FETTERED WARD

The Fettered Ward, Gloomwrought’s entertainment district, spans the north end of the city. Spectacles arise on every corner, and intense sensations lurk down every street, captivating the mind and the senses. Bizarre sights are common, and dark thoughts are brought into the dim light and made real. Many experiences that can be had in the Fettered Ward might be frowned upon in other communities or, at least, shamefully hidden away. In the City of Midnight, however, people openly come into the quarter and openly take part. Concentrated diversion is life itself in the Shadowfell, chasing away the bitter grayness that soaks into the soul.

Buildings in the Fettered Ward reflect the passion of life in the district. They are more changeable here than almost anywhere else in the city, and their mutability more obviously mirrors the sentiments of the people. Storefronts take on an angry aspect, for instance, when vicious crowds storm into the quarter during the weekly hangings or the monthly gladiatorial games. Spiky horns sprout over doorways, and windows resemble clenched teeth. The environment feeds the citizens’ frenzy, so that they reach their destinations howling for blood.

Permanent residents in the Fettered Ward, other than entertainers and other workers, are those who have sunk into the Shadowfell’s dismal grasp. Steady exposure to the district’s offerings has numbed these poor souls to stimulating effects. Such wretches must chase experiences that are more and more extreme just to fend off the decay of mind, body, and soul. Addicts beholden to acute sensations to keep them going, they can no longer live in a way that passes for normal in Gloomwrought. They are trapped. Bound in such a downward spiral, few recover.

1: Hanging Wall

Spikes jut from the top edge of the City Wall here like jagged fangs or claws, splayed in all directions. Dangling from several of these barbs are the corpses of hanged criminals, a ghoulish warning to would-be lawbreakers.

Each week, the Deathless Watch carries out the justice of Gloomwrought here in front of the people. It is a spectacle not to be missed, and hundreds of citizens gather for the show. Guards enjoy the attention. They ham up their parts in the work of stringing up prisoners and hurling them from the wall. More than half of these executions happen cleanly, ending with a broken neck and hurling them from the wall. More than half of these executions happen cleanly, ending with a broken neck or decapitation for the condemned. But the crowd really gathers to see executions that fail.

For a few of those to be hanged, the spike supporting the hanging rope bends or breaks under the sudden weight. It releases the convict. This is as good as a pardon to the guards, and they consider their duty done. For the prisoner, however, this is just the beginning. Still bound, he or she plummets nearly four stories, facing death again. Those who survive have to deal not only with injuries from the fall, but also with the crazed throng of onlookers.

The crowd immediately sets upon the newly acquitted. Some spectators attack over the fact that the prisoner’s survival lost them a bet. Others try to touch the survivor, hoping to claim a bit of death-defying good luck or bragging rights at the tavern that night. Instead of dying at the end of a rope, lots of prisoners perish in a press of flesh, unable to shield themselves from the mob. Despite the long odds and a potentially grisly end at the hands of a bloodthirsty multitude, most prisoners prefer the fall and the fighting chance.

Scattered throughout the crowd are bookies taking wagers on the fate of each prisoner. Bets come down first on whether the spike holds. Chants from each betting group spread through the mob during the buildup to a drop. If the prisoner falls, a spectator can make a wager on whether and how long the lucky one can survive. The payout is at least 10 to 1 if the prisoner somehow escapes death. If the spike holds, however, money changes hands again, with some gambling safer stakes on how long it takes the rope and its passenger to finally go still.

Hanging Fixed (Hook): Pharn, a tiefling pickpocket and street acrobat, has been to the Hanging Wall twice before. Both times his spike broke, and he survived the fall and the mob. Having become a celebrity, Pharn is coming to the wall once again this week, and everyone thinks he is sure to defy death once more. The characters have learned that one or more members of the Deathless Watch are orchestrating Pharn’s escapes to collect on the bets going on at the wall. Further, a few others now have great sums invested in Pharn’s death. These people aim to make sure Pharn dies even if the noose spares him. The characters might come in on either side, but protecting Pharn is likely to make them folk heroes and garner them some interesting enemies. Pharn might not even be in on the scheme.

