

MODULE REVISIONS - ARCANA UNLEASHED: DEADFALL



Advice for revising the Arcana Unleashed: Deadfall adventure,
made for use with the latest edition of the world's greatest
roleplaying game!

MODULE REVISIONS - ARCANA UNLEASHED: DEADFALL



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GENERAL REVISIONS

PREVIOUS MISSIONS

In the event that you wish to run this adventure as the conclusion to a longer campaign, there are a couple of options that you can pursue when it comes to adventures for lower level characters that can be connected to this one with varying degrees of difficulty.

KEYS FROM THE GOLDEN VAULT

One option which could be a lot of fun and fits well thematically is to run the adventures included in the Keys of the Golden Vault adventure anthology prior to running this adventure. The level range of the anthology's adventures dovetails perfectly with that of Deadfall's such that you could feasibly run a campaign from level 1 all the way to level 20 by combining the two together. Additionally, the fact that the adventures all center around various heists means that your players will already be familiar with how an adventure of this nature works and will bring characters who have the requisite experience and skills to navigate a magical spy thriller of this magnitude. If you end up using this approach, I would recommend placing the adventures in the anthology within the Forgotten Realms and beyond, with the exception of the Shard of the Accursed adventure, as that adventure's setting of San Citlán is trickier to fit within that context. On the bright side, you don't necessarily have to run it alongside the other ones to maintain the level progression you need in order to get your players ready for Deadfall, seeing as it is one of two level 8 adventures included in the anthology.

ADVENTURES IN FAERUN

Another option to consider which allows for more flexibility and more easily fits within the setting of Faerun is to run a selection of the adventure scenarios included in the Forgotten Realms: Adventures in Faerun supplement until your players reach level 11, with each scenario causing them to level up upon completing it. This has the benefit of allowing you to pick and choose from the many adventure scenarios available based on the interests of your players, albeit at the cost of not really having much in the way of narrative cohesion without additional work on your part to tie your chosen adventure scenarios together and into the story of Deadfall. If you end up using this approach, I would strongly recommend running the Vault of Velsharoon adventure scenario once your players hit level 8, as that scenario involves the Red Wizards of Thay directly and can be used to establish the party's connection with them, whether as allies or enemies.

TOMB OF ANNIHILATION

A third option to consider which allows for a broadly cohesive narrative without much in the way of additional work on its own is to run the Tomb of Annihilation adventure before running this adventure. Similarly to the Keys from the Golden Vault anthology, Tomb of Annihilation's level range dovetails perfectly into that of Deadfall, not to mention the two adventures can be narratively tied together in that the party must contend with a contingent of Red Wizards on the continent of Chult during Tomb of Annihilation, interactions which could potentially tie into Szass Tam's plans while also establishing a connection between the party and the Red Wizards which can segue nicely into Deadfall. On the other hand, tying the two adventures together in this way could serve to undermine Deadfall's narrative stakes if you aren't careful: after thwarting the likes of Acererak and saving the world from the effects of his death curse, Szass Tam could feel like small potatoes by comparison, even though the two villains have the same Challenge Rating. If you end up using this approach, I would recommend doing more to tie the two adventures together in a narrative sense so that Deadfall feels like a proper escalation to Tomb of Annihilation: perhaps Szass Tam was hoping to use the Soulmonger to speed his plans along until the party's interference prevented him from doing so, or perhaps Szass Tam has retained Valindra Shadowmantle's services in order to ensure that his plans are successful, leaving the party with two liches they have to contend with instead of just one.

- For the latter scenario, I'd recommend using Valindra's stat block from Forgotten Realms: Adventures in Faerun throughout your campaign in order to make things more interesting and keep her capabilities in line with those of other NPCs included in Deadfall.

DEAD IN THAY

Finally, one last option to consider which involves the party dealing with the Red Wizards of Thay in a far more direct fashion is to run the Dead in Thay adventure from the Tales from the Yawning Portal adventure anthology before running this adventure. As with other approaches, the level range for Dead in Thay segues nicely into Deadfall, taking your players from level 9 to level 11, not to mention it allows for the adventure to be slotted into place after running the Vidorant's Vault adventure if you're using the first approach or The Vault of Velsharoon adventure scenario if you're using the second approach, giving you a degree of flexibility in how you go about things. Additionally, the design of Dead in Thay strongly encourages stealth due to the mechanics surrounding the alert level of the Doomvault, the sheer number of powerful foes lurking within, and the potential risks associated with dying in the dungeon, making the

adventure a good match for the magical spy thriller approach outlined in Deadfall. If you end up using this approach, I would once again recommend combining it with one or both of the first two approaches described above in order to get your players up to level 9 and more well-acquainted with how such an adventure works while also potentially establishing the party's relationship with the Red Wizards of Thay.

