

THE DM TOOL CHEST

WHOLE BRAIN EMULATION

BLOOD FOR THE BLACK GOD PART II



A DARK CULT HAS DISCOVERED A PATH TO IMMORTALITY
AND AN ANCIENT POWER THREATENS THE MATERIAL PLANE



WHOLE BRAIN EMULATION

Whole Brain Emulation is part two of "Blood for the Black God," a two-part Fifth Edition adventure for **three to six characters of 4th to 6th level**, optimized for a party of **four 5th level characters**.

In the first part of this adventure, "Unfortunate Middlemen," a priest at the church in Byzateia notices that a body from the mausoleum has gone missing. He hires the adventurers to track down what happened to it, through which they learn it has been stolen by a thieves' guild known as Seven Fingers in service to a strange warrior-cult calling themselves the Black Templars. How will the adventurers approach the temple held by the Black Templars within the city? How will they react when they discover that the Black Templars are using human sacrifices to weave the conscious minds of the leaders of an ancient empire into new hosts through manipulation of the Astral Plane? This adventure takes place in the city of Byzateia in the Freelands campaign setting, and it can be placed in any large town or city in another campaign world with a few adjustments.

BACKGROUND

Many know that the city of Byzateia was built atop the ancient ruins of the great Khorsinian empire. Fewer know that the power the Khorsinian's possessed lurks in the rubble beneath the city, waiting for those with the will and the means to harness it. The Black Templars know this and are eager to take the Khorsinian's necromantic secrets for themselves. But accessing this old and forbidden magic is not easy—only through complex arcane rituals can the spirits of the ancient

empire be communed with. The Black Templars' research suggested that the body of a holy man is a necessary component for these rituals. They concocted a plot to infiltrate the church within the city and steal the bodies of the clergy entombed below. To execute this plot, the Templars contracted a thieves' guild called Seven Fingers, both to ensure a skilled job and to create a layer of separation between themselves and this serious crime. Seven Fingers themselves then made an additional layer of separation from the crime by paying another man, named Sippas (whom they were not affiliated with), to bribe a clergy member for information about the church. With this information in hand, Seven Fingers executed their thefts. The plan was a success, and the Templars have now acquired numerous bodies from beneath the church with the help of Seven Fingers, who take the bodies back to one of their safehouses before they transfer them into the possession of the Black Templars.

Millennia ago, the Khorsinian empire covered much of the continent. Having satisfied themselves in the area of conquest, the empire's ruling class sought a new kind of greatness: immortality. They put in motion a great imperial directive known as the Immortal Project, where vast sums of the empire's wealth were funneled into the magical research of everlasting life. The rulers at the forefront of this research, the first heirs apparent to its potential fruits, came to be known as the Immortals. The path to immortality was identified through the transfer of consciousness from an ailing body to a younger, healthier one. The mind represented the person; the body was seen merely as a vessel. A mechanism to facilitate this transfer was identified in the Astral Plane, through which, it was theorized, a

conscious mind could be routed from one body to another. The empire built vast facilities and slaughtered thousands in pursuit of their goal, for they needed healthy brain matter and physical materials for their rituals and experiments. They came close — eventually, they were able to "host" conscious minds in constructed Astral demiplanes for indefinite periods of time while those minds were between hosts, but still, the consistent transfer of mind from one body to another without adverse side effects remained just out of reach. Before the Khorsinians could reach their goal, however, the gods took notice. Furious at the hubris of the mortals, they brought calamity to the empire. Many of the Immortals narrowly escaped divine destruction by sealing themselves away in one of their constructed Astral demiplanes. All other remnants of the empire were destroyed. Now, thousands of years later, the Black Templars have recovered ancient texts beneath the city of Byzateia written by the Immortals. This, in turn, has allowed the Immortals, trapped within their demiplane, to leverage the Astral to communicate with the Templars through vague, fleeting dreams. Their message to the fledgling cult is clear: our project was almost complete; you must finish it for us, release us from our self-constructed prison, and return us to our glory on the Prime Material.

