—regardless of the PCs' actual ability to heal. The mob is allowed to make Spot checks (with no modifiers) to notice a character's religious garb or holy symbols, which the PCs can wholly avoid by removing the symbols of their faith or by making opposed Disguise checks.

Actually healing a disease victim or making a show of divine power within sight of the mob nearly sets off a riot. The crowd swarms the would-be healer, dozens of the sickly riffraff begging to be cured and explaining why their case is the most desperate. Each PC must make a DC 16 Escape Artist or grapple check to escape the press. Violence against the crowd at any point is immediately noticed by the Korvosan Guard. While the watchmen can understand a few thrown punches if the party is mobbed,

the use of weapons or deadly spells—even in defense—could see the characters arrested.

Once the PCs manage to muscle through the crowd, guards at the doors to the Grand Vault halt them and sternly ask their purpose. Mentioning Ishani's name is enough to convince the guards that the PCs have legitimate business inside, and unless the PCs are obviously sick or violent, the guards let them into the temple for their appointment.

Ad Hoc Experience Award: If the PCs manage to navigate the crowd without harming anyone, grant them a CR 2 experience award.

The Healer's Hands

Even after the clerics of Abadar manage to disperse the plague victims with promises of healing, the temple remains a place besieged. Within its airy hall, priests and patrons eye each other and every newcomer with suspicion, and every footfall upon the marble floor echoes through a frightened silence. The PCs should have no trouble finding Ishani Dhatri, as he reserved one of the temple's western meeting rooms to meet with the party and waits for them there. The young priest looks grave as he greets them.

"Thank you for coming. I assume you already suspect my reasons for calling, having seen the crowd outside—poor lot. You recognize the symptoms too, I'm sure. I had hoped that the Soldado case was isolated, but apparently we have a bigger problem on our hands than I'd feared.

"I'm concerned for the city, but also for my brethren here. The morning after my visit to the Soldado home I came to the temple to hear that three of my brothers awoke with similar symptoms, although they had already been healed. I spoke to each, and aside from their usual duties in the temple, none have had any dealings with the sick. Later in the day, more of my brothers—vaultkeepers, guards, and acolytes—developed symptoms, and folk from throughout the city began arriving in search of healing. It's been more than a little bit frightening. They're calling the sickness 'blood veil.' An apt enough name, I suppose.

"This affliction has spread fast, yet I'm not yet sure how. Most of the patients we're treating have come from North Point and Old Korvosa. The disease seems to spread fastest through the lower classes. Although we here at the temple can heal some of the ill, I fear that the spread of the disease will soon outpace our resources. The only way to stem the growing infection is to involve all the city's resources. We need to organize. We need to call upon the faiths of Sarenrae, Pharasma, and even Asmodeus to face this attack. Archbanker Tuttle and several of his assistants are out pursuing alliances with these other faiths, but even that won't be enough. We need to involve the Korvosan Guard, at the very least. And that's where you come in—with the number of desperate souls growing, it's not particularly safe



for a priest to walk the streets of Korvosa. I hear that you have a good relationship with Field Marshal Cressida Kroft—perhaps you would be willing to escort me to Citadel Volshyenek to introduce me to her?”

Ishani doesn't expect the party's involvement to be charity and has already cleared a generous payment of 200 gp for each PC involved in the errand. This is all the church is willing to commit to a single priest's unofficial interests, but Ishani might be convinced to increase the payment by 50 gp apiece if the PCs prove hesitant, supplementing the church's gold with his own.

Ishani is also willing to answer any questions the PCs might have about blood veil, but it's unlikely he knows much that they don't. His first encounter with it, after Brienna, was at the temple, when three of his fellow priests received healing for the disease's early symptoms. Several other faithful fell ill soon after, but each was healed with ease. The first sick from outside the temple were a barkeep and his wife from the Three Rings Tavern in North Point. They paid to be cured magically and were sent on their way. Within the next hour, though, three more sick citizens arrived, and more in the hours after that. Soon the crowd the PCs saw upon entering the temple had formed. Ishani

fears that the scene on the temple's steps is but a precursor to the dangers ahead.

First, Do No Harm

Reaching Citadel Volshyenek poses little problem, despite Ishani's fear to the contrary. Although many in the city attempt to conduct life as normal, stilted mumbling and quiet conversations replace the raucous chatter of any normal business day, as if noise might attract the plague's lethal notice.

