

**FOR 5 PCS OF
7TH LEVEL**



SONG UNDYING

**A 5E WARLOCK ADVENTURE
BY JEFF LEE**

SONG UNDYING

Adventure Background

When Chiara Vacarro died from illness, her son Salamondre, one of Zobeck's most famous dirgists, was distraught. Her husband's suicide followed shortly thereafter. Salamondre's performances at their funerals were talked about for weeks, and those who spoke of it wept when they recalled the mournful tones of his lyre and the pain in his voice. Then Salamondre left Zobeck. He traveled for many years. Seeking solace, is what people said, assuaging his grief. Yet that was not what motivated the dirgist. In all his music lay his own fear of death. He traveled far and wide, looking for a way to stop the inevitable. Salamondre wandered as far as the Southlands in his quest. He joined up with a band of adventurers, braving death even as he sought to elude it. He hoped that by delving into lost temples and abandoned crypts, he would find balm for his tortured soul. At some point, he did, but not before a final adventure that ended in tragedy. All the heroes in his band were slain except for Salamondre and Giselle, a paladin of Lada.

When Salamondre finally returned to Zobeck, he was a changed man. He quietly divested himself of all his family's business holdings and property. He bought an abandoned monastery and used a portion of his fortune to restore it. Then he began his ministry. Salamondre exhorted a new

religion, based around a single principle: The Song Undying. The music of the universe, an unending melody that binds all life together. Master the song, and death cannot approach you. Life, youth, and happiness, forever. Salamondre's new sanctuary quickly began to fill with devotees, carefully selected and chosen by the bard. Certain temples in the city, including that of Rava, wanted this new cult shut down. However, the mayor is an admirer of Salamondre's work as a dirgist, and certain other important personages in the city favored his new cult. The message of the Song Undying is compelling, and Salamondre's selective nature about who is allowed to join and enter his compound has the rich and powerful clamoring to gain the bard's favor. Why even seek becoming a gearforged, with its great expense, when one can remain forever whole and well in one's original body? The Song Undying has become increasingly popular in a very short time, with adherents and fans among the city's poor and working-class citizens, as well as several wealthy and influential families. A forceful crackdown on the cult at this juncture would be politically unwise, and so its influence continues to grow.

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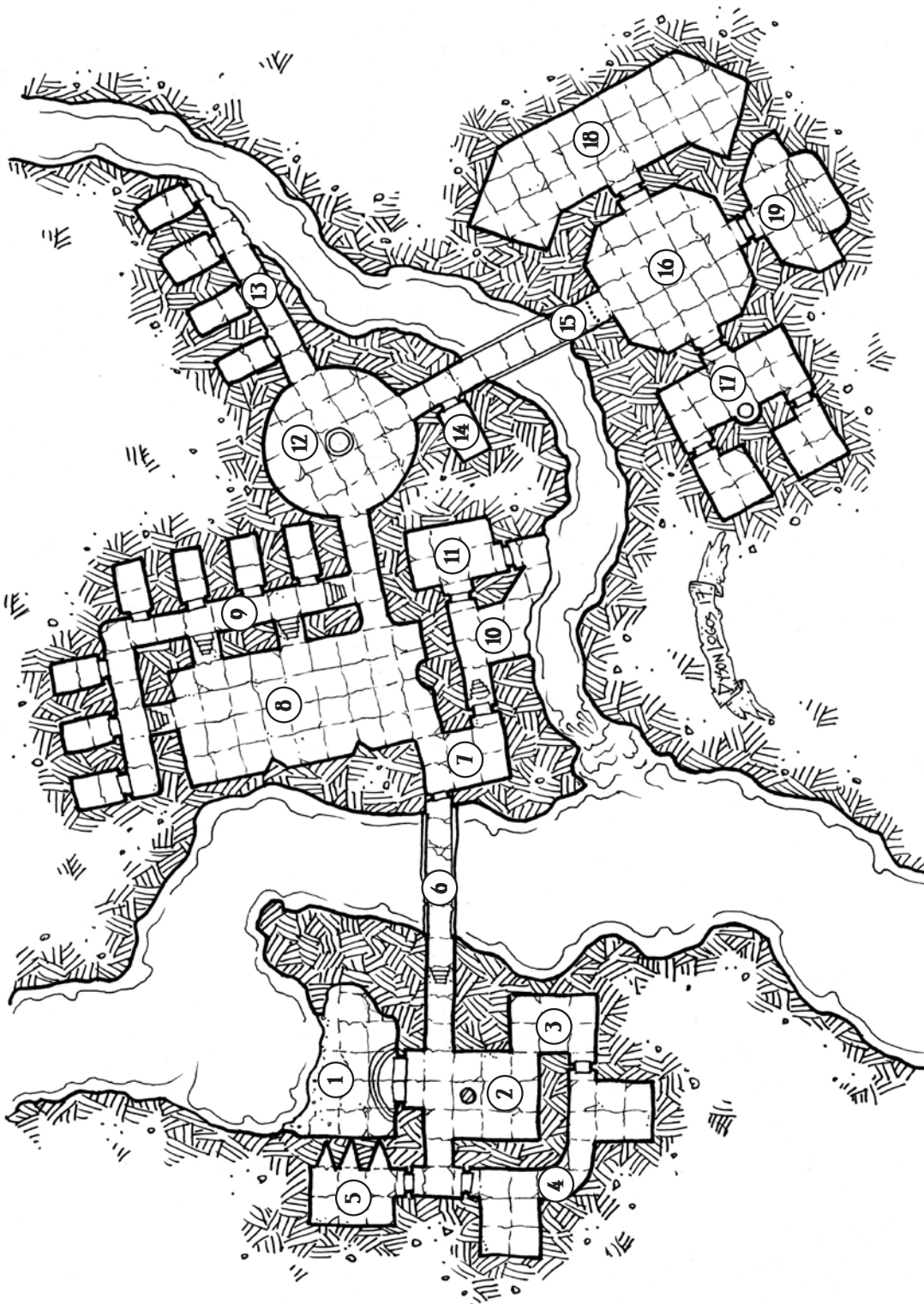
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Adventure Summary

The PCs are in the Lower District of Zobeck at night when they stumble upon what seems to be a group of thugs attacking a man and his young son. During the fight they realize their opponents are deadly killers, who are much more skilled than common, dockside thugs. The man is killed in the fight, though the boy, Marko, survives. The man protecting him was not his father, but his bodyguard, Conte. With his bodyguard dead, young Marko is vulnerable to further attacks. He knows Conte was trying to get him somewhere safe, but he doesn't know the details. A bloodied letter on Conte's body provides some clues. Strangely, it appears Conte was trying to get Marko to a local fence, one who buys goods from common pickpockets and second-story thieves. Unknown to Marko, the thugs were assassins sent by Salamondre. Marko is Salamondre's young cousin and only living relative, which makes him the only person capable of destroying the object that is the root of Salamondre's powers.

