

BASTION OF BROKEN SOULS

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For D&D:

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INTRODUCTION

The dragon came.

—J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*

In *Bastion of Broken Souls*, player characters (PCs) solve a mystery, help a demon prince come to terms with his dual nature, overcome a deity stripped of his divinity, battle a great wyrm red dragon/half-demon, and eventually repair the damaged cycle of life.

Encounter Levels: *Bastion of Broken Souls* is designed for a party of four 18th-level D&D® characters who should advance through 19th level during play, and reach 20th level (and perhaps beyond) by the conclusion.

PREPARATION

To run this adventure, you need the three D&D core rulebooks: the *Player's Handbook*, the *DUNGEON MASTER'S Guide*, and the *Monster Manual*. If you want to expand the planar travels in this adventure, *Manual of the Planes* would be useful, but it is not required to run the adventure.

One background villain in particular will be familiar to longtime D&D players. Demogorgon is a character whose name many players know, and about whom many rumors flourish. When the PCs discover his involvement, you should take some time to find out what the players (and PCs) think they know about this demon prince, and use it to the adventure's best advantage. Some additional information about Demogorgon can be found in *Manual of the Planes*, but is not necessary in order to fully enjoy this adventure.

Shaded boxes provide player information. Sidebars contain important information for you. Information on nonplayer characters (NPCs) appears in abbreviated form; see Appendix I, Appendix II, and the *Monster Manual* for full NPC and monster statistics. The stat blocks given here for creatures found in the *Monster Manual* reflect changes due to nonstandard possessions or statistics; they replace or add on to the *Monster Manual* entry, as appropriate, but all other *Monster Manual* information for that creature remains the same.

Adventure Background

The demon prince Demogorgon wages a war of secrets for control of himself. Demogorgon has two heads and two minds, but one seeks domination of the other. Most creatures are unaware of Demogorgon's unending internal conflict.

Aameul, one of Demogorgon's personas, seeks to part with his sibling persona, called Hethradiah. Aameul and Hethradiah are unable to control one another, since each is in truth an aspect of the other. Nor could one simply slay the other without also perishing. However, Aameul knows of a demonic soul supercharged with life energy, which, if he absorbs it quickly enough

after he slays his sibling head, would allow Aameul to survive as a single entity.

Aameul learned of the great wyrm Ashardalon's breaching of a site known as the Bastion of Unborn Souls. The Bastion is a font of preincarnate souls, those who have not yet lived. Ashardalon's presence has tainted the Bastion and resulted in a "sickness" affecting newborn creatures everywhere.

The dragon is the key to Aameul's self-serving plan, because the great wyrm has the heart of a demon once loyal to Demogorgon. As Ashardalon continues to feed on preincarnate souls in the Bastion, his once faltering, demonic heart grows daily stronger (but more dependent) on this life force. To gain this soul-within-a-soul, Aameul must slay Ashardalon.

Aameul needs an edge against the supremely powerful dragon—he requires a descendant of an ancient druid named Dydd, whose blood may quell the dragon's power. He sends out agents to acquire such an individual. Hethradiah sends out his own agents to see what's going on.

And one of the PCs is of the blood of Dydd.

ADVENTURE SUMMARY

The adventure begins when the primary hook (see Character Hooks, below) engages. The PCs may also be cognizant of (or later learn about) other supporting hooks. The events of the adventure unfold as described here.

A Mystery: Aameul's agent tracks down a descendant of Dydd and attacks. Hethradiah's agent interferes and offers an alliance. Later, the PCs may track Aameul's agent to her abode.

Gathering Information: The PCs regroup, seek information, and come up with a plan to seek either the Guild of Sleep or the Church of the Elements.

Agents of Aameul continue to harry PCs as they attempt to resolve the adventure.

Church of the Elements: The druid society provides the history of Dydd and information regarding Ashardalon, the dragon Dydd mortally wounded long ago.

Guild of Sleep: Odd entities that live in dreams possess information on how to enter the Bastion of Unborn Souls.

Desayeus's Prison: The PCs must breach a celestial prison to find a piece of the *Soul Totem*, which grants them entry to the Bastion.

Bastion of Unborn Souls: The heroes travel to the Bastion and confront Ashardalon.