“We all wear chains. Should I judge a prisoner for having his around his wrists? Should I judge you for those shackling your mind? I think not.”

–Kryssa Halfheart, owner of the Red Door

CHAPTER 2 | City of Midnight
2: Avenue of Chains

Strings of metal links crisscross over the road like a net, creating a sort of second floor above the lane. At street level, entertainers such as fire-eaters and buskers occupy every corner, and open doors lead into dimly lit shops.

The Avenue of Chains runs through the heart of the Fettered Ward, snaking across the north end of the city from the Graveyard to the Carnival Grounds. Every block between bears the signature chains that give the road its name. Pulled across the street eight feet or more above the ground, the chain net creaks and rattles as it sways in the breeze. A colored banner hangs from the links outside just about every shop, indicating the business within. Yellow indicates a food vendor or an eatery, blue designates a crafter or a sundries shop, and red, the most common by far, signifies a pleasure den.

People who frequent the avenue use the chains overhead for a variety of purposes. Skilled citizens walk on the chain nets to move from building to building without going down to street level. Practiced balancers can cross the chains at a run, or even hop from chain to chain. Those given to storytelling say that the chains shield patrons in their moments of excess from the eyes and hands of prudish deities. Some establishments magically utilize the chains to snatch thieves or entangle unruly clients.

Boisterous and belligerent customers are a common sight here, since some people develop cravings that are hard to sate. Only the truly wealthy can afford to regularly indulge themselves at the House of Sterling, but other members of the Veiled League operate most of the red shops along this avenue and provide similar services for the masses. Each outlet focuses on one or two particular delights, and caters exclusively to patrons seeking such experiences. A client looking for a good time needs only to duck into an establishment, allude to the vice of choice, and pay up. Although most places aim to please the customer, arguments over price and services rendered are everyday occurrences.

3: City Jail

Near the east end of the street sits a blocky building only sparsely fitted with color. The chains over the street are strictly functional, blocking escape from the windows and doors.

Gloomwrought’s city prison is the temporary home of unfortunate souls who were too poor to bribe their way out of trouble. Prisoners are crowded into dank underground communal cells and can go without food or exercise for days at a time.
The Deathless Watch shackles prisoners to the floors of their cells to await punishment, which most find at the Hanging Wall. While they wait, captives must endure those whom the guards allow, for a fee or as a favor, to have a walk through the jail. Such tourists hurl insults, garbage, and worse at the miserable residents.

**Race to the Noose (Hook):** Walking by the jail, the characters find a scrap of paper on the ground, apparently dropped from one of the windows. It has a location in another district written on it. As the characters ponder this, guards lead a string of prisoners out of the prison. One of the criminals, a half­orc, sees the characters with the note and shouts, “Go there! It’s under the floorboards! I’m innocent!”

The guards silence him, but he looks back forlornly one more time. Can the characters find the evidence to save an innocent person? Or is this all some elaborate ruse to allow enemies to catch the party unawares?

### 4: Red Door

Bright red paint covers the front door of this well­kept two­story home, but no pennant hangs from the chains outside. People, patrons perhaps, come up to the door and knock. After a quick whisper to an unseen figure within, they move quickly inside, and the door shuts again.

One of the more popular stops on the Avenue of Chains is a large house that has no displayed name. No flag or sign marks it as a business. Nonetheless, figures come and go through its crimson entrance at all hours. The locals know it as the Red Door.

Madam Kryssa Halfheart, a half­elf who claims to be a widow and appears to have scores of friends, owns the house. These friends contribute willingly to the upkeep of the place and the wages of the accommodating servants who work within. Kryssa’s sons, serving as guards, remove those who fail to donate, and then recommend that such ingrates stay away. Guests at the Red Door are expected to accept that among Kryssa’s sons are a half­orc and a dragonborn, both of whom have uncounted scars. Visitors who express disbelief or even doubt that these could be her offspring are denied the house’s offerings.

The exact nature of Kryssa’s business is hard to summarize; she deals in everything from secrets to pleasure. Her web of connections is vast and carefully guarded. She is the absolute ruler of her domain, controlling everything that happens within the walls of the Red Door. She is, at the same time, mildly insane . . . or even doubt that she could be her offspring are denied the house’s offerings.