The fence is a relative of a rogue who once adventured with Salamondre. When the group returned briefly to Zobeck to consult the Clockwork Oracle, Giselle saved the fence's life. The paladin is the only surviving member of Salamondre's adventuring company, and one of the few who knows the secret behind the Song Undying. Knowing the fence felt indebted to her, Giselle sent Conte and Marko to him with hopes the fence could use his contacts to hide Marko until she returned. She intended to gain possession of the object that is the source of Salamondre's power, the Thrice-Cursed Heart, and bring it to Marko to be destroyed. Unfortunately, she has been captured by Salamondre. After being shown the letter on Conte's body, the fence implores the PCs to help Giselle by going to the monastery and stopping Salamondre.

At the old monastery where Salamondre has established his place of worship, the PCs soon discover the people supposedly cured of their ills or returned from the dead are actually undead. While the Heart can restore the flesh, it can't restore the spirit and instead fills people with dark energies, raising the dead into undeath or slowly converting the living. All these undead are beholden to the Heart, and thus to Salamondre, as it has become his phylactery. Unless the Heart is destroyed, Salamondre can never be slain. The PCs must defeat the undead cultists, wrest the prize from Salamondre, and return it to Zobeck to be destroyed by Marko. Only then will the Song Undying end.

RUNNING THIS ADVENTURE

This adventure takes place in and around Midgard's Free City of Zobeck. A map of Zobeck can be found online at: <https://midgardmap.koboldpress.com/zobeck/> Extensive knowledge of Zobeck isn't required to run this adventure, which can be easily run using just that map and this lair. If you aren't using the Midgard campaign setting, this adventure can be run in any major city with a river running through it.

Attack in the Lower District

The PCs are in Zobeck's Lower District at night when they hear the clash of steel and shouts from a nearby alley. This area contains several warehouses and a few shops, most of which are closed for the evening, making the sounds of combat an odd occurrence. If the PCs investigate, they see a pitched battle with five, armed people attacking a single man, who calls out for help when he notices them. The attackers are professional mercenaries (treat as **veterans**), hired to track down and kill Marko Vacarro, Salamondre's young cousin. He is the only living being at the moment who would be able to destroy the Thrice-Cursed Heart, the corrupt egg-shaped object that serves as Salamondre's phylactery.

The lone man, Conte, is a loyal guard for house Vacarro and serving as Marko's bodyguard. Giselle, paladin and former adventuring companion of Salamondre, warned Conte of the assassination attempt and gave him a name and location in the docks of someone who could help hide Marko until she had obtained the Thrice-Cursed Heart from Salamondre's compound. The mercenaries tracked them from the family home and caught up with them in the Lower District. While trying to lose them, Conte took a wrong turn and ended up in this blind alley. With no way out, he had Marko hide and prepared to stand them off. Unfortunately, he was struck with a pair of poisoned crossbow bolts before the mercenaries closed in to finish him off. When the PCs arrive, he is near the end of his fight. The first round the PCs enter combat, the mercenaries strike down Conte before turning their attention to the interlopers.

Salamondre's mercenaries aren't willing to die, no matter how well paid. If more than two of them fall, they attempt a fighting retreat out of the alley, hoping to regroup and find Marko again later. If they are unable to escape, they surrender if reduced to half their hit points or fewer. Once combat is over, the PCs can make a DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check. On a success, they notice Marko hiding behind a bin near the back of the alley. If they can coax him out, Marko weeps over Conte's fallen form. A successful DC 10 Charisma (Persuasion) check can calm the boy enough for him to answer questions. He gives his name as Marko and tells them he is eight years old. Conte was his friend who worked for his mother and father. He doesn't know why the bad men hurt Conte or where they were going, only that

Conte was “taking him somewhere safe.” If asked about his mother and father, Marko says, “Mama and Papa died in an accident. Conte takes care of me now, ‘til I’m grown up.”

IF THE PCS SAVE CONTE

The PCs might incapacitate or disable the mercenaries before Conte is slain, or they might administer magical healing to Conte before he dies. If this happens, Conte speaks to the PCs himself and provides the information listed in the Development section. He asks them to accompany him to Milos to ensure Marko arrives safely. He continues to bodyguard Marko even during the boy’s time sequestered away with one of Milos’ connections. Conte promises their aid to him and the young Vacarro will be generously rewarded, as noted in Concluding the Adventure.

TREASURE

Each mercenary carries a pouch containing 50 gp, their advance on the payment for Marko’s murder. The rough clothing they wear is incongruous with their weapons and mail, and they look as if they took extra care to disguise themselves as common laborers. They carry nothing that indicates why they were trying to kill the boy.

If the PCs search Conte’s body, they find a pouch with 13 gp, 37 sp, and a key. The key is the master key to the Vacarro house in the Merchant District in Zobeck. If asked, Marko tells them it opens the doors at his house.

DEVELOPMENT

Conte also carries a blood-stained letter. It reads as follows:

Conte,

Sal— <obscured by bloodstain> for the boy. You need to get him out of the house. Go to the Lower District and seek the shop under the sign of the rusty scales. Tell <another bloodstain> ent you. Say you’re call—<more blood> and give him the o—<bloodstain>—rote. He needs to find a place to hide Marko until I can find the heart and return to the city. When I return, I’ll see him and—<marred by bloodstains>—estroyed and this will all be over. Lada watch over you and the boy.

- Giselle

If a PC searches Conte’s boots, or if a PC succeeds on a DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check while searching the body, the PC finds another letter rolled up and tucked into one of the boots. This one is addressed to someone named Milos and says:

Milos,

I’m calling in your debt. My friends here need help. The head of the Song Undying cult has hired killers to come after this boy. A life for a life. Use your contacts and find a place for the

boy and his warden to hide. They’ll need to stay there until I come to visit you at your shop. Then you’ll need to bring me to them, or them to us. Do this, and we are even. If a week passes and you hear nothing from me, go to the Three Singing Maids and ask if I left anything for you. There is a letter that explains everything. Please take it to the temple of Lada. Lada’s blessings on you.