CHARACTER HOOKS

The primary hook best involves your player characters directly.

Primary Hook: Aameul's agent, the Cathezar, attacks the PCs because she has determined that one of them is a descendant of Dydd (a legendary druid who lived a

thousand years ago and is said to have single-handedly killed a great red wyrm). The Cathezar's attack spectacularly jolts the PCs into the action. See Part One: A Mystery.

Supporting Hook: A "sickness" begins to afflict newborn creatures, just a few at first—born listless and limp, almost seeming to lack some vital spark. Investigation reveals that these children are soulless, and the number of these children is growing. PCs are called on to discover the cause. PCs who begin with this hook eventually find the Guild of Sleep. See Part One, Scene 5.

Supporting Hook: Divinations are strangely, alarmingly mute on certain topics—the strange sickness afflicting newborns being foremost. The high-level PCs are asked to investigate this state of affairs by NPC authorities in your campaign. The problem is due to the Ban of the Unborn, which prevents deities from exerting any influence on unborn souls. (See the sidebar Ban of the Unborn in Part One, Scene 2.)

Alternative Hook: The heroes, long on the trail of Ashardalon the legendary red dragon, are finally in a position to track him down.

PART ONE: A MYSTERY

Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.

—Ecclesiastes 9:10

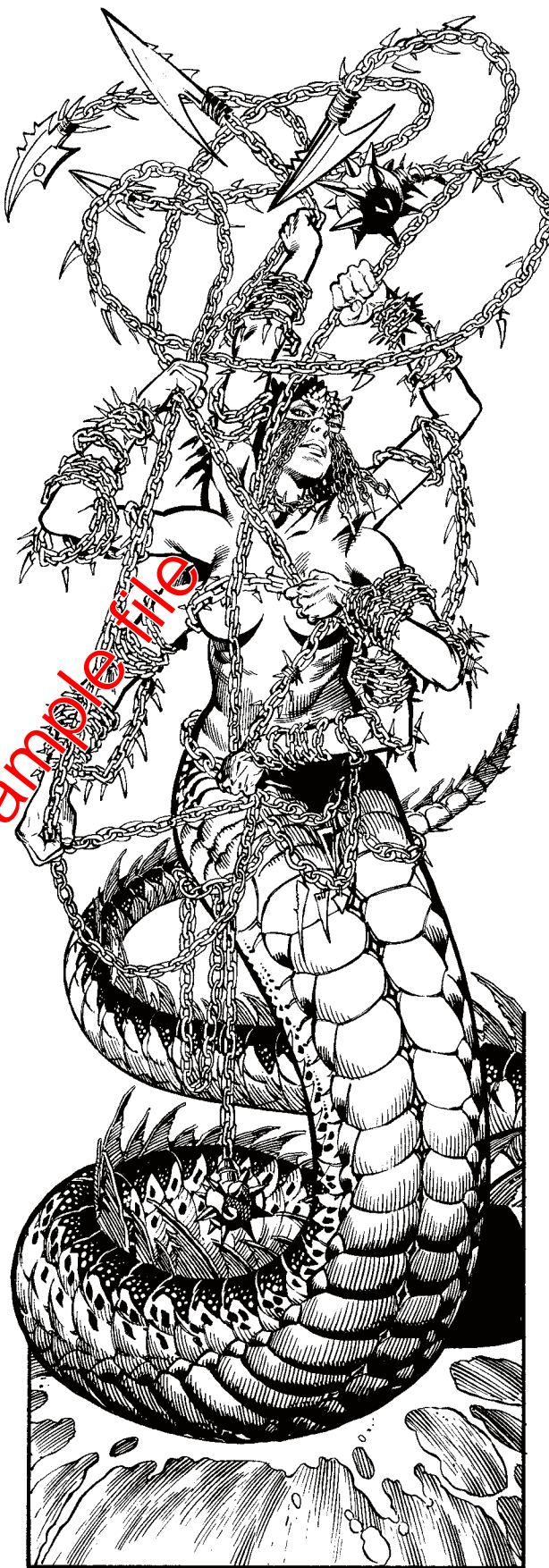
Using the primary hook to begin the adventure rivets the PCs' attention and motivates them to discover the reason behind the attack. You must decide which of the PCs is the descendant of Dydd (choose a PC who has no living family, or one who was secretly adopted). If you do not wish to use the primary hook, you can develop a hook appropriate to your campaign.