The exact nature of Kryssa’s business is hard to summarize; she deals in everything from secrets to pleasure. Her web of connections is vast and carefully guarded. She is the absolute ruler of her domain, controlling everything that happens within the walls of the Red Door. She is, at the same time, mildly insane . . . or so it would seem.

To be welcomed into the Red Door, one must claim to be a friend of Niall Halfheart, Kryssa’s late husband. Kryssa needs only to hear that assertion voiced at the door, whereupon she allows entrance to the visitor. In such fashion, a host of Gloomwrought’s citizens have asserted their friendship for Niall Halfheart, but no confirmed record of that person’s existence has ever been found. Someone who’s good at picking up information on the street should have little trouble figuring out that he or she can be a friend of Niall Halfheart, too, simply by saying so.

Kryssa always gives members of House Harskel a warm reception. She knows how vigilant Dedrek is about coin that passes through the family coffers, so she accepts no payment from scions of the merchant house who stop by to have a little fun off the patriarch’s books. In return, however, she secretly takes her pick of the finest silks and other accoutrements from Harskel shipments. As a result, the Red Door is more lavishly appointed than any similar establishment in the district, which helps to explain its popularity.

Kryssa’s unspoken alliance with the Harskels has made her a nuisance to other noble houses, but since her operation is extremely popular, action against her is minimal. She has few allies in the Veiled League, but the leaders of that organization leave her alone due to her public esteem. Kryssa resents that so much business flows to the House of Sterling and the Veiled League rather than to her home.

**Homecoming (Hook):** A half­elf claiming to be Niall Halfheart arrives in the city, and Kryssa halts operations at the Red Door in deference to her miraculously returned husband. However, a circle of “friends of Niall” soon contacts the characters. These individuals firmly believe that Niall is an impostor, although their theories are all conjecture. The only well­known fact is that, when the couple has been seen in public, Kryssa seems withdrawn and in poor health. Is Niall a vampire, a doppelganger, or the real person returned from the dead? Or is something more sinister going on, perhaps at the instigation of Kryssa’s enemies? Those adversaries are sure to be displeased if the characters take actions that lead to the Red Door being reopened.

### 5: Tenebrous Cabal

One building on this block is almost too unremarkable, brazen in its plainness. It is a structure that fails to invite the eye of anyone who isn’t looking for it, and shadows unnaturally gather around it.

Shadow magic is relatively rare in the mortal world, but in the Shadowfell it is a way of life. Those who dabble in these arts create a connection to the Shadowfell, just as druids and barbarians create ties to primal spirits in the world. To some, the skill to shape shadow comes naturally, but others must learn. This building, the headquarters of the Tenebrous Cabal, is one place to do so.

To be trained here, one must apply and gain acceptance. An applicant must perform one or more errands for the cabal, each mission assigned based on the candidate’s current capabilities. It takes aptitude and remarkable confidence to accomplish even the simplest of these tests. Those who succeed become apprentices of the Tenebrous Cabal, able to study the skills of assassination, necromancy, and other forbidden arts. Those who fail might not live to reapply.

**Chapter 2 | City of Midnight**
Some among the city’s rich send their unfavored scions to the Tenebrous Cabal, hoping to improve the youngster’s chances of survival and advancement in the dangerous games of the nobility. Graduates use their powers of misdirection and shadow manipulation to fulfill ambitions both personal and familial. Every success enhances the cabal’s reputation.

As is true of noble families, the cabal follows a hierarchic structure. However, merit rather than birthright determines one’s place in the hierarchy. Apprentices, also known as initiates, are lowest on the ladder. Those who prove worthy advance to journeyman status, and then to the rank of master. A member of any status can be a cabal agent. A cabalist of lower rank can gain a better position by outdoing one or more members of a higher echelon.

Within the guild house are rooms for housing the cabal’s master instructors, staff, and guests, as well as ceremonial chambers for various uses. Other members must see to their own housing. Teaching sessions occur in secret locations inside and outside the city. Learning to make it to classes covertly is part of the training.