- Giselle

If asked about the letters, Marko doesn’t know anything, except that the name Giselle sounds familiar. He thinks that might be the name of the lady that was talking to Conte when they were at the market a few weeks ago. He says she was tall, wore shiny armor, and had a sword. Her shield had Lada’s eye on it. She and Conte talked very seriously and frowned a lot. He doesn’t know anything else.

The PCs have two leads to follow at this point. The order in which they attend them matters little, though having Marko tagging along with them when he has a price on his head might put him in further danger. The pawn shop isn’t far from where the PCs rescue Marko, leaving it the most convenient next step.

If the PCs manage to capture one or more of the attackers alive, they refuse to talk, unless a PC succeeds on a DC 14 Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion) check. If successful, the mercenary admits to being hired by Salamondre to kill Marko Vacarro, though they do not know the reason behind the assassination. They can also tell the PCs the location of Salamondre’s compound.

The Rusty Scales

This pawn shop is run by Milos. He does a lot of business with sailors and dock workers, but he makes the bulk of his money as a fence for petty criminals—pickpockets, second-story workers, and similar thieves. He buys their stolen wares and makes a profit selling them off, typically to shady merchants on their way out of the city who can sell the goods in other locales.

If the PCs present Milos with the letter addressed to him, a mix of emotions crosses his face as he reads it, his eyes straying to Marko and back to the letter. He agrees to help the boy, under the condition the PCs head to the inn mentioned in the letter and collect the letter she has left for him. He wants to know just how much trouble Giselle has herself in on account of the lad. If pressed, he explains Giselle saved his life once, when a loan shark decided that having him die in a fire in his shop was worth not receiving the money Milos owed him. Giselle was an unlikely visitor, but she was accompanied by one of Milos’ relatives that was part of Giselle’s adventuring band. They were all fairly famous, but none of them as much as “that death bard”

with them. If questioned, he recalls the bard's name was Salamondre. A successful DC 12 Intelligence (History) check reveals Salamondre was a famous dirgist who recently returned to Zobeck to preach a new song-based faith, as described in the Adventure Background.

The Three Singing Maids

This modest inn is in the Market District. If the PCs inquire with the innkeeper and one of them claims to be Milos, they are given a sealed letter. The letter, from Giselle, is addressed to the high priest at the temple of Lada, Lucca Angeli.

From Giselle, devoted of Lada.

If this letter has reached you, I am likely dead. I once traveled with Salamondre Vacarro, the famous dirgist. I was with him when he recovered a relic known as the Thrice-Cursed Heart. It is a jeweled egg, cunningly crafted, with hinged doors and a golden center. He has spent several years studying this object, learning to tap its powers. However, I have discovered that this relic is corrupt, and, in handling it, Salamondre has also become corrupted. This new religion of his, the Song Undying, is a lie. The dead he has supposedly returned to life, the sick he claims to have healed, are all twisted by the power of the Heart. They are not alive, but undead! Salamondre is one of them as well, but he is more powerful. Bonded to the cursed object as he is, he truly is undying. Only if it is destroyed will he meet his final death. I have discovered a weakness, a way to destroy it. If the Heart is trod beneath the foot of one of Salamondre's bloodline, and that one is innocent, it will be crushed, like a real egg. There is a young boy of the Vacarro family, hidden and kept safe from harm. The bearer of this message knows his location. Send for the boy and send someone to the Song Undying's compound—an old dwarven monastery on the Derry river to the north—someone of power who can deal with Salamondre and his minions. They must take the Thrice-Cursed Heart and have the young Vacarro destroy it. Do not delay. Salamondre's power and control over the Heart grows with each passing day. May all the gods grant you victory where I have failed.

- Giselle Reinherz

If the PCs return to Milos and show him the letter, he becomes distraught, muttering to himself and pulling at his hair. While a criminal, Milos does have some morals. He feels a direct debt to Giselle for saving his life, and he doesn't feel that hiding Marko is enough to pay the debt. Therefore, he asks the PCs to travel to the Song Undying's compound to retrieve the Thrice-Cursed Heart and find Giselle. Whatever her fate, he wants her returned, dead or alive. If the PCs need some sort of additional motivation, he offers them a reward upon their return, a *necklace of adaption*. It was sold to him a short while ago. He has a hedge mage acquaintance

who regularly checks his incoming stock of items for magic. Though he rarely happens on such pieces, the mage found the necklace in Milos' items this week. If the PCs return with the Heart and Giselle, or her body, he promises them the necklace.

The Song Undying Compound

Salamondre used funds from selling off various Vacarro businesses to buy an old dwarven monastery just west of Zobeck that was built into the cliffside along the Derry River, which flows south through Zobeck. He has furnished it as the temple for his new religion, and recruits are brought in from Zobeck and the surrounding area for purification and indoctrination, which means their transformation into Salamondre's obedient undead servants. He also keeps a force of paid mercenaries as guards, at least until the numbers of undead at his command are great enough that he does not need to fear attack. The monastery is about a half day's travel upstream from Zobeck.

1. ENTRANCE

Off the bend in the river, a hollow worn by water has been excavated into a larger area. Iron hooks are affixed to the rock, allowing boats to be tied here. Three arrow slits pierce the wall to the west. A trio of shallow steps lead to a semicircular dais and a pair of stone double doors. Each door holds a carved metal plaque, which depicts a sphere enwrapped with a scroll covered in musical notations.

The doors are barred on the inside. A successful DC 18 Strength check can force them open. If the PCs look like trouble (obviously bearing weapons, casting spells at the door, etc.) the guards in Area 5 open fire on the PCs with their heavy crossbows. The guards have three-quarters cover from the arrow slits, and a Small or smaller creature can squeeze through the arrow slits.

2. RECEIVING ROOM

A stone pedestal stands in the center of this room, a lyre decorated in gold and strung with strings of brass atop it.

This room is normally used to receive guests and petitioners. A formal welcome ceremony is performed before the visitors are escorted across the bridge and into the temple proper.