A few hours prior to the PCs' arrival, Field Marshal Kroft received orders stamped with the Korvosan royal seal, commanding that the Guard serve as bodyguards to the queen's personal physician, Doctor Reiner Davaulus, and a group of strange men proclaimed to be doctors, as they fulfill an appointment by the throne to halt the plague's spread. Although Kroft doesn't like her men being tasked as glorified bodyguards, she knows her duty and obeys. Reiner and his band of strangely dressed "Queen's Physicians" are escorted to Citadel Volshyenek to be introduced to the Guard, and as the PCs arrive, this introduction is in full swing. Assuming the PCs have done nothing to sour their relationship with Field Marshal Cressida Kroft and the Korvosan Guard, the guards at the

PLAGUEBRINGER'S MASK

Aura faint conjuration; **CL** 5th

Slot head; **Price** 2,000 gp; **Weight** 2 lbs.

DESCRIPTION

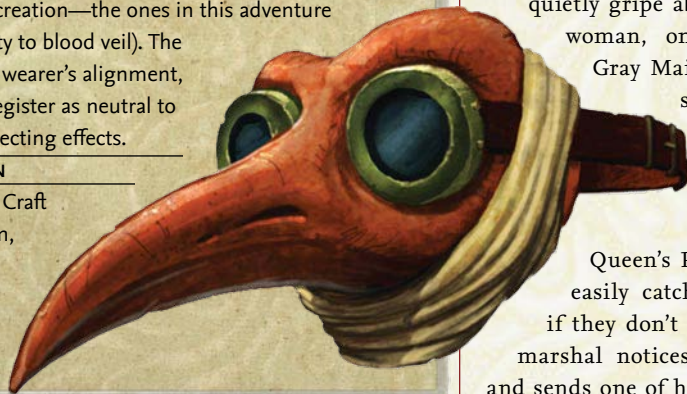
Resembling the more common nonmagical doctor's mask, a *plaguebringer's mask* grants a +2 resistance bonus on saving throws against nauseating scents and immunity to one specific disease (the disease must be chosen at the time of the mask's creation—the ones in this adventure grant immunity to blood veil). The mask veils the wearer's alignment, making him register as neutral to alignment-detecting effects.

CONSTRUCTION

Requirements Craft

Wondrous Item,
misdirection,
remove disease;

Cost 1,000
gp, 80 XP



gate greet the PCs warmly, noting that if PCs want to meet the Queen's Physicians, they need to hurry to catch the doctors in the citadel's courtyard. As Ishani and the PCs enter the citadel, read the following.

The echoes of forcefully spoken but still just-missed words resound off the imposing granite and iron walls of Citadel Volshyenek's outer curtain. Dozens of red-and-silver-armored guards stand in assembly upon the pitted stone mustering ground here, mumbling in hushed, somber tones. Before them, atop a weathered wooden platform, paces Field Marshal Kroft, her eyebrows arched sternly as she momentarily tolerates the crowd's murmurs. Behind her upon the scaffold stand three grizzled veteran guardsmen at attention, as well as an ominous-looking group. These men wear cowled robes of oily-looking leather, supple gloves, and wide black hats. Some grip heavy canes, others dark satchels. Each of them, though, wears a dark-goggled mask tapering to a pointed beak. Among them stand two others. The first is a middle-aged gentleman in a simple black overcoat with streaks of white gracing the sides of his short dark hair. He watches the gathered guards with a soft, concerned expression, his hands tightly clasping a heavy-looking doctor's case. The second figure is an imposing one indeed—a woman dressed in full-plate armor, a longsword and shield at her side, and her blank-faced full helm sporting a bright red plume.

The Field Marshal's fierce tone cuts through the rumble of whispers. "You will escort Doctor Davaulus and his men in their royal duties wherever those might take them. Furthermore, you are to consider orders from any of the queen's new order of Gray Maidens to be as binding as any superior officer in

the Korvosan Guard or Sable Company. You are guardsmen of Korvosa. You will not balk. These are dire times and your city needs these healers. Your city needs you. Your patrol leaders have your assignments. Dismissed!"