AS SEEN ON THE SILVER SCREEN

Given that the adventure makes reference to background events depicted in the movie *Dungeons & Dragons: Honor Among Thieves*, as well as the position which agents of Szass Tam occupy as the overarching antagonists of that film, it might be fun to include one or more of the film's characters in the adventure or any adventures you run leading up to it. The most notable of the film's characters have been given stat blocks which you can access on D&D Beyond through the Thieves' Gallery supplement, while several of the magic items that they use in the film can likewise be found there through the *Legendary Magic Items* supplement, allowing you to make use of both in your campaign if you so choose. Advice for how to utilize these characters and the magic items featured in the film, as well as any mechanical modifications which could be made to either, have been included below:

THE THIEVES

When it comes to Edgin and his party, the protagonists of the film, I believe that the best approach to take would be to use them somewhat sparingly: with each party member having a Challenge Rating of 5, they aren't that far off from your players in terms of power at the start of the adventure, and thus could run the risk of stealing their spotlight. They could be encountered sporadically throughout the adventure in situations which hint at all sorts of shenanigans they are dealing with "off-screen" as they attempt to thwart Szass Tam in their own unorthodox way, or they could have been captured after their plans went awry and require rescuing, offering their powerful magic items to the characters in exchange for seeing them to the relative safety of the characters' home base. As far as modifications to their stat blocks are concerned, everyone is more or less fine as is, although I would suggest revising Edgin's stat block to make him more of a mundane Bard than a true spellcaster in order to match his depiction in the film. In order to accomplish this, I would suggest revising the wording of his *Disorienting Words* action and *Inspiring Words* reaction so that they are not magical abilities, while also modifying his *Spellcasting* action such that he cannot cast *Disguise Self* and requires no spell components to cast his spells, allowing his remaining spells to be flavored as representations of his own natural charisma (while also implying that his *Message* spell is simply him whisper-yelling to his allies).

THE PALADIN

When it comes to Xenk Yendar, the Thayan paladin who assists Edgin and his party in their quest to obtain the Helm of Disjunction, I believe that the best approach to take is to use him as something of an escape hatch for your players: between his Challenge Rating of 10 and his experience fighting the Red Wizards of Thay specifically, he is well equipped to aid the party in a difficult encounter that would otherwise kill them. This sort of assistance does not come without risk: Xenk does not do anything subtly, and Szass Tam has no doubt been hunting him for some time after everything he's done to stymie his ambitions, not to mention he would be very interested in determining just how he survived the *Beckoning Death* and why his narrow escape from it extended his lifespan. To that end, I would recommend only allowing Xenk to save the party from a difficult encounter once: after that, he is hunted down and captured by Szass Tam's forces if the lich has not already been dealt with, potentially requiring the party to rescue him from the Citadel as he is likewise forced to watch Szass Tam's ritual.

- In the event that he dies while rendering assistance in this way, he bestows his *Daggersword* to the party in the hopes that they can make use of it during their mission. I would suggest treating the *Daggersword* as a *Legendary* magic weapon with the same properties that are outlined in Xenk's stat block.

THE VILLAIN

When it comes to Sofina, the powerful Red Wizard of Thay who serves as the film's main antagonist, I believe that the best approach to take is to use her as a representation of what Szass Tam's plans could mean for Thay and the rest of the world: having been pretty thoroughly slain by Edgin's party at the end of the film, Sofina's return as a malefite mockery of her former self, bound to serve Szass Tam as punishment for her failure to unleash the *Beckoning Death* upon Neverwinter, could serve as a rather frightening encounter for the party. With a Challenge Rating of 15 and access to several high level spells and magical abilities, Sofina is a force to be reckoned with all on her own, making her an effective minion to place in between the party and thwarting Szass Tam's plans. To that end, I would recommend modifying her stat block such that she is an Undead instead of a Humanoid and given the traits of a malefite which will be described later, while describing her appearance as being more akin to how she looked at the time of her death in the film.