Trap. The lyre is a magical alarm. If touched without first speaking the proper phrase, "*uplift your voice and join the Song Undying*," the lyre plays a jangle of discordant notes that reverberate through the complex. If this happens, the guards in Area 7 ready themselves and await intruders. The guards in Areas 3 and 5, if not already alerted, converge on this room, while the guards in Area 4 awaken and arm themselves, arriving in Area 2 in 1d4 rounds.

Prevention. A spell or other effect that can sense the presence of magic, such as *detect magic*, reveals an aura of abjuration magic around the lyre. The trap can be thwarted by casting *silence* or wrapping the lyre in a blanket or other similar material, absorbing the vibrations of the strings and stilling them. A successful *dispel magic* (DC 13) cast on the lyre destroys the trap. The lyre itself is worth 100 gp.

3. GUARD POST

This room is simply appointed with a small, wooden table and three chairs. A small, open cask and three clay cups sit on the table. A ladle rests inside the cask, hooked to the edge.

A pair of **veteran** guards are on watch in this room. They greet authorized visitors. One waits with the visitors in the receiving room while the other goes to inform Salamondre of their arrival. When dealing with intruders, they fire heavy crossbows, then draw swords and close to engage in melee. If overwhelmed by attackers, one guard moves to the lyre in Area 2 and uses an action to touch it and sound the alarm.

Keys. One of the guards on duty here carries a ring of keys. These unlock the door into the main complex (Area 7), the cells of the Undisciplined (Area 13) and Giselle's cell (Area 14).

4. BARRACKS

Behind the door is a small room, connected to a second room by a short, curving hallway. Each room is lined with bunk beds, footlockers, and a water barrel.

These are the sleeping quarters for off-duty guards in the compound. There are currently five unarmored **veteran** guards asleep or resting here. If the PCs enter or if the guards hear the alarm in Area 2, they grab their nearby weapons and shields and attack the intruders.

Treasure. The footlockers hold the guards' personal items, spare gear, and their money. A total of 51 cp, 42 sp, 30 ep, 30 gp, and 1 pp can be found here.

5. SENTINELS' CHAMBER

This small room is empty save for three stools. A trio of arrow slits carved into the stone look out onto the landing at the entrance.

Three **veteran** guards stand watch here. They are quick to welcome unarmed pilgrims and wisdom-seekers, as per Salamondre's orders. Armed adventurers, on the other hand, are greeted with crossbow fire from the arrow slits until they are dead or retreat. If the PCs gain entry, the guards here move to Area 2 to intercept them.

6. BRIDGE

A stone bridge exits the rock and arches over the river. At the far end, a single stone door sits in the rock face, the scroll-wrapped globe symbol carved into its surface.

The bridge arches over the Derry River as it rushes swiftly through the rocky channel here, some 20 feet below. The door at the far end is locked. The key on the guard in Area 3 unlocks the door. Alternatively, a successful DC 15 Dexterity check using thieves' tools picks the lock.

7. GUARD POST

The eastern wall holds an open archway to the north and a barred, iron-banded wooden door to the south. A wooden chest sits in the southwest corner.

The barred wooden door leads to the loading dock (Area 10) and is barred from this side.

Four **veteran** guards are on watch in this room. The guards attack anyone that forces their way in from outside. If two of them fall, the remaining guards fall back, one heading to Area 9 to rouse the undead there, the other to Area 16 to alert Salamondre of intruders.

Treasure. The chest in the corner is unlocked and contains a chain shirt, a longsword, a shield emblazoned with the symbol of Lada, and a pouch containing three vials of holy water, a holy symbol of Lada, and a *potion of greater healing*. This equipment belongs to Giselle, who is imprisoned in Area 14.

8. GATHERING HALL

The walls of this long, vaulted room are hung with cloths of red, white, and gold. Several archways line the walls, most leading to rising stairs. To one side of the hall, two projecting shelves have been carved out of the stone and hold musical instruments and sheet music in glass cases. A half cylinder projects from the south wall. A niche carved into this projection holds a statue of a figure in white, red, and gold robes, holding a lyre. The left side of the statue's handsome face is covered in a gold half-mask.

This hall is used for lesser ceremonies with new converts, as well as housing such converts until they have been fully indoctrinated (turned into undead). Currently, the room is unoccupied unless the guards in Area 7 alert the undead in Area 9.

Treasure. The shelves hold Salamondre's nonmagical, favored instruments, now put aside in favor of the Song Undying. The shelves also hold rare compositions and old songs the bard unearthed in his adventuring days. Collectively, these are worth 750 gp if sold to a bardic college, university, or collector interested in such items.

9. CELLS OF THE CHOIR OF ADHERENTS

This long, L-shaped corridor is lined with several solid, wooden doors on one side. On the other side, several exits lead to stairways down to a lower area.

These cells are used by those that have fully converted to the worship of the Song Undying. They have either been fully restored from death or fully corrupted from the living, and they are all devoted undead servants to Salamondre. One such adherent is found in each cell, making for a total of seven. Treat three of these undead as **darakhul** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 216) without the Stench trait and the others as **ghasts**. The adherents are completely loyal to Salamondre and the cult and fight to the death, trusting that their master will restore them for their loyalty.

Treasure. The cells are spartan and hold only sleeping pallets and small desks. The adherents are allowed some small, personal items that help tie them to the world of the living and remember themselves, which helps them assert better control of their undead natures. The PCs can collect the following from the cells: A pair of garnet earrings worth 50 gp, a silver comb worth 25 gp, a set of leather worker's tools, a dulcimer, a set of gold dice worth 25 gp, an embroidered silk handkerchief worth 25 gp, a carved jade statuette of a horse worth 75 gp, a wooden snuff box inlaid with mother of pearl worth 15 gp, and an ebony walking stick topped with a polished sphere of rose quartz worth 50 gp.

10. LOADING DOCK

A wooden door opens into a room that abuts an underground stream. Buckets and a couple barrels sit on the floor near the water. Two other wooden doors block exits out of this area.

This area was once used by the dwarves of the monastery to unload supplies. The supplies were ferried from a nearby dwarven settlement via the underground stream that runs through the compound and empties into the Derry. Now the stream is used by the guards to draw fresh water for cooking and drinking.

11. COOL STORAGE

Racks and hooks on the walls and ceiling hold haunches of meat and strings of sausages. Crates and barrels are stacked on the floor under the meats.