Scenes 2 through 6 of Part One may occur in any order, depending on when and how the PCs learn of the links, and the choices they make on how to best deal with the situation.

SCENE 1: THE CATHEZAR (EL 21)

The Cathezar, a half-demon/half-devil, attacks the PCs without warning in this scene. Choose a time and place where the characters are all together and not expecting to be set upon. One possibility includes a public street or tavern of your choice where screaming commoners and other secondary NPCs provide interesting flavor. Another intriguing possibility is an attack on the PCs while they are involved in an unrelated adventure.

During or immediately following the encounter with the Cathezar, Hethradial's agent, Nurn, shows up.



The Cathezar first spends 1 round scrying the descendant of Dydd, a second round casting *haste* on herself, then teleports in on the third round with a *hasted* partial action and attacks the PCs with her remaining standard round of actions. PCs may notice

the magical sensor associated with scrying (Scry check or Intelligence check DC 20) in the round prior to the attack, and if noticed, take one round of actions before they are attacked. If Dydd's descendant is shielded from scrying, the Cathezar relies on the power of her *blood mark* (see Appendix III), arriving 1 hour later after tracking the PC magically until she finds her quarry.

A nine-foot-tall fiend appears out of thin air and attacks. The creature appears as a giant snake with green, scaly coils from the waist down, and as a chain-shrouded female humanoid above the waist. She has six arms, all of which wield hellishly animate loops of barbed chain. Cruelly barbed chains also serve her as armor and clothing.

Creatures: The Cathezar is one of Aameul's best agents. She is a fiend, but is an outcast among both demons and devils—she is half demon and half devil, spawn of a doubly unholy union. The Cathezar utilizes a special magic item called the *blood mark*, created by Aameul to track down the nearest living blood descendant of Dydd. Among other powers, the item grants her a +20 bonus on her attempts to scry the nearest living descendant of Dydd.

Nurn is an agent of Hethradiah, assigned to monitor the Cathezar. Nurn is a master of stealth, and has so far managed to trail the Cathezar while he attempts to understand her suspicious activity (he has mysterious psionic abilities that allow him to see the unseen and predict the future). Nurn is a death slaad who always uses his *alter self* ability to appear as a clean-shaven human male with short-cropped blond hair and green eyes. He wears dark clothing and wields a magic short sword. When the Cathezar attacks the PCs, Nurn watches from the shadows (DC 44 for Spot and Listen checks to detect him) for 1 full round. Then he decides to seize the opportunity to gain information from the PCs, and so attacks the Cathezar as a supposed ally of the heroes on the second round of combat, with a sneak attack.

The Cathezar: Half-demon/half-devil; hp 250; see Appendix I.

Nurn: Death slaad Rog5; hp 164; see Appendix I.

Power-Up Suite

This term is used throughout *Bastion of Broken Souls* to define the array of magical abilities the creature in question prepares, casts, or activates before entering combat. Beyond the abilities themselves, another aspect of a power-up suite is the amount of time the creature has to prepare. For example, a wizard who wants to cast *shield*, *protection from arrows*, and *see invisibility* (in that order) needs 3 rounds to cast all those spells before entering the fray.

It falls to the DM (and the player characters' actions) to determine to what degree the power-up suites given herein are utilized. In the example above, the wizard with all three of her spells in place before entering combat is a much tougher opponent than the same wizard without those spells protecting her. Thus, these power-up suites provide DMs with another tool by which to adjust the strength of the PCs' opponents, the encounter, and the adventure overall.

Tactics: When the Cathezar arrives, her power-up suite (see the sidebar) is active (see her statistics in Appendix I). It is obvious by the Cathezar's actions whom she seeks with apparently murderous intent: The PC who is Dydd's descendant.

The Cathezar is tough and relies on her terrible flurry of attacks to incapacitate Dydd's descendant (if she kills the character, she can use *raise dead* on the victim later in her abode). Because she can't use her innate teleport ability to carry more than 50 extra pounds, she has to physically incapacitate her target via melee or spells, next take a standard action to grab the incapacitated target, then finally use her *helm of teleportation* (which can teleport only willing or unconscious/dead companions) to travel to her abode.