The Templars have gathered enough bodies to learn that the success of their rituals requires living hosts. And so, in addition to the bodies sourced through Seven Fingers, the Black Templars have scooped up vagrants and beggars from the streets of the city; people nobody would miss. After weeks of intense ritual and study, they have successfully transferred the mind of one of the Immortals to a living host body, erasing the host's consciousness in the process. Unfortunately, the body has been left permanently weak and bed-ridden from the ritual, allowing the Immortal only to speak in a low rasp and make the faintest of movements at the expense of great energy. Thus, the project must continue. Now, the Templars work to refine and improve upon the ritual to bring an Immortal to the Material Plane in a healthy, able vessel. When that is done, that Immortal, with the help of the Black Templars, can bring back the others from their Astral prison.

CONTINUING THE QUEST

The characters will learn about the Black Templars and the location of their supposed temple in the Wahvemos district of the city through their investigation of the Seven Fingers hideout. They may immediately decide to pursue the lead on their own, but if they return to Durriken for further instruction, the priest encourages the party to follow up on the mystery with his blessing. He is not surprised that the theft of the body is connected to cult-like motives, and he stresses that the characters are as careful as possible with who they trust, for the extent of this "Black Templars" cult is unknown. He reasons that the obvious threat to

innocent lives aside, a group with such nefarious intentions cannot be left unchecked. To protect the populace, the characters must not be hesitant to use violence if necessary against this clearly evil cult.

TEMPLE OF THE BLACK TEMPLARS

GENERAL FEATURES

The temple identified through investigation of the Seven Fingers hideout is one of a handful of Black Templar properties throughout the city. Beneath the temple is a small network of catacombs within which the cult conducts portions of their research. The temple's surface level is staffed by only a few non-combatant clergy loyal to the cause. Unless otherwise stated, ceilings in the temple are nine feet high. Doors are unlocked and made from timber reinforced with iron bands, with AC 15 and 27 hit points. The interior is dimly lit by low-burning torches in wall-mounted sconces. The circumstances of the temple may change depending on how and when the party decides to approach it. The following section details the temple's interior and the daily activities of the clergy members.

When the characters arrive at the temple, read aloud the following:

A modest temple, not nearly as grand as many of the other churches in the district, sits on a small, well-manicured plot of land spotted with colorful gardens. The single-story building of grey stone has a pair of dark lancet windows and a blue-domed roof. A pair of thick double doors are banded with iron and fitted with a brass knocker shaped like a gargoyle's head.

TEMPLE CLERGY

Three clergy members maintain the upper level of the temple and run regular worship services for the congregation. At the same time, the higher-ranking priests of the cult conduct research in the catacombs below. Each clergy member uses **commoner** statistics. The following clergy members and a description of their routines and what they know are described below:

Sister Helice. Sister Helice is a gaunt, 34-year-old woman with sunken, shadowy eyes and thin, pale skin. She has a constant far-away look on her face and a raspy, harsh voice. Though she has been a faithful servant of the Black Templars for years and strongly believes in its cause, she suffers from insomnia and is jealous of other cult members for their dreams of the Immortals, which she has never experienced. If the characters arrive at the temple under the guise of learning more about its religion, she correctly identifies



kitchen, quietly praying or reviewing the holy book, or sleeping.

What the clergy know. Pyris is the only cult member who can be influenced to share any information with the party. Helice and Pyris, if questioned, inform the party they would gladly die in service to the Immortals before giving any information to enemies. A successful DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check can convince Pyris to share the following information as he begins to second-guess his involvement with the Black Templars:

- The Templars have been stealing bodies from the church so that they can be used to contact the Immortals through complex rituals.
- The Templars have brought a vagrant down into the dungeons below the Temple under the guise of offering him help, but Pyris does not know why.
- The Templar priests have been blessed by the Immortals' power, and the complex below the temple should be well-defended. Pyris knows only that in the complex, the priests conduct "important rituals" to "speak directly with the Immortals."

KEYED LOCATIONS

The following locations are keyed to the provided map of the Temple of the Black Templars.

them as adventurers that can only be up to no good and does her best to dismiss them as quickly as possible, explaining that the faith, referred to as Immortalism, is not currently interested in new adherents. Helice spends her time maintaining the cleanliness of the temple, praying or reading its holy book, and sleeping.

Brother Thymotes. Brother Thymotes is a heavy-set man with a thick neck and a bald head. His forehead is creased into a frown, and his voice has a hollow ring to it. He frequently dreams of the Immortals, believing (correctly) that he is receiving visions of the past and directions for the future. He is an eager and faithful servant of the cult priests, who have been blessed by the Immortals with magical power. He hopes that one day he will be deemed worthy. Thymotes leads the regular worship services at the temple. When not running service, he spends his time either sleeping, quietly praying, or reviewing the cult's holy book.