As the assembly ends, the guardsmen gathered in the courtyard break up into groups, many reporting for various duties while others loiter for a few moments to quietly gripe about their new orders. The armored woman, one of the queen's aforementioned Gray Maidens, quickly organizes the guards, silencing bickering words with harsh commands and assigning orders for the day. Kroft and her veteran attendants begin to head into the citadel with Dr. Davaulus and his Queen's Physicians, but PCs who act fast can easily catch the commander's attention. Even if they don't try to catch up with Kroft, the field marshal notices them before she enters the keep and sends one of her aides to fetch the PCs. The leader of the Korvosan Guard welcomes the PCs and is even eager to see them, but she seems guarded in her current, unfavorable company—Davaulus's doctors unnerve her just as much as they do her men. She introduces the PCs to Dr. Davaulus, the newly appointed Queen's Physician. A calm man with a polite demeanor and deeply analytical mind, Dr. Davaulus greets the PCs warmly and welcomes their questions, saying that he hopes to ease the concerns of as many of Korvosa's people as possible in this trying time. If questioned about his plans to help Korvosa, Davaulus admits that he must still confer with Field Marshall Kroft to form a sensible plan, but produces a public announcement from his bag—one of numerous such writs soon to be distributed throughout the city (see Handout #1 on page 21)—to convey the queen's initial expectations.

If the PCs attempt to question the Queen's Physicians themselves, these men have little to say and defer to Davaulus, their voices muffled and disembodied as they emanate from their sinister masks.

The party might also wish to speak with soldiers of the Guard. By and large, the common guardsmen are wary of these strange new doctors—they're like no healers these simple men have ever seen before. The soldiers are also offended that outsiders have been given authority over them, and many are fearful that attending the doctors might result in their own infections.

At the conclusion of the discussion with Kroft and Davaulus, Ishani asks if he might be of service in coordinating the efforts of the Grand Vault of Abadar with those of the city. His participation is welcomed and he heads inside with the group after thanking the PCs,

THE GRAY MAIDENS

This adventure introduces several new organizations to Korvosa's streets: the Queen's Physicians, the cult of Urgathoa, and the Gray Maidens chief among them. Of these three, it is the Gray Maidens who are destined to have the largest role in Curse of the Crimson Throne. Created by Queen Ileosa to be a military group loyal only to her, she places her bodyguard and lover Sabina Merrin in command of this elite force.

New recruits into the Gray Maidens are hand-selected from beautiful young fighters, most of whom are conscripted from the Sable Company, the Order of the Nail, and the Korvosan Guard, but as this campaign continues, the Gray Maidens increasingly take to recruiting new members from Korvosa's more violent underworld. Conscripts to the Gray Maidens must pass the queen's own examination for beauty and strength—those who apply and are found lacking are told they can play another role in the new age, but are instead led down into the castle dungeons, disfigured, and imprisoned. Those who make the cut undergo a cruel and grueling initiation procedure designed to break down their personalities, leave their once-beautiful faces scarred, and to impress upon them that service and loyalty to the queen is the surest way to avoid painful punishment. Those who do not fall into line find themselves imprisoned as well. Those who comply are promised vaunted roles at Queen Ileosa's side once she brings Korvosa fully under her control.

During this adventure, the Gray Maidens are few in number, but Sabina Merrin quickly bolsters their ranks over the weeks. Although they are destined to become one of the major opposition groups against the PCs, strive in this adventure to present them as merely a necessity of desperate times—a personification of the threat of martial law in the face of a great urban crisis.



surprised and cautiously optimistic about the queen's new plans. It's up to you whether or not the PCs should be allowed into this meeting, a lengthy affair wherein Kroft and her aides go over the reports and statistics of plague in the city, then confer about ways to contain and treat the victims. Talk of quarantining blocks of the city and limiting movement through districts is the only news of any real import that comes of the discussion.

Dr. Davaulus and the Queen's Physicians

Dr. Reiner Davaulus heads Korvosa's efforts to combat the blood veil plague preying upon the city. A Chelaxian in his mid-40s, the doctor is deliberate in his speech and conducts himself like a concerned father, seeming to take genuine interest in assuaging the concerns and maladies of those around him. He claims to have served Queen Ileosa's family in Egorian, the capital of Chelax, for many years. When she contacted him several days ago, begging for his assistance on her city's behalf, he couldn't refuse. After accepting her gracious offer of magical transport to Korvosa, he's spent his time assembling a group of the city's most talented healers to help stem the tide of the spreading plague. In all cases, he speaks highly of

the queen and her attentiveness to her city's needs—this being the greatest clue of his counterfeit nature.

Dr. Davaulus does not lie when he doesn't have to: he is a doctor, he did come at the queen's request, and he is from Egorian. What he doesn't say, however, is that rather than being a servant of the Arvanxi family, he is in fact a secret member of the Red Mantis. An unassuming and unconventional assassin—more interested in slow poisonings and seemingly natural deaths than blades in the night—Davaulus was tasked by his superiors with fulfilling Queen Ileosa's genocidal wishes. To this end, the learned doctor contacted two allies of the Mantis: Lady Andaisin of Urgathoa's cult and Conte Tiriatic in Ustalav—



WHERE ARE ALL THE HEALERS?