The Cathezar, while an able agent of Demogorgon's left head, is primarily concerned with her own safety. At the first sign of the PCs overcoming her, she uses her innate *teleport without error* ability to retreat to her abode and plans a new attack for later (later scenes provide details of such attacks by her). At this point in the adventure, she does not fight to the death.

Nurn makes his presence known with a sneak attack on the Cathezar (his power-up suite is also active) on his turn in the second full round of combat. If the PCs' defense has not already given the Cathezar pause, Nurn's sudden arrival makes her panic, for she recognizes Nurn for who he is. The Cathezar uses her *teleport without error* ability to return to her abode on her next action. Her *bracers of exit* (see Appendix III) allow her to overcome the effects of a *dimensional anchor* spell, if one is cast upon her. This ends the combat portion of this encounter, presuming the PCs take Nurn at his word.

Development: If PCs kill the Cathezar with her goal unaccomplished, secondary agents will be sent to take up her mission (see the sidebar *The Second String* in Scene 3).

If the PCs interrogate the Cathezar, see *What the Cathezar Knows* in Scene 3, room A4.

If the Cathezar flees, empty-handed or after successfully obtaining her target, she retreats to a staging area located on the same plane where the PCs are located (see Scene 3). The PCs could attempt to track Cathezar to the staging area, possibly with the help of Nurn.

Dealing with Nurn: Once the battle concludes, Nurn remains. He offers to ally with the PCs. He is as curious about what the Cathezar was trying to accomplish as are the PCs, and thus he wants to work with the heroes to discover the truth. He volunteers information as noted below, but he won't reveal his own allegiance now.

- "The Cathezar is an agent of a demon lord of the Abyss called Aameul. What have you done to anger a demon lord?"
- "My allegiance is with he who opposes the Cathezar and her devious liege, but I am honor-bound never to reveal my master's true identity, though he goes by

the name of Hethradiah when dealing with such as me. So may you name him also.”

- “I have long watched the Cathezar, attempting to understand what she seeks. I have discovered an important fact—Aameul believes he has discovered a way to double his power. I and Hethradiah would rather Aameul not gain this power, but we are not sure of the route to his supposed ascendance.”
- “In my surveillance of the Cathezar I have learned that—for purposes unknown to me—she seeks always after a descendant of Dydd. Apparently, she believes one of you to be that descendant.”
- “Another name I have uncovered is ‘Bastion of Unborn Souls.’ The Cathezar has been heard to mutter this, in conjunction with her desire to find a living descendant of Dydd, so that ‘the wyrm might be tamed.’ More than this, I do not know.”
- “Aameul is a great power already, and should he grow greater yet, things will go ill for many. I submit to you that he should be stopped. Since you are marked by Aameul and his Cathezar, I think we could both profit by attempting to discover just what the Cathezar and Aameul’s other agents are up to. Will you have me?”

Nurn knows that Aameul is actually one aspect of Demogorgon, but he would rather not reveal that piece of information, since that would also lead one step closer to the true identity of Hethradiah. The slaad is an opportunist, and he knows the powerful PCs can aid him in his quest. Moreover, if Nurn discovers why the descendant of Dydd is so important to Aameul, he figures that the same applies to Hethradiah, putting him in an ideal situation to trade on the PCs’ trust; perhaps he can steal the descendant away himself later.

Protecting Nurn’s Secret: Nurn is as truthful as possible, without volunteering too much. If he can’t answer a question without twisting the words to make his answer at least partially true, he repeats that his “oath to Hethradiah does not allow me to speak of such things,” hoping an air of mystery ends that line of questioning. Even if his true slaad nature is somehow determined, he first attempts to parley a continued alliance with the PCs. If his true allegiance is determined at any time, he lays it on the line, pleading with the PCs to maintain the status quo and keep him in the group (see Nurn Comes Clean in Part Two). If this parley with the PCs comes to naught, Nurn tries to escape, and he becomes one more hit-and-run agent of Demogorgon that the PCs must put up with while they continue the adventure. In this instance, you can insert encounters with Nurn throughout the adventure as you desire, patterned after the tactics employed by the Cathezar and/or Aameul’s Second String (though he first argues for alliance whenever he meets the PCs).