THE CON MAN

When it comes to Forge Fitzwilliam, the con artist and thief who schemed his way into becoming Lord of Neverwinter with the help of the Red Wizards of Thay, I believe that the best approach to take would be to either utilize him as a prisoner at Revel's End (in the event that you are running the Prisoner 13 adventure from Keys from the Golden Vault before this adventure) or else making him into a prisoner of Szass Tam, having managed to escape Revel's End only to be captured by Szass Tam's agents and subjected to terrible arcane experiments in the Citadel as punishment for his failure to facilitate the lich's plans for Neverwinter. In either capacity, Forge could potentially serve as a source of information and a decently formidable ally in his own right given his Challenge Rating of 8, but he is ready and willing to abandon or betray the party if it means saving his own skin. To that end, I would recommend making it so that he does not have his listed equipment when the party encounters him and modifying his Multiattack so that he can make two attacks with no other stipulations in order to account for this.

CHARACTER CREATION

With regards to character creation, in addition to the options noted elsewhere in that section, I would strongly recommend making the rest of the materials included in the Forgotten Realms: Heroes of Faerun book available to your players in order to help truly immerse their characters within the setting of Faerun and the region of Thay in particular, even if they aren't necessarily from there. Giving them access to the unique languages that are spoken in the region in particular will really help them feel like locals or perhaps even more like foreigners, depending on the characters your players seek to portray.

MALEVOLENT MALEFITES

One aspect of the adventure which is cool in concept, yet falls flat somewhat in execution is the Malefice Mortum ritual, the mechanism through which Szass Tam plans to assume supreme power in Thay once more by raising an army of undead infused with demonic energy to wreak havoc across the land. Although this ritual sounds impressive, these demonic undead, known as malefites, don't really have much that sets them apart from typical undead outside of the unholy green energy that they emit, a detail which is purely cosmetic. In order to help the malefites fulfill their potential as a looming apocalyptic threat, I would recommend tying them a bit more strongly to the Abyss by taking a page from an unlikely source: Morte's Planar Parade, specifically its Planar Influences section, which features traits that can be given to creatures who have been fundamentally changed by their exposure to the Abyss. Although intended to represent the effects of months of exposure to the energies of that plane, I

believe that the nature of the Malefice Mortum ritual merits an exception in this instance, not in the least because the traits listed in Morte's Planar Parade are perfectly suited towards making the malefites stand out.

- Of the three Abyss-influenced traits noted in Morte's Planar Parade, the Poison Tolerant trait is generally unnecessary for the malefites, seeing as undead are typically outright Immune to the Poisoned condition.
- Entropy of the Abyss, meanwhile, is an outstanding trait for the malefites to have both thematically and mechanically, seeing as it allows them to turn Bludgeoning, Piercing, or Slashing damage they deal into Necrotic damage. This has the neat benefit of tying them even closer to the Zulkir of Necromancy that created them, while also serving as a nice counter to features like a Barbarian's Rage, a Monk's initial Deflect Attacks feature, or certain magic items that allow players to reduce or outright negate ordinary weapon damage.
- Finally, although the Siege Monster trait doesn't have much in the way of tactical implications for direct combat with the party, it's still a nice mechanical reflection of the malefites' destructive nature, given their infusion with demonic energy.
- Outside of these additional traits, I would also suggest removing any trait that a malefite may possess which allows them to return to life after being destroyed such as the Undead Restoration trait, in a similar manner to how the draconic malefite Drevoralyx does not possess the Spirit Gem trait of a typical Dracolich. Beyond serving as a good drawback in exchange for the greater power afforded to the malefites, it also removes the need for you and your players to worry about any of the malefites returning after they are destroyed and continuing to cause problems even after Szass Tam is stopped.

SAME OLD, SAME OLD

A related problem that this adventure suffers from, one that is only somewhat mitigated by the above changes made to the malefites, is the repeated use of various stat blocks for several different characters throughout the story, particularly with respect to the many Thayan NPCs and monsters that the party will need to interact with and face in combat in order to foil Szass Tam's plans. Being a high level adventure, it makes sense that the characters involved in it would have to be powerful enough to pose an actual challenge for the party, and in a highly stratified magical society like Thay, it likewise makes sense that anyone who's anyone would have to possess magical ability or be exceptional in some other fashion in order to hold onto their positions. That being said, certain stat blocks are used rather frequently throughout the adventure, and your players could easily get sick of fighting the same sorts of enemies over and over again, so more-so than usual, I would strongly recommend adding creatures from other sources to this

adventure and modifying existing stat blocks in order to increase the variety among the characters the party interacts with. Suggestions for alternative stat blocks and specific modifications for various NPCs will be detailed further in subsequent sections, but some more general suggestions for additional creatures and modifications have been included below:

ARCANA UNLEASHED NPCs

Aside from the suggested stat blocks for the other Zulkirs, Arcana Unleashed has a couple other creatures which can fit within the context of this adventure with very little work. The easiest to add are the Spellguards, warriors who specialize in countering rival spellcasters who could easily be flavored as Thayan Knights. In a similar vein, Darkenbeasts could be added to the adventure as the creations of Szass Tam loyalists who aid them in battle, ambushing the party under the cover of darkness and using their Spell Imprint trait to dramatically alter the course of a battle by casting additional spells against the party at the cost of their lives. Finally, given the unstable nature of Szass Tam's ritual and the demonic magic that still lingers in Eltabbar, there is ample opportunity to include all manner of Living Spells, including ones that are derived from appropriate Necromancy spells of 5th level or lower, such as Ray of Sickness or Blight.

ADDITIONAL DEMONS

Outside of the more powerful demons that players contend with in this adventure, there are a number of other demons from various sources that could potentially make for worthwhile additions. A natural fit for this adventure in particular are the Armanites from Mordenkainen Presents: Monsters of the Multiverse, who are outright stated to fight in hordes under the command of the Rendeliths introduced in this adventure, and so could easily be included as part of the demons wreaking havoc throughout Thaymount. Other worthwhile inclusions from Monsters of the Multiverse include the Alkiliths, who could be contributing to the weakening of the barriers between the Material Plane and the Abyss by forming portals to that plane around Szass Tam's ritual site, and the Nabassus, who have the uniquely devastating ability to consume the souls of their victims and thus might be of interest to Szass Tam in order to prevent those who oppose him from being resurrected. Beyond these demons, the Degloth from Vecna: Eve of Ruin fits well as a general brute enemy, while the Vlazok from that adventure is similarly powerful while also fitting very well aesthetically due to its skeletal appearance. Although not as powerful, Chasmes and Vrocks could also be added to encounters as an additional complication, using their Drone and Stunning Shriek abilities to try and disorient the party so that other demons can tear them to pieces. Finally, demon-adjacent creatures like the Gnolls could make for a good fit due to the existing threat posed by roving

Gnoll bands in the tharch of Gauros, with such a threat potentially being worsened in the wake of Szass Tam's plans such that the violence has now spilled out into nearby tharchs.

- As a general rule of thumb when adapting various 5e demons to a 5.5e adventure, I would recommend simply removing any Resistance to nonmagical damage they possess and possibly giving them an extra Hit Die or two to compensate for the loss. The exception to this is the Alkiliths, which I believe should have their Resistance to nonmagical damage replaced by Resistance to Bludgeoning, Piercing, and Slashing damage on account of their more fungal, ooze-like form.

ADDITIONAL UNDEAD

Although undead occupy a similarly prominent role within this adventure given the significance of the malefites, it's a little trickier to include additional undead creatures as part of the adventure, seeing as the malefites don't seem to include any incorporeal undead such as Wraiths, limiting the available options somewhat. That being said, there are a handful of creatures that can be included. One option which fits very well with Thay in particular are the Dread Warriors included in the Dead in Thay adventure, undead warriors originally created by Szass Tam who, although rather weak, can be used in a manner akin to a familiar by the Red Wizards who created them, allowing their creator to see through their senses and cast spells through them unless their connection is suppressed for 1 minute with a successful casting of Counterspell or Dispel Magic to shut down a 5th level spell, making them rather effective sentries and spies. Another option are the Deathlocks from Monsters of the Multiverse, undead warlocks that failed their patrons and were brought to unlife to continue their service, but which can also be brought back by powerful necromancers who act as their patrons, making them a good fit to represent weaker undead spellcasters that are sworn to Szass Tam's service. A third option which makes a lot of sense are additional vampire varieties in the form of the Vampire Nightbringer from the Monster Manual and the Vampire Warden from Astarion's Book of Hungers, both of which could be more powerful minions of the vampire siblings Viln and Nara Crocus ordered to deal with the party or protect the Citadel. Finally, the Bone Roc from Vecna: Eve of Ruin could be added as undead mounts for Szass Tam and his agents, with the customizability offered by the various bones that can be used in their creation making them quite versatile despite their relatively simple base stat block.