This room is cooler than the rest of the complex due to its proximity to the underground stream. It holds the food supply for the guards and any still-living devotees the cult draws in at any given time. The fresher meat also feeds some of the undead members of the cult who still possess cravings for such things. The crates and barrels hold other foodstuffs—fruits, vegetables, tubers, and grains.

12. PURIFICATION CHAMBER

Gold, red, and white wall hangings decorate this round room. In the center, a large font, standing four feet high, holds clean, clear water.

This room is used for purification ceremonies. Salamondre anoints the chosen ones who have been deemed ready to join him in the inner sanctum, where they learn the mysteries of the Song Undying and become one of the Choral Adherents. This anointing means they have been chosen to be corrupted by the Thrice-Cursed Heart and slowly turned into undead under Salamondre's control. The font in the center of the room is said to contain holy water, but this is just a lie told to initiates of the cult. The water is clean and drinkable, but it has no special properties.

13. CELLS OF THE UNDISCIPLINED

Four heavy, iron-banded doors line the north wall of this hallway. All of them are barred with planks of heavy wood. The hallway ends in a ledge overlooking a rushing, underground stream.

These cells contain initiates of the cult who have been converted, but who are not completely in control of their faculties. Though they appear human, they are prone to bouts of savage violence and cannibalism without Salamondre's presence to keep them in line. Treat these undead cultists as **ghouls**. If let out of their cells, they attack unless commanded by Salamondre to do otherwise. One piece of flesh is as good as another, and they are just as likely to attack one of the compound's guards as they are to assault an intruder.

Treasure. Like the quarters of the other adherents, these rooms are spartan, but the adjusting undead are allowed personal items that help them connect to their former lives. The PCs can find the following in these rooms: a pair of fur-lined boots worth 15 gp, a chess set with pieces of carved black onyx and ivory worth 50 gp, a pair of opera glasses worth 20 gp, and a framed painting of wild horses in a meadow worth 10 gp.

14. PRISON CELL

This room contains a straw pallet and a pair of buckets. A set of manacles is affixed to the wall opposite the door.

The door to this room is locked. The key on the guard in Area 3 unlocks the door. Alternatively, a successful DC 15 Dexterity check using thieves' tools picks the lock. Giselle (see page 11), a paladin of Lada and former traveling companion of Salamondre, was captured by the bard and shackled in this room to await her turn to be corrupted and transformed into an undead servant by the Thrice-Cursed Heart. If rescued, she takes whatever gear the PCs offer and joins them in facing Salamondre.

15. BRIDGE TO THE INNER SANCTUM

This stone bridge arches over an underground stream, bronze railings lining either side. At the far end, an iron portcullis blocks access to the room beyond.

The portcullis is forged of iron and heavy with AC 19, 27 hp, and a damage threshold of 5. A successful DC 20 Strength check lifts it, but it drops back into place immediately after being released. The lever to raise and lower the portcullis can be seen inside the hall on the other side.

16. SHRINE OF THE SONG UNDYING

This octagonal room is lit by a magnificent crystal chandelier suspended from the center of the ceiling. A bright light source pours out from the center of layers of hanging crystals, which paint the walls with rainbows of light. An ethereal tune fills the room, seeming to come from nowhere and everywhere at once.

The light and music comes from the Thrice-Cursed Heart, which is nestled at the center of the chandelier. Salamondre is a **virtuoso lich** (see page 11) and chooses music as his artistic expression each day, which makes thunder his Versatile Artist damage type. He is usually found here, working on his control of the Heart or restoring his form after a session working on one of his undead minions. If Salamondre is not here, the room is quiet and unlit, as the Heart is locked in its box in the reliquary (Area 17).

If confronted here, Salamondre fights, but not before attempting to convince the PCs to join him. He states they simply do not understand what he is trying to achieve. He tells them he can provide a world without death or suffering if they simply allow him to continue his work. Even if Giselle is present, he makes the effort. He implores her to allow him to work her goddesses' will. It must be Lada's will, after all, if the object bears her name. Giselle refuses and doesn't back down from her mission. Once he has made his plea and is rejected, Salamondre allows no further discussion. Only total surrender stops him from attempting to utterly destroy Giselle and the PCs.

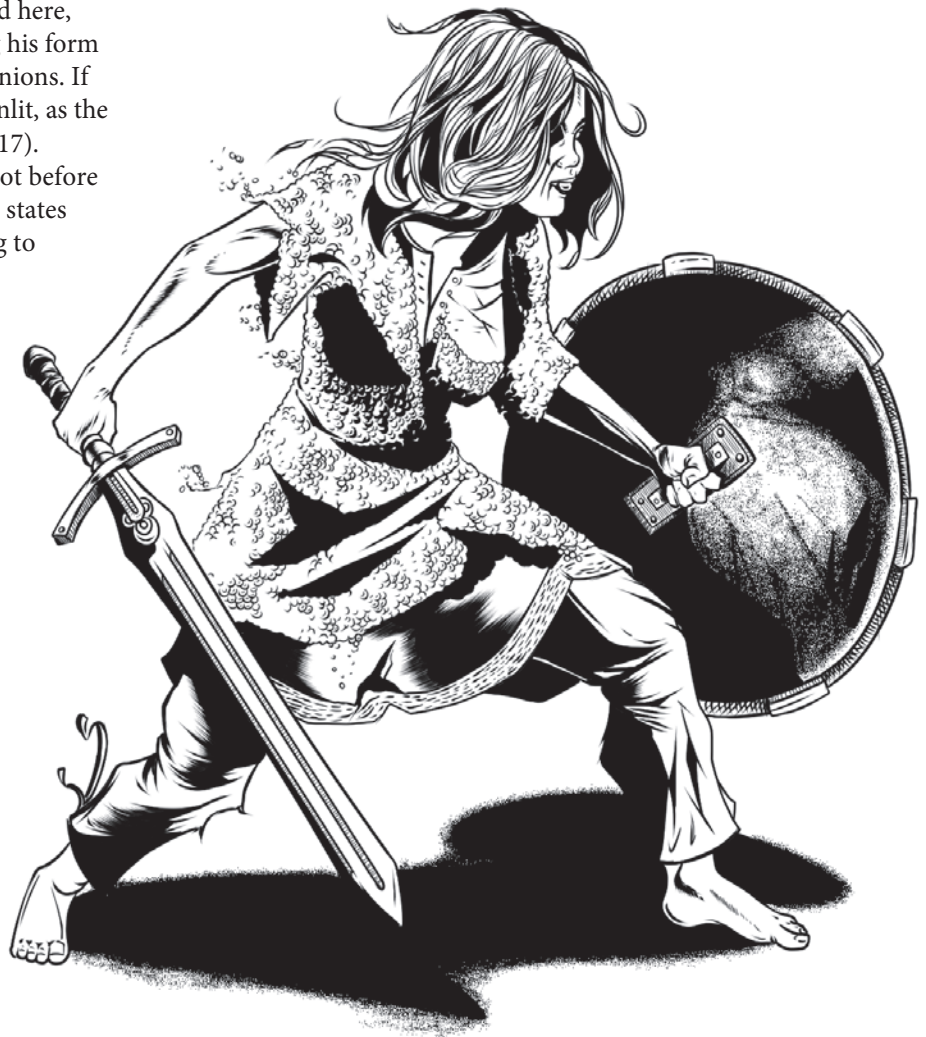
Choir. Four of Salamondre's choir (see Area 18) wander this room, humming and singing. Their voices seem to disappear into the melody of the Heart, absorbed, changed, and echoed by it. While at least two of Salamondre's choir are within 30 feet of him and he can hear them, he can use his lair action that requires nearby artistic expression (in his case, the song of the choir). If none of his choir are within

