

ORDER AMONG THE STARS

AN ADVENTURE FOR CHARACTERS OF 4TH TO 6TH LEVEL



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ORDER AMONG THE STARS IS A FIFTH Edition adventure for three to six characters of 4th to 6th level, optimized for a party of four 5th-level characters. A renowned observatory in the city of Bharzul has been infiltrated by a rogue

gearling from the Regulated Realm, which has seized control of the observatory's clockwork stewards and locked down the facility. The astronomer trapped within is unable to counter the methodical invader and its reprogrammed guardians. Can the party intervene to prevent the enforcement of absolute order? This adventure is set in the city of Bharzul in the Cartosia campaign setting, but the names of people, places, and locations can be changed to adapt the adventure to any high-fantasy urban environment with an association with clockwork or mechanical elements.

BACKGROUND

Nestled at the base of the lofty crags of the Sundered Peak Mountains, the Stonecipher Observatory has stood for centuries as a bastion of astronomical study. Its intricate clockwork mechanisms and precise celestial instruments, crafted by the skilled hands of its dwarven architects, have mapped the heavens with a precision unmatched in Cartosia. At the heart of the observatory lies the Astral Mechanism, an astrolabe of unimaginable complexity designed to unlock the cosmic patterns of the stars.

On a clear night, guided by the celestial knowledge stored in generations of star charts, the astronomer Cri attempted to align the Astral Mechanism with the subject of her latest research; an enigmatic, distant constellation. In an unintended flash of mechanical resonance, the Mechanism tuned into the precise frequency of the Regulated Realm, the plane of absolute order and machinery. For a matter of moments, a transient gate was opened, bridging the Material Plane to the realm of perfect cogwork.

Unknown to Cri, a rogue entity from the Regulated Realm had been waiting for such an occurrence. This entity, Tetras, belonged to a species of mechanical beings known as gearlings. Tetras was an anomaly, having developed an unusual sense of curiosity that set it apart from the other gearlings, who were defined by their unyielding adherence to order. This curiosity led Tetras on a path of independence and eventually to the Material Plane through the temporary gate. A matter of moments was all Tetras needed.

Driven by a desire to extend the perfect order of the Regulated Realm to the Material Plane, Tetras seized control of the observatory's clockwork guards, reprogramming them into methodical enforcers of its new regime. Cri was

forced to retreat, locking herself in the relative safety of her quarters.

Now, Tetras orchestrates its grand design from within the heart of the observatory, using the Astral Mechanism to calculate a celestial alignment that would permanently open a gate to the Regulated Realm. If successful, the mechanical harmonics of the Realm would cascade across the Material Plane, bringing forth an era of ruthless order and predictability. The observatory's keeper is trapped and its purpose subverted. The astral clocks tick away relentlessly, marking the seconds until Tetras brings its chilling order to the world. Can the party intervene successfully in time?

ADVENTURE HOOKS

There are numerous reasons the party may be called to address the situation at the Stonecipher Observatory. A few of these reasons are outlined below:

Silent Scholars. The Stonecipher Observatory, known for its regular dispatches of celestial reports and knowledge, has fallen ominously silent. A friend in the local scholar's guild requests the party to check on their colleague Cri at the observatory, and offers to compensate them for their trouble.

Familiar Heroes. The party has earned the respect of the Academia Arcana, a prestigious institution dedicated to magical and scientific study. The Academy, having received a distress signal from the observatory, calls upon the party to investigate. The promise of rare arcane knowledge or a generous purse of gold awaits upon their success.

The Broken Clock. The Grand Clock of Bharzul, which was synchronized to the celestial time kept by the Stonecipher Observatory, has suddenly gone haywire. The city's engineers are baffled, and communications efforts to the observatory have been ignored. The party is asked to investigate.

CRI THE ASTRONOMER

Behind the locked door of her quarters within the facility is Cri, an accomplished astronomer and master of the observatory. Sometimes, Cri is accompanied by an assistant, but she was alone at the time of Tetras' arrival. She is identifiable by her auburn hair that constantly escapes its bun, adorned haphazardly with an eclectic collection of stargazing tools. Sporting thick, round glasses that magnify her emerald eyes, Cri is known for her spontaneous, sometimes chaotic approach to her work. She has a quick laugh, a warmer smile, and a love for sharing her celestial knowledge. Her language is rich with astronomical metaphors and she tends to punctuate her sentences with an enthusiastic point of her finger, as if she is plotting

constellations in the air. Cri can explain the following to the characters:

- During her latest research, she attempted to align the facility's Astral Mechanism with a distant constellation.
- The Mechanism must have aligned with a previously unknown frequency, as a strange creature stepped through an appearing portal.
- The creature introduced itself as Tetras, a gearling from the Regulated Realm, and explained that it was going to use the Astral Mechanism to open a permanent alignment between the two planes.
- When Cri expressed fear and disagreement with Tetras, it turned the facility's clockwork stewards against her. She tried to flee, but Tetras somehow locked the exterior doors. She instead retreated here, to her quarters, where the clockwork stewards for whatever reason did not attempt to continue following her.