The Circle of Tenebrous Masters, most of whom are teachers as well as capable practitioners of shadow magic, sees to the running of the cabal. At the circle’s center is the cabal’s leader, the Grandmaster of Shadows. Only one cabalist can hold the grandmaster title, and death is the only way a grandmaster loses this lofty position.

Teliko, a vampire, is the current Grandmaster of Shadows. In just a few years, he rose up through the ranks of the Tenebrous Cabal to claim the position. Teliko’s rivals had a tendency to disappear. Many other masters believe he used unholy magic to swallow his enemies into shadow, stealing their knowledge and power. No one has yet proven these claims or dared to speak out against him.

6: Graveyard

The street runs through a ramshackle set of buildings, and a number of the figures moving among them walk with a shamble born of the grave. Others float just above the ground, a spectral glow lighting their translucent forms from within. Evidence of decay assaults all the senses.

To the chagrin of those who strongly revere the Raven Queen, as well as those who fear predation within Gloomwrought, undead can be found in the city as servants and citizens. Independent undead residents prefer to live in the Graveyard. This large section of the Fettered Ward is dedicated to sheltering and entertaining the living impaired.
The several blocks that make up the Graveyard appear worthy of the name. Even more than usual for the Shadowfell, color has drained away here, casting everything in a gray pall. Most buildings are in a state of advanced decay, sagging as rotting wood and broken stone give way. But even in this condition of extreme disrepair, the structures defy natural laws to remain standing, much like the undead that make their homes here. As with elsewhere in the city, occupancy, no matter how strange the occupants might be, keeps a building from collapsing.

Most undead that dwell in the Graveyard have forgotten the details of their former lives. The negative influences of the Shadowfell appear to have no effect on these creatures. In fact, the opposite seems to be true. Without fear of death holding them back or the troubles of life holding them down, Graveyarders are some of the most vital individuals in the city. Because they don’t need to sleep, the undead keep the Graveyard active at all hours.

The living rarely visit the Graveyard, which can be one of the most dangerous parts of Gloomwrought. Most people worry about an encounter with ravenous undead, such as the Charnel Fangs (see “Grigori and Nikolai,” page 120), a faction of cruel vampires. Some fear the wrath of the Raven Queen if they associate with those who have evaded final death. The only living people who regularly pass through are those who have an interest in the undead. More than one necromancer makes a hidden home here.

Vistani travelers are notable exceptions to this rule. The wandering folk welcome the chance to treat with the undead. To the Vistani, those living in the Graveyard have changed from living to dead without losing their lust for life. Even though the Vistani acknowledge the Raven Queen, they equitably assume that any creature that continues on after death was destined to do so. They value the knowledge they find within the minds and the tales of Graveyard citizens. However, even the most intrepid Vistani knows to walk here with caution.

Grave Costs (Hook): Viveka Ulfydar, a human aristocrat and a disciple of the Raven Queen, contacts the party about her dead father, Gamel. She swears that Gamel has been seen wandering the Graveyard and lurking around the family home. That he is undead (or so she thinks) is disgusting to her. She wants him laid to rest, by force if necessary.

To fake his death so he could escape his debts, Gamel hired a Graveyard necromancer named Zelugos. The necromancer now controls Gamel, who falsely believes he is a zombie. Zelugos hopes to profit from this control. Gamel’s debtors might be very interested to find out that he is still alive.
Legion of Risen Blades

A squad of well-armed undead moves along a street bordering the Graveyard. Acting much like guards, the soldiers that aren't mere zombies suspiciously examine all who pass.

Sentient undead have always been permitted to inhabit Gloomwrought, but their presence makes the living uncomfortable, to say the least. Zealous agents of the Raven Queen, such as the Ebony Guard, bear no tolerance for those who try to thwart fate and remain within creation after their time has come. Other do-gooders, paranoids, and vigilantes also want the dead returned to their final rest.

Graveyard's residents are aware of the risk of attack. They also have a responsibility to make sure that the life-craving undead within the area stay in check. Failing to do so might result in authorities taking up sword, flame, and astral light to drive the Graveyarders out.