Brother Pyris. Brother Pyris is a tall, muscular man with thick curly black hair and a clean-shaven face. He is missing one of his front teeth, and his fingernails are painted black. He is the temple's cook, providing regular meals for the other clergy and the priests that work below ground. He is a more recent member of the cult and not entirely aware of its general operations. He spends his time cooking or preparing meals in the

1. ANTECHAMBER

The double doors to the antechamber are barred from the inside, except during the hour leading up to the nightly service (see *Worship Service*, page 5). They cannot be picked or smashed open with brute force. Each door has AC 18 and 35 hit points. If the characters knock on the door, they are eventually greeted by Sister Helice (see *Sister Helice*, page 3).

Black banners emblazoned with the white icon of a jeweled goblet hang from the ceiling beams along the west and east walls of this antechamber. The smell of sage wafts from an incense burner on a small stone table beside the front doors. A door marked "clergy" in brass lettering exits to the northwest.

The clergy regularly burns sage to ward off the presence of evil spirits.

2. ROBIN ROOM

Two wardrobes and a pair of beds covered in white linens fill most of this room. A pair of end tables stand beside the beds against the east wall of the room. Paint wells, brushes, and unfinished paper illustrations are scattered

across a writing desk against the west wall.

The clergy sleep and dress for worship service in this room. Inside each wardrobe are two ankle-length black robes embroidered with gold thread along the sleeves and collars.

Visions of Immortals. The illustrations scattered across the writing desk were painted by Brother Thymotes, who has been receiving messages from Khorisian Immortals in his dreams. The illustrations are his attempt at recreating and understanding the communications he receives, which are primarily visions of the Immortals' downfall and current imprisonment. Characters who examine the illustrations see lordly figures dressed in lavish finery against the backdrop of an idyllic, sparkling palace in a paradisiacal garden. A second illustration suggests a grand, subterranean portal bathed in fire, and a third shows the skyline of an impressive city being showered by hellfire.

Cult Holy Book. Lying on one of the end tables in this room is a book bound in black leather embossed with the cult's goblet symbol and the words "Visions of Ophelestes." Visions of Ophelestes is the cult's primary holy text; it is composed of the writings of the cult's founder and prophet, Ophelestes, who was the first to receive contact from the Immortals through the Astral Plane. The visions described in the book detail the Immortals' story (through an obviously sympathetic lens), the core beliefs of the cult, and the vague steps they must take to return the Immortals to glory. A character who takes time to read the book can learn the following pieces of information:

- The Immortals, originally the ruling class of the ancient Khorisian empire, were directed by the gods to unlock the secrets of Immortality.
- The Immortals believed they could do this by transferring one's consciousness from one body to another by routing it through the Astral Plane.
- The Immortals made great sacrifices to pursue this research, and they were close to succeeding before a coalition of evil deities rained hellfire on their empire, jealous of their progress.
- To escape sure destruction, the Immortals, using their magic what they had learned about the astral, created an astral demiplane in which to shield themselves.
- The calamity wrought by the gods destroyed the link between the demiplane and the Material. The consciousness' of the Immortals has persisted in the demiplane throughout the thousands of years since as they have worked to bring themselves back to the Material Plane. Ophelestes was the first to hear their calls and has spread the good word.

- When they return to the Material Plane, the Immortals will bring back the secrets of immortality for all mortal races.

3. NAVE

Six stone pews are arranged in two equal rows facing a modest stone altar dressed in black cloth at the north end of the room. Atop the altar is a golden goblet approximately three times the size of a normal drinking goblet, as well as an ornamental dagger and a white handkerchief embroidered with gold thread.