Cri is eager to accompany the party throughout the observatory, but is a non-combatant who will do her best to stay safe from danger. She uses **commoner** statistics.

GENERAL FEATURES

The Stonecipher Observatory is a two-story building of white stone and polished metal. On clear nights, the cyclopean lens of its telescope can be seen peeking through the plates of the observatory's grand brass dome. A stately balcony extends from the west side of its facade, providing views of the surrounding city. In the aftermath of Tetras' arrival, the observatory has plunged into a discombobulated state as the forces of order and chaos clash within it.

Ceilings, Walls, and Floors. The observatory is constructed primarily from marble and is accented with gleaming metal fixtures. Ceilings vary in height but average at about 15 feet, while the walls are adorned with constellations and celestial symbols. The floors are of the same white stone, smooth and polished to a shine.

Doors. Doors within the observatory are heavy iron, designed to withstand both the test of time and potential invaders. They bear the emblem of a gear intertwined with a star and are built with a balance of artistry and security. These emblems glow softly with purple light, a byproduct of the observatory's generator which the doors are powered by,

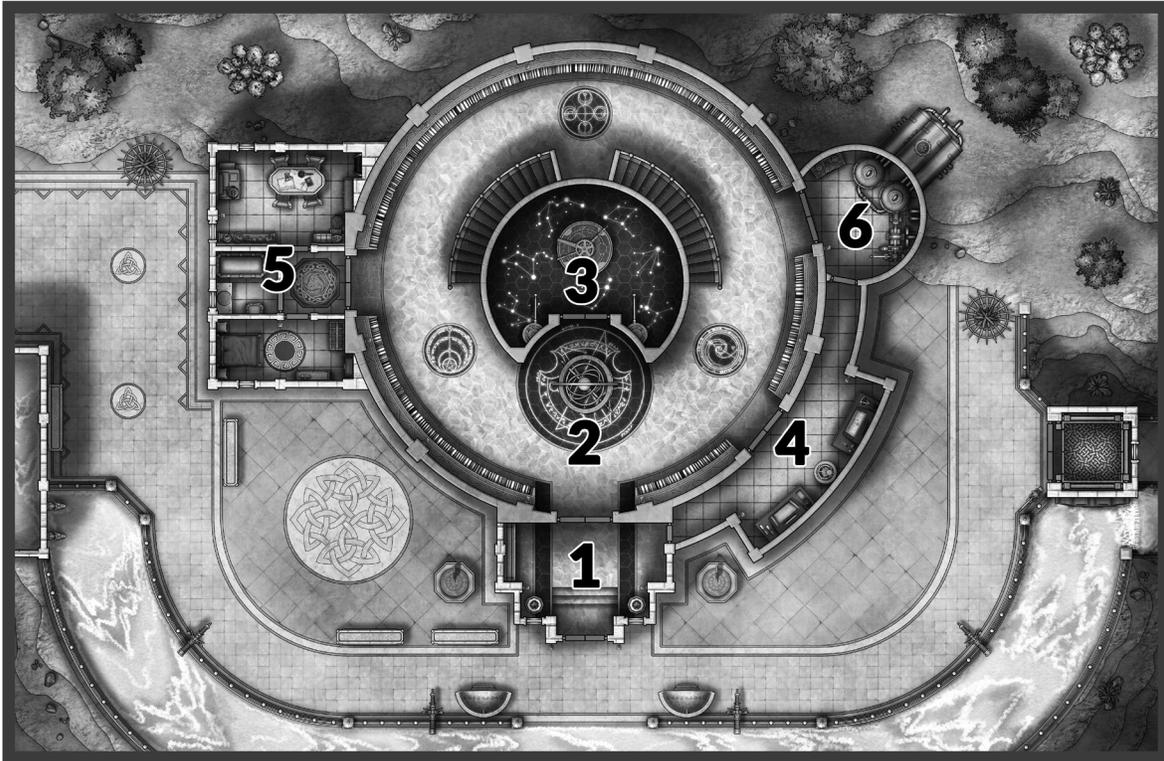
which facilitates a system of arcano-steam power generation unique to the observatory. The doors are powered by the observatory's generator and their emblems glow softly with purple light, a byproduct of the observatory's unique system of arcano-steam power generation. When opened, they slide into the walls rather than inward or outward. Unless stated otherwise, doors throughout the observatory are locked and can be opened with the master key carried by Cri or a DC 16 Dexterity check using thieves' tools. This check can be repeated, but failing it by five or more triggers the door's arcane defense mechanism. Any creatures within five feet of the door must make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw, taking 8 (2d8) force damage on a failed save, or half that amount on a successful one.