Because of that possibility, some Graveyarders have formed a makeshift private army that they call the Legion of Risen Blades. The innate powers of these soldiers make them a force to be reckoned with. Furthermore, some members of the militia can be utterly destroyed only in particular ways.

Turaknal, a skull lord released from bondage when its master perished, leads the legion. The power of the Shadowfell has sustained Turaknal. Instead of dissipating, the skull lord persists in the Graveyard, where it has found a new sense of purpose. Turaknal takes its position seriously, and it relishes its influence in the Graveyard.

**Fresh Recruits (Hook):** Citizens from outside the Graveyard suspect that Turaknal has been recruiting for the Legion of Risen Blades by sending servants to kill the drunken and the helpless so that the corpses can be animated as troops. A few people think Turaknal is planning an attack against the city. The characters need to find out what's happening and what lines have been crossed. Depending on what the characters discover, they might need to take decisive action against the skull lord. If Turaknal is innocent, then a cult of Orcus, a servant of Vecna, or a corrupt necromancer might be at work.

7: Carnival Grounds

This open plaza is concave, its lowest point at its center. Seating lines the upper area. At the bottom of the bowl, wide stages are set into the ground, and workers are busy setting up small towers and other features for some event.

The Carnival Grounds comprise the largest open space in the City of Midnight. A natural sinkhole creates a bowl the size of two or three city blocks, and no buildings rise or can be built within. This fact doesn't stop the people of Gloomwrought from putting the plaza to use. Seating can be stacked on the collapsed cobblestones to accommodate hundreds of spectators, with more people able to cram in behind them. Every vantage point is filled for the large outdoor events that play out here, from circuses to arena matches.

Each month, people come to the Carnival Grounds for gladiatorial bouts that the city authorities sanction. All of Gloomwrought embraces these games. Shadar-kai, in particular, savor the chance to fight, or to watch and wager. Anyone looking to raise the blood for an afternoon might be found at the public fights. Increasing the stakes for spectators, no barriers stand between the gladiators and the viewers. Battles sometimes spill into the crowd, or vice versa. Any onlooker can step up onto the stage and issue a challenge to the gladiators.

Most of the contestants on the official roster are criminals. Officials walk through the city jail a few times a month, looking for new recruits among prisoners eager to escape the Hanging Wall. Nobles or merchants sponsor other gladiators, providing these warriors with extra equipment and magical enhancements. Such branded fighters are another form of competition among the rich, one more way for them to jockey for prestige. Anyone who wants to fight can, so another group of gladiators consists of freelancers trying to make names for themselves. The best among these can earn sponsorship from a noble house or a wealthy trader, becoming branded career gladiators. Lucky criminals might do the same.

In stark contrast to the brutal fights and weird spectacles, a small, peaceful shrine to Avandra has its place on the edge of the Carnival Grounds. Citizens of Gloomwrought recognize Avandra’s position as the deity of trade and, especially, of change. Although the grounds are out of the way for most citizens, the shrine is the site of more prayers than some of the grander institutions in the Temple District. Gella, an elderly and blind female halfling, is the shrine’s official custodian; the faithful help keep her fed and the shrine in good repair.

**Last Words (Encounter):** The characters attend the games intending to talk with a particular gladiator afterward. Before they can do so, members of a rival house’s team challenge the gladiator’s squad. It becomes clear that the challengers intend to kill the informer before he can deliver his information. The characters must intervene on their contact’s behalf, facing the opposing gladiators and the potential wrath of the spectators. Good tactics and savvy crowd management are required to save the day, as well as to receive the message during the armed intervention.
Vistani Visitation

Crowds of city-dwellers mill about, waiting for a signal from the brightly colored wagons pulled in a tight circle within the plaza. Suddenly, a man in a purple shirt bounds out of the largest wagon and up on the main stage. He throws fire into the air, and the crowd erupts into applause. The Vistani are finally ready for visitors.

Vistani caravans stop at Gloomwrought in their travels, and when the Vistani can, they camp on the Carnival Grounds. Although the nomads don’t stay in one place for long, most clans make an exception for the City of Midnight. Here, like no other place, the people celebrate the Vistani.