Nurn doesn’t initially know the location of the Cathezar’s latest abode, but later in the adventure he may use his *metafaculty* psionic power (see his statistics in Appendix I) to determine the location if PCs can’t find it

on their own with the methods noted later. You decide at which point Nurn makes this choice—possibly after the PCs have already visited the Guild of Sleep or the Church of the Elements (if the Cathezar or the Second String are never successful in capturing a PC, the other members of the party might be less motivated to track down the NPC). If a PC is captured, it might be fun to let that player play Nurn until his regular character is freed, if that player is sworn to secrecy about his true slaad heritage (and isn’t told he really serves Demogorgon).

Ad Hoc XP Adjustment: Award normal experience the first time the Cathezar is run off. Award 50% of normal experience for each additional time the Cathezar is driven off, if any. Award an additional 200% XP if the PCs finally permanently slay the Cathezar (or defeat her in her abode).

Nurn as an Ally

If the PCs decide to accept Nurn into their party, he fights steadfastly at their side (as discussed elsewhere)—this means he’ll earn an equal share of any experience gained through the adventure. For purposes of advancement, treat Nurn as though he is a 20th-level character with 198,000 XP; see Characters above 20th Level in the Conclusions section of this adventure.

SCENE 2: GATHERING INFORMATION

Following the abrupt attack by the Cathezar, the PCs are faced with many questions and few answers. When they attempt to find the Cathezar directly, refer to this section (and Scene 3 as well). Likewise, return to this section when the players want to find out more about Dydd and the Bastion of Unborn Souls, or related information unearthed by information gathering.

The information in this scene is intended to provide enough direction to allow the PCs to move on to any of several scenes. If the players get hung up on a particular point or are unable to cast the requisite spells or make the necessary Knowledge checks, provide NPCs who have these capacities.

The characters have access to a variety of information-gathering resources and divination spells.

Question-and-Answer Spells: This category includes *augury* (Clr 2), *divination* (Clr 4), *commune* (Clr 5), and *contact other plane* (Brd 5, Sor/Wiz 5). *Augury* only provides information about events that will occur in the coming 30 minutes (and so will be less useful in sorting out the big picture). *Divination* can be more useful depending on what the PCs ask. Use your discretion as to whether they deserve a nugget of useful information or just a piece of generic advice such as “Seek Evil where it lies” or “The best way to fight Evil is to know your enemy.”

Questions about the Cathezar or Dydd are better answered with general information spells (see below), bardic knowledge, and Knowledge checks. Questions about the Bastion of Unborn Souls are met with silence (due to the Ban of the Unborn). Questions about Aameul and Hethradiah (or the Cathezar’s master) are actually intercepted by Demogorgon (one head or the

Ban of the Unborn

By an edict as old as the multiverse, the deities are prohibited from influence, contact, or dealings with preincarnate souls in any fashion whatsoever. This is to prevent their meddling in the sanctity of the free will that all creatures possess at birth. For the PCs, this means they cannot appeal to the deities once they figure out what's going on. Similarly, summoned planar allies will not accompany PCs into the Bastion. Divination spells and the like that touch directly on the Bastion of Unborn Souls are simply not answered, while questions that bear indirectly on the Bastion are skirted or only answered partially. It is the Ban of the Unborn that prevents *divination* and similar spells from determining the cause of the infant "sickness" described in Character Hooks. Repeated or clever questions garner only the following answer: "The Ban of the Unborn may not be set aside." Knowledge (religion) checks reveal more (see below).

Despite the Ban, clerics who enter the Bastion continue to receive granted spells; likewise, items or artifacts that feed off divine power continue to function.

other). Thus, questions about either are also met with silence. Questions about Nurn reveal that he is a solid ally of the PCs; should the exact right question be asked, it could be revealed that Nurn serves a secret master. Answers to questions about the sickness assailing newborns might eventually convey the fact that they are empty shells without souls.

Answers to questions about Ashardalon reveal that the dragon is a great wyrm red dragon/half-demon who seeks any means to extend his waning life (due to the Ban of the Unborn, no answer reveals that he has entered the Bastion).