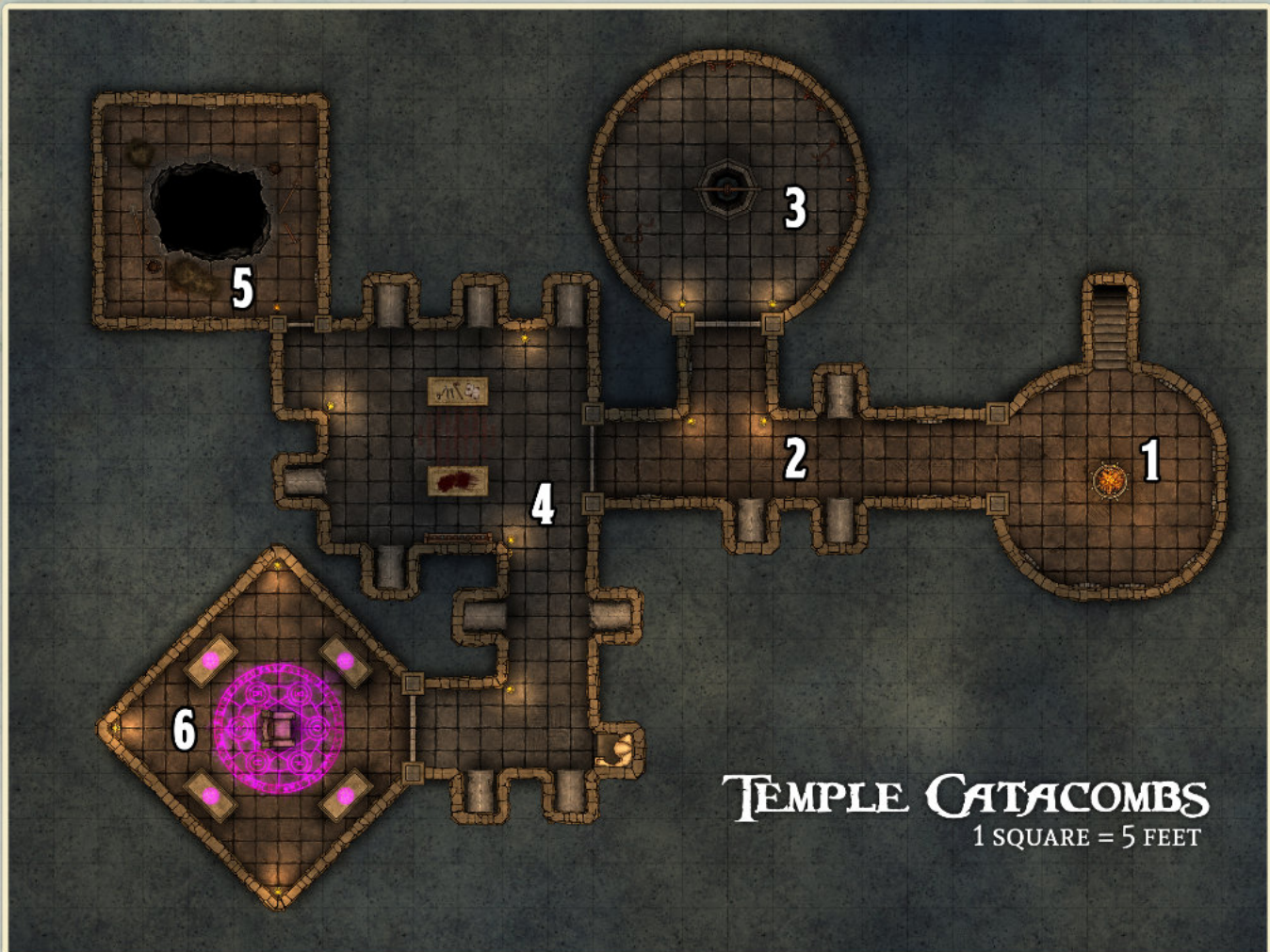
The Black Templars hold regular service in this room multiple times per week.

Treasure: Worship Objects. The goblet is solid gold and worth 500 gp. The dagger is finely crafted, with a sparkling amethyst set into its pommel. The dagger is worth 100 gp.

Worship Service. The temple may happen to host a service while the characters are around. If the characters are somehow able to attend service or watch it from one of the temple windows outside, the following sequence of events takes place:

- Thirteen total people arrive separately to the temple; the front doors are unlocked ahead of time so people can let themselves in.
- The parishioners take their seats. Sister Helice opens with greetings and then leads the group in prayer.
- Sister Helice recites a parable with a lesson relating to either suffering in the name of a greater cause, the transitory nature of the flesh, or the "shared mind" of all people.





TEMPLE CATACOMBS

1 SQUARE = 5 FEET

- One by one, parishioners approach the altar, make a small cut in their forearm, and drain some of their blood into the goblet.
- Sister Helice takes a sip from the goblet, then walks around the room and offers the goblet to each individual's lips.
- Sister Helice leads another prayer, then service ends. The parishioners linger for a few minutes to catch up with one another. The entire service takes approximately thirty minutes.
- The parishioners leave the temple.