Page 138 of the DMG presents a way to determine how many characters of each class reside in a city. According to this method, the average population of a large city like Korvosa includes 3 12th-level clerics, 6 6th-level clerics, 12 3rd-level clerics, and 24 1st-level clerics. Of these clerics, only nine are of high enough level to cast *remove disease*. Even including the average of 24 paladins—of which there are only three of a high enough level to possess the *remove disease* ability—and disorganized numbers of rangers, druids, and visiting NPCs with access to healing magic, this is still less than 0.1 percent of the city's population. With far more victims contracting blood veil every day, it's easy to see how the city's curative magics are quickly overwhelmed, even if every healer in the city were casting the maximum possible number of *remove disease* spells each day. To a certain extent, wands and potions and scrolls can bolster these numbers, but only as long as supplies hold out. When faced with a plague as virulent as blood veil, magic alone is not enough to save a city.

—F. Wesley Schneider

both known scholars of disease. With their aid, he masterminded the creation and advent of Korvosa's plague. Currently, he acts as a go-between for the queen, the Red Mantis, and the cult of Urgathoa hidden beneath the city. Publicly appointed as the Queen's Physician, Davaulus pantomimes the acts of a concerned healer devoted to his royal patron and the well-being of her city, while in truth, he and his Queen's Physicians plan to spread blood veil to every corner of Korvosa, relieving the city of its excess population of undesirables.

Dr. Davaulus's supposedly handpicked cadre of doctors are as deadly and false as he. Each of these men is a worshiper of Urgathoa, although they bear no evidence of their religion and their magic masks disguise their evil alignments. Expecting their appearances to generate some concern, the doctors lift up their masks, showing that they are indeed humans if asked (although this does not count as removing the masks, allowing them to still benefit from the magic items' effects). Each claims to be a local with some knowledge of healing or a country doctor rushed in from Harse, Palin's Cove, or Veldraine as soon as word of the spreading disease reached them.

PART FOUR: PESTILENCE

The plague has come to Korvosa, and while the new queen and her advisors bicker over how to address the calamity, on the streets fear takes hold. As the number of sick grows, people take desperate measures to avoid the plague, shutting themselves within their homes, shunning the infected, or even seeking escape from the city. As the Guard has yet to receive any official word on how to treat the ill, Korvosa's

most impoverished areas—particularly Old Korvosa—manifest district-wide symptoms, with blister-faced beggars and hacking common folk visible on every corner.

The majority of the encounters the PCs have through the rest of the adventure rely on them seeking to help the people of the city. With the Korvosan Guard doing its best to keep the peace and the church of Abadar busy tending to the ill, there are few with the time to seek out the PCs and ask for their aid. If the PCs look for ways to help, though, they easily discover a host of plague-related perils afflicting the city. The following six encounters present various ways the PCs can help fight the plague and slowly unravel the sinister source behind its spread. While each of these encounters is assigned a specific hook in which the PCs could get involved, feel free to adjust these hooks as befits your campaign. In any case, these encounters occur in no precise order, allowing you to run them as you please or leaving the PCs to pick and choose which situations most deserve their attentions.

Body Count

Through the efforts of Queen Ileosa, the Red Mantis, and the Cult of Urgathoa, hundreds of Korvosans are destined to die before the blood veil plague runs its course. Their efforts target the poor and weak among the city's populace—a group that numbers in the thousands. With the aid of Dr. Davaulus's Queen's Physicians and the plots of their Urgathoan allies, approximately 5,000 Korvosans are destined to succumb before the plague runs its course if the PCs do nothing to fight it.

Throughout this part of the adventure, each encounter ends in a "Body Count" section. These descriptions detail what results the PCs' efforts have on the estimated death toll of 5,000 souls. You should record the total number of lives the PCs save, as this not only provides a rough estimate of the plague's total casualties at the adventure's end, but serves as a guide of how effective the PCs were in combating the plague.

A. The Hungry Dead

Hook: Field Marshal Cressida Kroft hears a disturbing rumor that some of the lazier northern plague carters aren't delivering their bodies to the Gray District as ordered, but are instead disposing of them in one of several secluded alleys. She sends the PCs to investigate one of these sites—Racker's Alley.

In the days since the start of the plague, the disposal of bodies became a great concern, leading the Korvosan Guard to contract dozens of plague carts to collect the dead and see them buried in the city's Gray District or transported to wards where they can be safely burnt. It wasn't long, however, before a few carters in North Point grew tired of their long treks across the city bearing the