- Similarly to the demons discussed above, I would suggest simply updating the Dread Warrior's Undead Fortitude trait to match that of the Zombie from the 2025 Monster Manual and removing the Deathlocks' Resistance to nonsilvered weapons when adapting them for use in this 5.5e adventure, and perhaps giving the Deathlocks an extra Hit Die or two to compensate.

ADDITIONAL HUMANOIDS

Although there aren't too many options for generic Humanoid stat blocks that both fit within the context of this adventure and are powerful enough to keep up, Monsters of the Multiverse does offer a few. The Blackguard and Champion can make for pretty good representations of Thayan Knights, while the Warlord can be used as an alternative to the Warrior Commander in order to represent a truly exceptional military leader and strategist. Similarly, the War Priest could be used as a weaker, yet more specialized and thematically appropriate representation of those clerics who worship antagonistic gods such as Bane or Cyric. Finally, although not all of them are powerful enough to make the cut, spellcasters such as the Abjurer Wizard, the Diviner Wizard, the Evoker Wizard, the Necromancer Wizard, or the Warlock of the Fiend can likewise be used to represent Red Wizards and other spellcasters who have taken more specialized paths in their pursuit of power, likely while having sworn loyalty to their corresponding Zulkir.

MODIFYING STAT BLOCKS

Beyond all of these options, I believe that the best recommendation I can make is to freely encourage modifying the equipment, features, spells known, and/or traits of the existing creatures and NPCs featured in this adventure where appropriate in order to help those with the same stat block stand out from each other as much as possible, and in some cases giving them new stat blocks entirely which I believe are a better representation of them. Outside of the creatures and NPCs who will be discussed further in subsequent sections, the various tharchions and other NPCs described in Chapter 1 who aren't immediately relevant to this adventure are perhaps the best example of this, as several of them use the exact same stat block with no other changes, while others (namely the Zulkir of Divination, a Gnome named Lethnar) are left unchanged from their base stat block even when they would have to be given modified stat blocks in order to accurately represent them. Unnamed Red Wizards and other magic users are also strong candidates for this treatment, as otherwise you're going to end up with an entire society of mages who almost universally use the exact same spells, and that just isn't an accurate representation of what a magocracy whose members are constantly vying for power would really be like.

- As a minor note, for the sake of verisimilitude, assume that any Thayan the party encounters has knowledge of Thayan as part of or in addition to the languages they know unless otherwise stated.

OVERWHELMING ENCOUNTERS

Finally, a persistent issue with the encounter design of this adventure is a tendency to throw several powerful foes at the party at once in a manner which strikes me as being somewhat haphazard. Although this may perhaps be more reflective of what high level characters are actually capable of taking on than the historically flawed Challenge Rating system, and can potentially help encourage players to take a more discreet approach towards completing their missions, this logic holds less sway towards the end of the story when discretion is no longer required and the party continues to face numerous powerful foes thrown at them simultaneously. Moreover, the adventure also has a habit of making Humanoid characters fight the party to the death even when they don't necessarily have a reason to do so, making these encounters even more difficult as a result. In an effort to make these encounters slightly more manageable, I would generally recommend having Humanoid foes move to flee as soon as they are Bloodied, with exceptions to this rule and potential consequences for allowing certain enemies to get away or failing to defeat certain enemies being detailed further in subsequent sections.

CHAPTER 3: OPERATION DEADFALL

MODIFIED STAT BLOCKS

When it comes to the various NPCs featured in this chapter, I have compiled those whose stat blocks I believe should be modified and discuss those changes below, organized roughly in accordance with the order in which they appear.

CITY WATCH RED WIZARDS

With respect to the Red Wizard Archmages that serve on the City Watch, I would suggest modifying their spell list to lean away from more destructive spells in order to minimize property damage, if not out of an actual concern for potentially harming innocent people caught in the crossfire. To that end, I would suggest modifying their Spellcasting action such that they can cast Chain Lightning in place of Lightning Bolt and Hold Monster (level 9 version) in place of Cone of Cold, making them more capable of taking out all manner of threats with greater precision than simply blasting them to bits. I would also suggest giving them knowledge of Draconic, Dwarvish, Elvish, and Infernal.