30 feet of him, he can use a lair action to call four of his choir from Area 18. If called while Salamondre is in Area 16, 17, or 19, the choir members arrive on initiative count 10. If Salamondre calls them from a different part of the monastery, the four choir members arrive in 1d4 rounds.

17. RELIQUARY

Tables holding religious items and musical instruments sit on either side of this room. Tall wardrobes flank the door. A pair of iron doors stand in the western wall, and an iron box sits on a pedestal in an alcove in the wall.

The locked iron box holds the Thrice-Cursed Heart when not in use. Salamondre carries the only key. Alternatively, a successful DC 20 Dexterity check using thieves' tools picks the lock. The wardrobes hold various ceremonial vestments for Salamondre and other members of the cult. The tables hold altar vestments, candles, and other temple accoutrements.



Treasure. The two locked doors open into rooms that hold Salamondre's remaining wealth. Salamondre carries the keys. Alternatively, a successful DC 20 Dexterity check using thieves' tools picks the lock. The rooms hold the following: 14,000 gp, 1,200 pp, 5 silver statuettes of celestial figures with amethyst eyes worth 250 gp each, a *ring of evasion*, a *silver horn of Valhalla*, and a *wand of paralysis*.

THE THRICE-CURSED HEART

This jeweled egg was originally created by a master goldsmith, a faithful servant of Lada, as an act of devotion. Her fervent devotion and unmatched skills put in service to her goddess brought her to the attention of Lada herself. Fascinated by the work, the goddess imbued her power within the object, intending it to be an instrument of peace, love, and healing. The goldsmith named it "Lada's Heart." However, the goldsmith's work also gathered the attention of Lada's enemies, those her church calls the three evil sisters: Marena, Sarastra, and the White Goddess. They were furious at the thought of such a symbol of Lada's power being present in the world. They worked together to corrupt the egg, adding their own magics to twist and warp the original intent of the item, and transformed it into a subtle, corrupting evil item, veiled by beauty. Thus, it became the Thrice-Cursed Heart.

Lada's priests took the corrupted Heart and hid it deep in the deserts of the Southlands, hoping no one would ever find it. Years ago, Salamondre's group stumbled upon the Heart's resting place while trying to find sanctuary from a sandstorm in the desert. The Heart, sensing the conflict in Salamondre's soul, called out to him with a melody only he could hear. He led his group deeper into the complex to where the Heart rested. Not recognizing the ancient, magical runes surrounding the Heart until it was too late, the group was caught unawares by the magical backlash which collapsed the complex. Salamondre escaped, the Heart tucked safely in his cloak pocket, with the help of the group's only other survivor: Giselle.

When Salamondre performed the funerary dirge for their fallen companions, the Heart awakened and bound itself to the bard, embracing and nurturing the conflict and fear growing within Salamondre. As it awakened, it slowly and subtly changed Salamondre's form into the undying menace that leads the Song Undying cult. When its power changed his form, the Heart's own form changed to become his phylactery, the housing for what remained of his corrupted soul. Now, the Heart amplifies and feeds Salamondre's fear of death by slowly changing those near it into undead with some memories of their former lives—corrupted and lesser versions of Salamondre's new undead form. Bound to him body and soul, the Heart can be destroyed only by someone of his bloodline with an innocent heart. While it remains whole, Salamondre can't be truly defeated.

The egg itself is fashioned of gold and platinum, detailed with colored enamel and set with tiny jewels. Hinged doors open to reveal a gold orb suspended in the middle of the egg by chains of white gold. The orb has a hidden door that opens to reveal a gold, clockwork heart. A tiny turnkey protrudes from the Heart. If this key is turned, the heart beats, creating music. A chain of metal beads (each containing a scrap of paper with musical notes) is wrapped about the heart within the orb, an ornamentation that appeared after the Heart bound itself to Salamondre.

18. THE CHOIR ROOM

This wide hall holds wooden choral risers that stand against its back wall. The high walls are draped with cloth hangings, and banners with the scroll-wrapped globe symbol hang from the vaulted ceiling.

The lesser choir of the Song Undying stands in this room, humming and singing. The choir consists of twenty hollow ones (treat as **skeletons**), though some help or provide music for Salamondre in Area 16 as he works with the Heart, enhancing his sound-based magic. The hollow ones are the dead that Salamondre has begun to bring back with the Heart's help, but their bodies are not yet complete. He has given them their lungs, tongues, and vocal cords so they may participate in the choir, but they have little else. Each is covered in a shell of skin that gives a human appearance, which is easily torn away to reveal the undead creature beneath it. They remain here unless commanded to leave, providing their song to boost Salamondre's power, and they defend themselves if attacked.

19. SALAMONDRE'S SANCTUM

This room holds a number of cabinets and a table covered in piled papers and scrolls. Steps lead to a raised dais at the far end of the room, which holds a divan, a wardrobe, and a small table holding a gold bowl and ewer.