Light. Everburning candles mounted in brass sconces throughout the observatory ensure that it is well-lit at all hours.

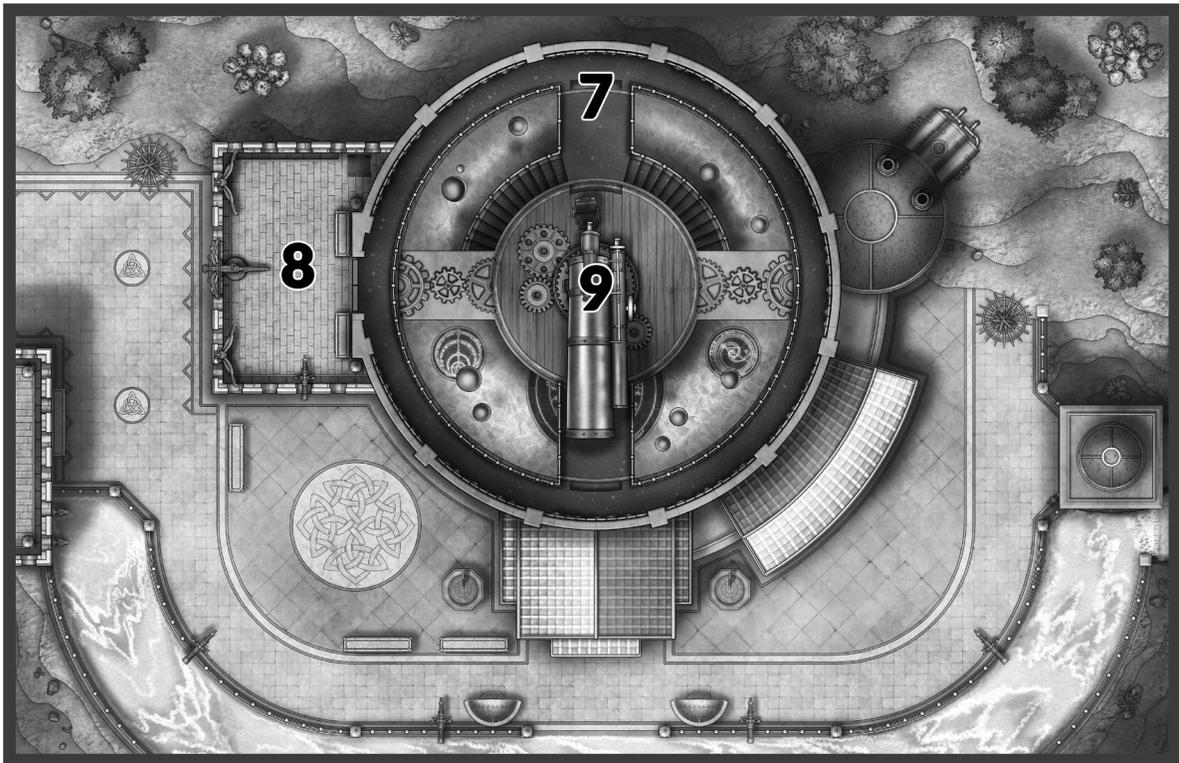
Regulation Fields. The temporary alignment with the Regulated Realm has caused pockets of regulation fields to appear throughout the observatory. These fields interrupt the free-flowing nature of the Material Plane and impose a deterministic order on actions taken within them. While inside the observatory, the party will notice a subtle shift in their perception. The air seems unusually still, almost stagnant, with dust particles floating in geometric patterns. The usual background noise of the world seems muted, replaced by a low, harmonious hum that resonates with steady rhythm. Shadows cast in these fields appear sharper, and the movement of light more predictable.