4. KITCHEN

The back door to this room is kept locked. It can be opened with a DC 14 Dexterity check using thieves' tools or a DC 18 Strength (Athletics) check.

This room is filled by a small stovetop, a pair of preparation countertops, and a circular table surrounded by three stools in the middle of the room. Cupboards line the south wall.

The clergy store food, prepare meals and take occasional breaks in this room. The cupboards are filled with dry ingredients.

5. STORAGE

Shelves on the walls of this plain stone chamber are stocked with extra linens and cleaning supplies. A stone staircase descends toward an iron-banded door at the base of the landing.

This room provides access to the temple's catacombs, below, where the Black Templars carry out their foul work of trying to bring back the Immortals.

TEMPLE CATACOMBS

GENERAL FEATURES

The temple catacombs hold the bodies of the clergy who previously owned the temple — a small religious order dedicated to the goddess of life, love, and dancing. Since taking over the temple many years ago, the Black Templars have repurposed the catacombs for their magical research. The catacombs are crafted from large

blocks of hewn grey limestone. Unless otherwise stated, ceilings are nine feet tall. Wall-mounted torches fill the area with dim light. Doubled stone doors are unlocked and open inwards. Though heavy, they require no ability check to open. The walls of the catacombs are lined with crypts; these crypts are sealed with small stone doors without handles (AC 18, 27 hit points) that can only be opened if they are smashed in. The crypts contain skeletal remains in simple religious garb, and most of them are empty of any treasure.

Black Templar Priests. This section of the adventure makes reference to Black Templar priests. Black Templar priests use **priest** statistics, though they have 75 hit points and AC 16, as they wear chainmail armor.

KEYED LOCATIONS

The following locations are keyed to the provided map of the temple crypts.

1. VESTIBULE

A small fire burns in a claw-foot brass brazier in the middle of this circular room. The smell of sage is strong. The walls are lined with crypts bearing various names and dates. A hallway extends to the west.

The brazier burns with sage, which the Templars are consistent about burning at all times while they do their work.

2. CORRIDOR

Three sarcophagi are set into the north and south walls of this corridor.

Encounter: Black Templar Priests. Two **Black Templar priests** stand guard outside the west doors of this corridor. They attack any intruders immediately, protecting the ritual site beyond with their life. The high priest (a **mage**) in the killing chamber (area 3) joins combat on the fourth round with her **flesh golem** if the sounds of combat reverberate through the catacombs.

3. PRISON CHAMBER

A stone well occupies the middle of this circular room. Chains and manacles hang from the walls. A humanoid figure is chained tethered to the wall at the north end of the room, slumped over with their back to the doors.

The well provides drinking clean drinking water for the temple. A bucket is tied to a winch for access.



Skiron the Prisoner. The figure chained to the wall is Skiron (LG male human **commoner**), a man who the Black Templars abducted nearly a week ago. He is in his mid-twenties, with a head of thick, shoulder-length brown hair and a scruffy beard. His eyes are wide and deep black. The manacles he is chained with can be opened with the key found on the high priest's (area 4) person, a successful DC 15 Dexterity check using thieves' tools, or a successful DC 22 Strength (Athletics) check. Skiron is overjoyed to be rescued and can share the following information with the party:

- He remembers drinking alone in a tavern late at night, where he fell asleep at his table. When he woke up, he was here.
- He says that the priests told him to be grateful, for he has been offered "an opportunity to make his life and body worth so much more than they otherwise would be."
- He has been fed and watered very well. A priest comes to him every day to read religious scripture from a holy book of some sort.

- He has seen others brought in here and then disappear. They didn't get the same treatment that he did. He has heard screams and suspects they have all been killed.

4. KILLING CHAMBER

Two stone tables occupy the center of this room. One is laden with surgical instruments, ritual knives, and detailed notes. A body lies on the other, with the top half of its skull removed and its brain exposed to the open air. Shelves on the south wall hold mysterious contents suspended in liquids. A door exits to the north, and a corridor extends to the south.

A character who takes time to review the notes on the south table can learn that the Black Templars have learned through magical ritual and communing with the Immortals that a specific portion of the brain (the hippocampus, though they are not aware of its proper name) is strongly associated with dreaming. As a result, they have sought to harvest this part of the brain as often as they can from victims so that it can be consumed by the priests and incorporated into rituals. In addition to various spell components, the numerous jars on the south shelves hold many removed hippocampi and other pieces of the brain, including the stem and portions of the frontal lobe.