General Information Spells: Spells such as *commune with nature* (Drd 5), *legend lore* (Brd 4, Knowledge 7, Sor/Wiz 6), and *vision* (Sor/Wiz 7) fall into the category of spells that grant the caster information but fall short of answering specific questions. Vague information on the events surrounding this plot might include such phrases as the following.

- "The Cathezar's nature is divided, like the mind of her master."
- "A demon-hearted wyrm, though slain, lives while it feeds on souls of the unborn."
- "The cycle of life is disrupted, but the deities are powerless to repair it."
- "Songs sing of Dyd's epic deed."
- "The Ban of the Unborn overpowers the will of the gods."
- "Preincarnate souls grow in the loamy soil of possibility."
- "The Dreamer reveals what the deities must conceal."

Scrying: *Scrying* (Brd 3, Clr 5, Drd 4, Sor/Wiz 4) and *greater scrying* (Brd 6, Clr 7, Drd 7, Sor/Wiz 7) are potent tools. The DC to scry the Cathezar, Aameul's Second String, or Nurn begins at 10 since the PCs meet these subjects before attempting to scry them. In fact, scrying might be the best method for the PCs to track the Cathezar back to her abode (though while in her

abode, she has certain spells in place that direct any *etheral* travelers or anyone teleporting in to a trapped entry point). The PCs are barred from directly scrying the Bastion or those within it (because of effects related to the Ban) and Demogorgon (because of the potent spells on his fortress, the Abyss).

Even if the PCs somehow find an item that once belonged to Ashardalon, the effects of the *discern location* spell are blocked because of the Ban of the Unborn.

Bardic Knowledge: Bardic knowledge (or the lore ability of a loremaster) might be able to connect a reference to Dydd with the song *Dydd's Farewell* (DC 25),

a song that tells the tale of an ancient druid's fight against a devastatingly powerful red dragon (DC 33 to determine the dragon's name was Ashardalon). The dragon was mortally wounded, and Dydd was slain, as were many other druids. The song speaks of Dydd's association with a druidic organization called the Church of the Elements. Any druid who lives in the vicinity can provide directions and general information about the temple (see Scene 4). A bardic knowledge check (DC 30) can pinpoint the location of the enigmatic Guild of Sleep (see Scene 5).

Knowledge Skills: Some characters may have Knowledge skill modifiers high enough to recognize clues provided through spells in the adventure. A Knowledge (history) or Knowledge (local) check against DC 35 reveals the same information about Dydd as a bardic knowledge check does. Knowledge (religion) or Knowledge (the planes) reveals that the Ban of the Unborn is an edict older than the multiverse by which all divine creatures must abide (DC 25). The same Knowledge check reveals that the only group that knows anything more about the Ban is the Guild of Sleep (see Scene 5); another check (DC 25) pinpoints the location of the enigmatic Guild. Another Knowledge (religion) or Knowledge (the planes) check for information about the Bastion (DC 30) likewise points to the Guild of Sleep as the only potential link to the name. A Knowledge (history) check concerning Ashardalon (DC 25) reveals how a great red dragon once ruled a region of the world and was worshiped like a deity. However, he was slain or driven off, and his cult shriveled and died—most texts assume the dragon is dead. A Knowledge (the planes) check concerning the Cathezar (DC 35) reveals it to be the name of a mysterious demon provocateur, supposedly the head of a large and secret network of demon infiltrators (see Scene 3).

Ad Hoc XP Adjustment: Award experience to the PCs for having the wherewithal to use their resources to pierce the shrouds of this mystery, and move on to the next scenes. This experience is awarded once only, even though the PCs may attempt to gather information multiple times throughout the adventure. Grant the PCs as many XP as they would get from an EL 16 encounter.

SCENE 3: THE CATHEZAR'S ABODE

The PCs can find the abode by scrying the Cathezar or their missing friend and then attempting to use a *teleport* spell to get in, or they can enter with the aid of Nurn. Depending on the flow of events, the DM may have to devise other ways for the PCs to discover it.

Below an abandoned warehouse in a large city on the Material Plane lies a cellar that serves as the headquarters for Aameul's extensive network of demon infiltrators into humanoid society. The Cathezar runs the network, and its headquarters serves as her personal