A Vistani clan might appear mysteriously at one of the city gates, then march through the city purposefully attracting attention. Crowds follow the wagons through the streets, anticipating the opening of the camp. The festive atmosphere surrounding the Vistani draws city residents. Normally bright and loud, the Vistani are even more outlandish when contrasted with the Shadowfell’s oppressive gloom.

More than one Vistani clan might come to the city at the same time. When this unusual event happens, it’s time for a showdown. For such a meeting, the competing clan members perfect new skills such as sculpting animals out of fire or conjuring coins from thin air. Orators tell their best stories, and the crowd votes for its favorite. Acrobats bound from raised bar to raised bar, performing routines and offering to race anyone down the topside of the Avenue of Chains. Both clans are winners in the larger spectacle their combined caravans make.

While Vistani are present in the city, anyone can meet and connect with them. Despite the public performances they stage, however, the enigmatic drifters are still aloof. Trade with them is still possible, but only politeness and persistence can earn one an invitation to the clan’s fireside when the show is over.

No Wagon Left Behind (Hook): While speaking to the Vistani one night, the characters discover that the clan has suffered a great loss. Monstrous brigands attacked them as they crossed the Darkreach Mountains. The clan was forced to abandon a wagon of ritual components and mystic implements, as well as an elder and a few clan members. Supernatural power is obviously in the hands of the attackers, since the Vistani are having trouble retaliating. Anyone willing to help them is sure to become a great friend to the Vistani and, perhaps, one of the blood.

8: Ghost Hall

The unremarkable exterior of this building stands out as far newer than anything else on the block. Especially notable are the two shadar-kai standing outside, guarding the entryway.

At the northern end of the Fettered Ward, nestled among houses and tenements, stands a simple building harboring malevolent inhabitants. This is Ghost Hall, the home and headquarters of an insurgent shadar-kai group known as the Ghost Talon (page 100). Ghost Talon members advocate the superiority of the shadar-kai, and they foment discord between shadar-kai and other citizens of Gloomwrought. Their ultimate goal is to claim the City of Midnight as the capital of a shadar-kai nation. In this pursuit, the group executes small missions throughout the city, attacking authorities and members of other races.

Ghost Talon missions are planned and overseen from Ghost Hall. As such, the place is well protected. The hall is never left unoccupied, and the Ghost Talon members are merely Ghost Hall’s most visible defense. Traps and alarms line the windows of the place and unused areas within it, waiting for unauthorized visitors to trip them.

Ghost Talon operatives take captives if they think the targets can be ransomed or if they believe a mark has valuable information. Steel bars and warding rituals fortify cells in the basement. A would-be escapee must sneak past Ghost Hall’s barracks before coming upon the front entrance.

The central chamber on the second floor is the most important area in Ghost Hall. All of the order’s active missions are detailed on the parchments that cover the room’s large darkwood table. A ledger kept under lock and ward details the past exploits of the Talon and keeps the names of all active and inactive members. The ledger notes all inactive members as deceased, having died either in the line of duty or because of their abandonment of same.

Fey Sparks (Hook): The inn where the characters are staying falls under attack. Ghost Talon members have come to slay an eladrin noble, Lefevra Ellynbon, who is visiting the city. The shadar-kai hope to sow strife between Gloomwrought’s authorities and Lefevra’s house in the Feywild. Ghost Talon warriors move through the halls, putting the building to the torch, while others attack Lefevra’s entourage. A few Ghost Talon members wait outside to attack anyone who escapes the blaze. The characters can resolve the situation by extinguishing the fire, driving off the shadar-kai so that others can escape, and rescuing Lefevra.

Ghosting the Ghosts (Hook): Lefevra Ellynbon bends her will, alliances, and wealth to finding the Ghost Talon after the group’s attempt on her life. She succeeds, but nobody in her entourage is up to the task of staging an assault on Ghost Hall. Lefevra turns to the characters, who might be her strongest allies in Gloomwrought. They must break into Ghost Hall. Barricading destruction of the entire terrorist group, which is a tall order. Lefevra wants Ghost Hall ruined and all the faction’s plans exposed.