Salamondre retires to this room when he wishes to be alone. The papers and scrolls on the table are portions of his research, which reference the Thrice-Cursed Heart as "Lada's Heart." They also cover many of the locations that he explored during his adventuring years, including a few places he had yet to visit. If you wish to place a map or notes to direct the PCs to a specific adventure location, you can insert them among Salamondre's things.

Treasure. The gold ewer and bowl are worth a total of 500 gp.

Concluding the Adventure

Once Salamondre's body has been destroyed, Giselle urges the PCs to collect the Thrice-Cursed Heart and return with her to Zobeck with all due haste. It is possible to reach the city before Salamondre has time to rejuvenate, but only if the PCs hurry. Even a short delay could result in the virtuoso lich returning before they've had a chance to destroy the Heart, and they risk another battle with him (though at least one without the advantages of his lair).

Once contacted by the PCs or Giselle, Milos retrieves Marko (and Conte, if he lives) and meet with them at the temple of Lada. There, the Thrice-Cursed Heart is laid on the floor of the temple before the altar, and Marko steps on it, crushing it to bits as if it were nothing more than a real egg. There is a blast of light, a burst of sound, and three wisps of black smoke that rise from the remains of the egg, then nothing. The pieces are taken away by the priests to be burned in a forge. Giselle thanks the PCs for their aid. If Conte is there, he takes Marko home. The PCs receive a 1,000 gp reward from the Vacarro family majordomo for protecting Marko (this increases to 2,500 gp if Conte is still alive, as he gently insists the PCs are paid their due). Giselle thanks them again then takes her leave, needing time to recuperate and to mourn a lost friend.

GISELLE

Medium humanoid (human), lawful good

Armor Class 16 (chain shirt, shield)

Hit Points 65 (10d8 + 20)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	12 (+1)	15 (+2)	11 (+0)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Wis +3, Cha +4

Skills Athletics +5, Insight +3

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages Common

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Divine Eminence. As a bonus action, Giselle can expend a spell slot to cause her melee weapon attacks to magically deal an extra 7 (2d6) radiant damage to a target on a hit. This benefit lasts until the end of the turn. If Giselle expends a spell slot of 2nd level or higher, the extra damage increases by 1d6 for each level above 1st.

Spellcasting. Giselle is an 8th level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 14). Giselle knows the following paladin spells:

1st (4 slots): *cure wounds*, *protection from evil and good*, *shield of faith*

2nd (3 slots): *find steed*, *lesser restoration*, *magic weapon*

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Giselle makes two melee attacks.

Longsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) slashing damage, or 8 (1d10 + 3) slashing damage if used with two hands.

REACTIONS

Lada's Mercy (3/Day). When an ally Giselle can see within 30 feet of her is reduced to 0 hit points, she says a quick prayer to Lada, and the ally is reduced to 1 hit point instead. In addition, the target has advantage on death saving throws for 1 minute.

Virtuoso Lich

The beautiful singer bows to the adoring crowd before stepping behind the curtain. Away from the eyes of the crowd, the singer changes its half-mask, briefly revealing a ghastly, undead visage.

A virtuoso lich is an artist whose love of art sustains it beyond death.

Birtherd By Art. A virtuoso lich is created when an artist powerful in both its artistic and magical expression dies with art left undone. Such artists often die before completing or creating a masterpiece and the torment of the art left undone couples with the artist's powerful magical talents, turning the artist into a virtuoso lich. A virtuoso lich is bound to an object of art, such as a favorite musical instrument, painting, dance slippers, quill, or some other object of artistic expression that was significant to the lich in life. This piece of art is the lich's phylactery.

Beautiful Mien. A virtuoso lich maintains the beauty of its former life, appearing much as it did in life—save for one physical feature that betrays its undead nature. This undead feature can be a clawed, skeletal hand, which the lich hides in a glove; a stiff, zombie-like leg, which the lich disguises with robes and a cane; a face ravaged by undeath, which the lich covers in a beautiful mask; or any other appropriate feature.

A Virtuoso Lich's Lair

A virtuoso lich chooses a lair with an eye and ear for artistic potential, whether that lair is an ancient cavern with natural acoustics, a meadow with plentiful natural light, a hall of mirrors, or some other locale capable of enhancing some form of art, allowing the lich's magic and artistic expression to swell and grow, reaching every corner. Whether an urban setting, underground, or even outdoors, a virtuoso lich's lair provides it with powerful advantage.

LAIR ACTIONS

On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), the virtuoso lich takes a lair action to cause one of the following effects; the lich can't use the same effect two rounds in a row:

- The virtuoso lich channels artistic expression it can see or hear into a magical assault. The artistic expression must be of the type chosen with the Versatile Artist trait, but it otherwise can be any form of expression not originating from the lich, such as the song or cheers of a nearby group that echoes in the lair, the colorful paint decorating canvases, the twirling forms of dancers, or similar expression. The virtuoso lich chooses a creature it can see within 30 feet of the artistic expression. The target must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 18 (4d8) damage of the type chosen with the Versatile Artist trait on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.
- The virtuoso lich enhances the natural artistry of its lair, distracting and hindering nearby creatures. The lich chooses a point it can see within 60 feet of it. Each creature within 5 feet of that point must make a DC 15 Charisma saving throw. On a failure, a creature has disadvantage on saving throws against the lich's spells and its Corrupt Art action until initiative count 20 on the next round.
- The virtuoso lich rolls a d4 and regains a spell slot of that level or lower. If it has no spent spell slots of that level or lower, nothing happens.

VIRTUOSO LICH

Medium undead, any evil alignment

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)

Hit Points 104 (16d8 + 32)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	16 (+3)	15 (+2)	15 (+2)	12 (+1)	20 (+5)

Saving Throws Dex +7, Cha +9

Skills Perception +5, Persuasion +9, Religion +5

Damage Resistances necrotic; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities blinded, deafened, charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned

Senses truesight 60 ft., passive Perception 15

Languages Common plus up to two other languages

Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If the virtuoso lich fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Rejuvenation. If it has a phylactery, a virtuoso lich gains a new body in 1d10 days, regaining all its hit points and becoming active again. The new body appears within 5 feet of the phylactery.