Encounter: High Priest. A Black Templar high priest (use **mage** statistics) gathers materials from a corpse in this room with the aid of her **flesh golem**, which hands her tools. If the high priest hears the sounds of combat in the east corridor, she quickly joins the fray. The high priest attacks immediately with the aid of her flesh golem upon recognition of intruders.

5. WASTE PIT

Characters approaching this room with a passive Perception of 12 or higher can hear groaning and shuffling sounds from beyond the door. When the characters enter, read aloud:

A ten-foot-by-ten-foot pit that looks to be about twelve feet deep has been dug into the center of this chamber. Shuffling around inside the hole and clawing uselessly at its sheer walls are a half-dozen walking corpses, each of which have had the top portions of their skull removed, revealing brains that have been similarly disturbed. A billhook mounted on a ten-foot pole hangs on the wall nearby.

The Black Templars use this chamber as a temporary dumping ground for corpses which they have little use for. It is easier for the cult to store them here than to burn them or sneak them out of the temple. The foul

necromantic presence that occupies the catacombs has brought them back to undeath. Occasionally, the priests harvest the corpses to augment or repair their flesh golem.

Encounter: Zombies. Six **zombies** occupy the pit, though they pose no threat to the characters while remaining on high ground. The zombies grow agitated and snarl menacingly at their presence.

6. RITUAL CHAMBER

Four figures in the robes of the Black Templars lie face-up, eyes closed, on four equidistant stone slabs arranged around the perimeter of this diamond-shaped room. Their bodies glow with purple light. Arcane runes in a circular pattern decorate the floor glow similarly, filling the room with soft light. In the middle of the chamber, surrounded by the runes, another humanoid figure sits on a stone throne facing away from the doors.

The primary research project of the Black Templars occurs in this chamber. Here, through a complex ritual involving the Astral Plane, four **Black Templar priests** have used their minds to transport the consciousness of an Immortal into a living host on the Material Plane. The priests can only be awoken if the ritual is dispelled with a casting of *dispel magic* (DC 19). If the magic is dispelled, the priests eventually recognize the party as intruders and attack. Otherwise, they cannot be woken. Alternatively, the ritual also ends if each priest is slain. In this event, the Immortal in the throne loses consciousness over a period of minutes before its mind returns to its Astral demiplane.

Kiramax the Immortal. The figure on the throne is Kiramax the Immortal, though his mind is being hosted by another body captured by the Black Templars for this specific purpose. Though the mind transfer was a success, the magic remains experimental, and unfortunately for the Black Templars, the body has proven too weak to host the consciousness with full capabilities. As a result, Kiramax is essentially paralyzed and can only speak in a low growl and make the faintest of head and finger movements. Kiramax and the priests have been in this state for over a week, as other Black Templar cultists work to understand Kiramax's faculties and question the Immortal on next steps. In his condition, Kiramax poses no threat to the characters, and if given the opportunity, he engages them in conversation, as that is all he can manage. A power-hungry narcissist who is eternally enraged by his imprisonment, Kiramax can share the following information with the characters:

- His name is Kiramax, and he is no threat to them.
- He is a mind occupying a vessel. Eventually, he will be capable of everything he once was a long time ago.

- The Black Templars are loyal servants, and they will be rewarded. The party, too, can be rewarded should they serve the Immortals faithfully.
- After millennia of imprisonment, the Immortals near a return to the Material Plane, where they once ruled. They will bring immortality to all who serve them.

If the characters dispel the ritual, slay the priests, or deliver a fatal blow to Kiramax himself, he curses their name and promises them an eternity of torment.

AFTERMATH

The aftermath of this adventure depends heavily on whether or not you and your group are interested in developing it into a longer-running campaign. Should you so choose, the temple and its catacombs may only be a single stronghold for the Black Templar cult, which maintains other properties and conducts similar rituals in a city-wide secret society dedicated to restoring the Immortals to power. Should the party return to Durriken with information, he will take what the party says seriously and begin connecting them with the right individuals to help them address the Black Templar threat. Perhaps the party starts to see Kiramax in their dreams as he taunts or threatens them through the Astral Plane. Alternatively, the temple and catacombs could represent the near entirety of the cult, and the characters' interruption crushes the threat of the returning Immortals.



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