Chapter 4 | Dark Threats

The Keepers

The Keepers of Gloomwrought are mystery made manifest. Despite constant attempts to learn more about the creatures and their enigmatic goals, the reclusive Keepers baffle all. They rarely interact with the city’s inhabitants, though they occupy nearly every street corner in the city. As they studiously examine the buildings, the creatures speak only in a series of guttural clicks. For the most part, the Keepers seem content to leave the other inhabitants of the city alone, provided no one interferes with their maintenance. If they are attacked, the Keepers do everything in their power to avoid further conflict, but they are surprisingly lethal when forced to fight. Keepers can shift between humanoid form and a motile mass of viscous black tar, evading, attacking, and devastating those who dare antagonize them.

Keepers rarely interact with others. When anyone asks a Keeper what it’s doing or where it came from, the Keeper ignores the question, avoids looking at the questioner, and keeps working. No sage has any record of a Keeper responding to such a query.

The Keepers do seem able to influence or control the golems of Gloomwrought, and they sometimes fight alongside a piece of the living city. They also have a strong connection to creatures of shadow, calling them into battle when facing a powerful foe.

“The mysterious, black-clad creatures known as the Keepers maintain Gloomwrought’s buildings. Nobody outside their ranks knows their secret goal.”
—A Codex of the Planes, by Corwin Aterly

City dwellers have long thought of the Keepers as a homogenous group, but recent events suggest otherwise. Keepers with silver skulls ornamenting their black smocks began showing up throughout the city, in ever-increasing numbers. On rare occasions, these Keepers were glimpsed fighting—and even killing—other Keepers.

This turn of events has led to speculation about “false” Keepers, creatures that are either Keepers corrupted by an outside force or beings able to mimic the Keepers. Worst of all, these false Keepers seem to have the ability to manipulate the city, making Gloomwrought strike out against their enemies.
Where facts are few, theories abound. Most citizens of Gloomwrought assume that the Keepers serve Prince Rolan, and that they are responsible for the constantly changing landscape of the city. No one in the city recalls a time when the Keepers were not there, quietly toiling in the background. The creatures might predate Gloomwrought, and some think the Keepers built the city with their own hands. New theories suggest the Keepers’ continuous vigil isn’t responsible for the city’s shifting face, but instead it fortifies Gloomwrought against degradation caused by the Shadow fallen. As with most of the strange and inexplicable phenomena in Gloomwrought, the existence of false Keepers has been blamed on powers such as Orcus and Vecna.

Behind the Keepers

The following section presents possible background information about the Keepers. If you prefer to leave the Keepers as mysterious figures in your campaign, want to use a different explanation for the facts given above, or let your players’ guesses define the Keepers’ role, feel free to disregard this material.

Feed on Misery and Woe: In truth, the Keepers feed on the negative emotions of creatures within Gloomwrought’s walls. They oppose happiness or joy, and they manipulate the shifting of the city’s architecture to create feelings of unease, uncertainty, and dread. They don’t do so out of malice. They would literally starve if Gloomwrought became a more pleasant place. Still, regardless of their motives, the Keepers subjugate the citizens of the City of Midnight, leaving them in a state of constant anguish and depression.

Preserve the City: The Keepers sense a sentence of sorts in the city itself. As long as they maintain its “health,” they can draw the psychic energy they need from its brick and stone. No clear line separates the fate of the Keepers from that of the city. Perhaps they arose from its walls, children that began as blobs of tar. Or they might have built the city to serve as a cage, trapping creatures within it and leeching their misery. They could even be the first dark lords, with Gloomwrought as their domain of dread.

False Keepers Go Rogue: Because of a twist in their mentality, the false Keepers broke from the ranks of the Keepers. If the Keepers are psychic vampires, then the false Keepers are their gluttonous kin, torturing and imprisoning victims to devour more and more negative emotions. They take a direct approach—one far harder to justify. They have split off from the main group only recently, and anything that could cause such a major shift must be dangerous.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>False Keeper</th>
<th>Level 17 Elite Controller</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Medium shadow humanoid (shapechanger)</td>
<td>XP 3,200</td>
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<tr>
<td>HP 332; Bloodied 166</td>
<td>Initiative +16</td>
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<tr>
<td>AC 31, Fortitude 29, Reflex 31, Will 27</td>
<td>Perception +12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Speed 6</td>
<td>blindsight 20</td>
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**Traits**

- **The City Serves**
  - Aura 2
  - Squares in the aura are difficult terrain for enemies.

**Standard Actions**

- **Claw**  At-Will
  - Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +22 vs. AC
  - Hit: 3d8 + 11 damage.

- **Corrupting Miasma**  At-Will
  - Attack: Ranged 5 (one or two creatures); +20 vs. Will
  - Hit: 2d8 + 11 damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).
  - First Failed Saving Throw: The target is no longer dazed and is instead dominated until the end of its next turn.

- **Dissolving Ooze** (acid, polymorph)  Recharge 2
  - Effect: The false Keeper shifts up to its speed and can enter enemies’ spaces during this movement. Each time the false Keeper enters an enemy’s space for the first time during this movement, it can make the following attack against that enemy.
  - Attack: Melee 1 (the enemy whose space the false Keeper entered); +20 vs. Reflex
  - Hit: 4d8 + 11 acid damage, and the target is slowed until the end of the false Keeper’s next turn.

**Triggered Actions**

- **Caustic Breath** (acid)  Encounter
  - Trigger: The false Keeper is first bloodied.
  - Attack (Free Action): Close blast 5 (creatures in the blast); +20 vs. Fortitude
  - Hit: 3d8 + 11 acid damage, and the target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls and damage rolls (save ends).
  - Miss: Half damage.

**Abilities**

- **Str 16 (+11)**
- **Dex 24 (+15)**
- **Wis 21 (+13)**
- **Con 14 (+10)**
- **Int 17 (+11)**
- **Cha 8 (+7)**

**Alignment unaligned  Languages Common**

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**False Keeper Enforcer**

| Medium shadow humanoid (shapechanger) |
| HP 150; Bloodied 75 | Initiative +17 |
| AC 30, Fortitude 26, Reflex 30, Will 28 | Perception +13 |
| Speed 6 | blindsight 20 |

**Traits**

- **Combat Advantage**
  - The enforcer deals 2d10 extra damage against any creature granting combat advantage to it.

**Standard Actions**

- **Shadowformed Blade**  At-Will
  - Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +21 vs. AC
  - Hit: 2d10 + 10 damage.

- **Gloom Stride**  At-Will
  - Effect: The enforcer shifts up to half its speed and uses shadowformed blade. This movement doesn’t trigger attack powers.

- **Dissolving Blitz** (acid, polymorph)  Recharge 2
  - Effect: The enforcer shifts up to half its speed and uses shadowformed blade. This movement doesn’t trigger attack powers.

**Triggered Actions**

- **Caustic Bile** (acid)  Encounter
  - Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +19 vs. Fortitude
  - Hit: 4d6 + 12 acid damage, and the target is blinded (save ends).
  - Miss: Half damage.

**Abilities**

- **Str 16 (+11)**
- **Dex 24 (+15)**
- **Wis 21 (+13)**
- **Con 14 (+10)**
- **Int 17 (+11)**
- **Cha 8 (+7)**

**Alignment unaligned  Languages Common**