Spellcasting. The virtuoso lich is a 12th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 17, +9 to hit with spell attacks). The lich has the following bard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *mage hand, message, true strike, vicious mockery*

1st level (4 slots): *bane, hideous laughter, thunderwave*

2nd level (3 slots): *enthrall, hold person, invisibility, shatter*

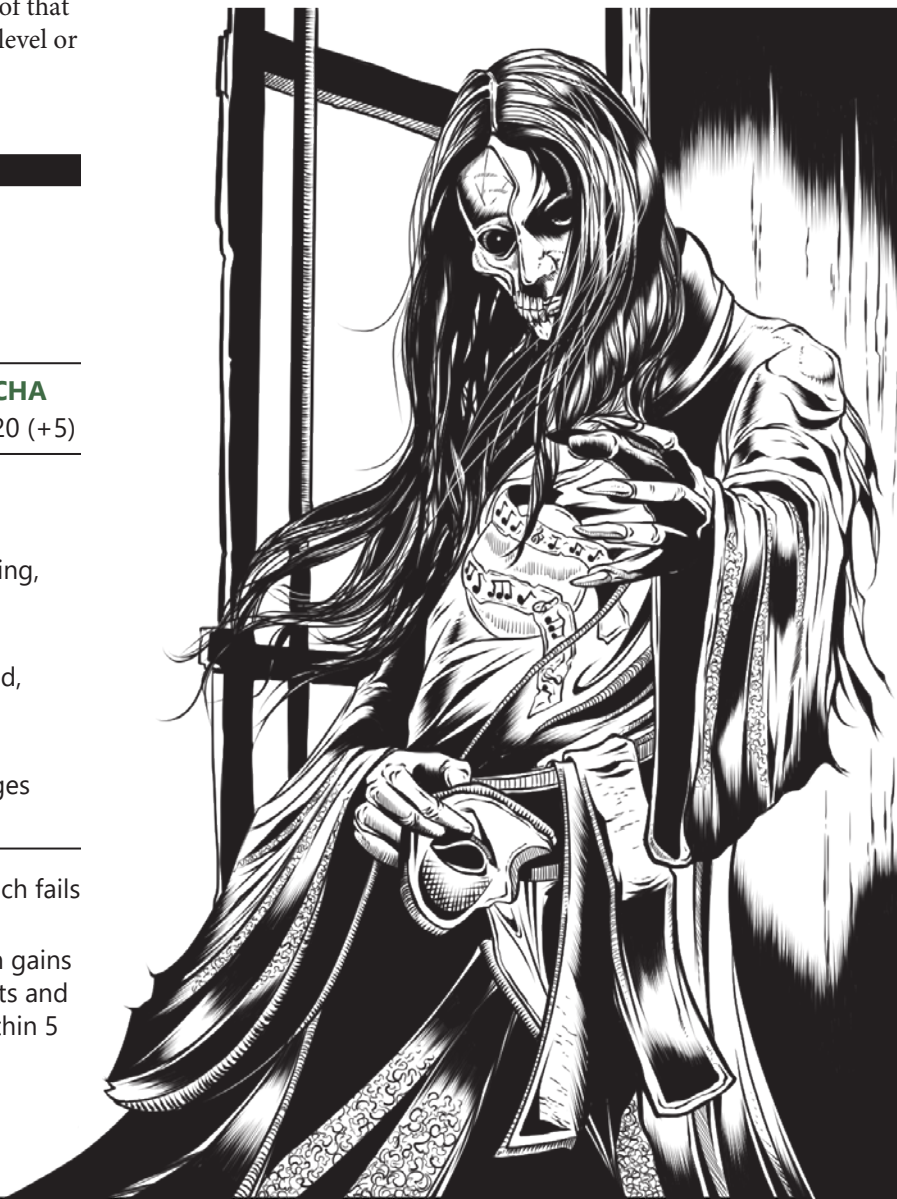
3rd level (3 slots): *dispel magic, fear, speak with dead*

4th level (3 slots): *compulsion, confusion, dimension door*

5th level (2 slots): *dominate person, mislead*

6th level (1 slot): *irresistible dance, programmed illusion*

Turn Resistance. The virtuoso lich has advantage on saving throws against any effect that turns undead.



Versatile Artist. At the end of each long rest, the virtuoso lich chooses one form of artistic expression, such as song, poetry, dance, fashion, paint, or some other form of artistic expression. Until it finishes a long rest, the virtuoso lich has immunity to one type of damage, which is associated with its artistic expression. For example, a lich expressing art through song or poetry has immunity to thunder damage, a lich expressing art through fashion has immunity to slashing damage, and a lich expressing art through paint has immunity to acid damage. This trait can't give the virtuoso lich immunity to force, psychic, or radiant damage.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The virtuoso lich makes two Artistic Flourish attacks.

Artistic Flourish. *Melee Spell Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6 + 5) damage of the type chosen with the Versatile Artist trait.

Corrupted Art. The virtuoso lich hums a discordant melody, paints a crumbling symbol of death in the air, performs a reality-bending pirouette, or some other expression of corrupted or twisted art and targets one creature it can see within 60 feet. This action's effects change, depending on if the target is undead.

Non-Undead. The target must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw, taking 18 (4d8) necrotic damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Undead. The target regains 18 (4d8) hit points. Healing that exceeds the target's hit point maximum becomes temporary hit points.

Call Muse. The virtuoso lich targets one humanoid or beast it can see within 30 feet of it. The target must succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw or be charmed by the lich for 1 minute. The charmed target, the lich's "muse," has a speed of 0 and is incapacitated as it watches or listens to the lich's artistic expression. The muse can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a creature's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the creature is immune to the lich's Call Muse for the next 24 hours. If the muse suffers harm from the lich, it is no longer charmed.

The lich can have only one muse at a time. If it charms another, the effect on the previous muse ends. If the lich is within 30 feet of its muse and can see its muse, the lich has advantage on its first Artistic Flourish attack each round against a creature that isn't its muse.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

The virtuoso lich can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The lich regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Cantrip. The virtuoso lich casts a cantrip.

Artistic Flourish. The virtuoso lich makes one Artistic Flourish attack.

Corrupted Art (Costs 2 Actions). The virtuoso lich uses its Corrupted Art.

Unrestrained Art (Costs 3 Actions). The virtuoso lich unleashes the full force of its artistic talents on those nearby. Each creature within 10 feet of the lich must make a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw. On a failure, a creature takes 18 (4d8) damage of the type chosen with the Versatile Artist trait and is knocked prone. On a success, a creature takes half the damage and isn't knocked prone.

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