Creatures within these fields might experience a strange sensation, like persistent déjà vu, or as though they could predict their own actions moments before they occur. Their movements might feel more mechanical, their thoughts more structured. A sword swing follows a perfect arc, a spell is cast with an uncanny precision, and even a random thought seems to follow a distinct pattern. This effect can be disorienting, especially for those who rely on instinct and spontaneity. However, for those with keen minds, these fields provide an opportunity to perceive and manipulate the very fabric of causality. When a creature first enters the observatory, they must make a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check to perceive and predict the imposed order. The outcome of this check affects their subsequent rolls while within the observatory in the following ways:

OBSERVATORY FIRST LEVEL



OBSERVATORY SECOND LEVEL



Success by 5 or more (20 and above): The creature successfully discerns the patterns imposed by the Regulated Realm, allowing them to use this to their advantage. They can roll their d20 as usual and choose to add or subtract 2 from the result. This reflects the character's keen understanding of the deterministic nature of the field and their ability to manipulate it.

Success (15-19): The creature perceives some of the deterministic laws at work. They can roll their d20 as usual. This reflects a basic understanding of the regulating effects, enough to act normally within it.

Failure (14 and below): The deterministic order overwhelms the character. They must subtract 2 from the result of any d20 roll. This reflects the character being bound and disoriented by the overwhelming forces of order within the observatory.

A creature may repeat this roll every time they enter a new area of the observatory in continued attempts to improve their understanding of the regulation fields. A creature cannot be subject to the effects of a lower understanding level than one they have previously achieved. Every subsequent roll of 14 or below, however, causes the character to take 8 (2d8) psychic damage. For example, a creature who initially rolls a 16 and achieves a basic understanding of the fields and which then rolls a 13 in an attempt to master their understanding takes 8 (2d8) psychic damage but maintains their current understanding level.

Regulatory Pressure. The influence of the Regulated Realm increases by the minute, and the temporary instability caused by the realm of law spilling into the chaos of the Material Plane can wreak havoc on the minds of creatures. For each hour a non-construct creature spends in the unstable environment of the observatory, they must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw, taking 10 (2d10) psychic damage on a failed save as their senses and train of thought are assaulted by the warping of reality.

The following areas are keyed to the provided map of the Stonecipher Observatory:

I. ENTRANCE HALL

Bright blue flames burn in two braziers mounted on marble pedestals in this entrance chamber. A pair of double doors exit to the north, and a smaller door exits to the east.

The braziers, like the torches throughout the observatory, are everburning. Expected guests to the observatory would usually be greeted in this chamber by Cri.

2. CELESTIAL RECORDS

This circular chamber stretches out before you, ringed by towering bookshelves that hug the curvature of the room. Each shelf is densely packed with dusty tomes, scroll cases, and astronomical charts, their spines neatly aligned. The floor is of smooth white stone, polished to a sheen and reflecting the faint light that fills the space. In the center of the room is an intricate brass orrery, a miniature replica of the cosmos, suspended in ceaseless, silent rotation. Beyond the orrery is a set of double doors, their intricate design suggesting particular significance. Other sets of doors exit to the east and west.

Much of the pages in this room are dedicated to the recording of celestial movements, which have been kept for the entirety of Bharzul's history. A casting of detect magic reveals an aura of enchantment magic emanating from the orrery, the many rings of which rotate independently to model celestial movements.

Encounter: Clockwork Stewards. A number of clockwork stewards assist Cri at the observatory. These humanoid-shaped constructs of gears, cogs, and levers carry out tasks such as cleaning, record maintenance, document retrieval, and, should it ever be required, defense. Where a face would be on a living creature, a panel of crystal provides a window to the inner workings, illuminating the darkness with a soft, ghostly glow. An intrusion by a being such as Tetras, however, is not something the clockwork stewards are able to defend against. In fact, their mechanical nature makes them vulnerable to interference from the Regulated Realm, and they have turned against Cri as they obey the orders of their new master. A steward (use **animated armor** statistics) and a senior steward (use **shield guardian** statistics) patrol this chamber and immediately attack any intruders. The stewards fight until they are destroyed, but do not pursue any creatures that maintain a break in line of sight for at least four rounds. If the party flees into another room of the observatory and closes the doors behind them, the stewards will not pursue.

Treasure: Master Key. A character who inspects the body of the master steward and makes a successful DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check notices an array of tools embedded into its right arm. The steward can extend and manipulate these tools to suit the task it has been assigned. One of these tools is a master key that unlocks every door throughout the observatory that retains power. This key can be removed from the body without damage with a successful DC 13 Dexterity check. A character with a set of tinker's tools makes this check with advantage.

Finding the Manual Override Instructions. Somewhere in this room, a slip of aged parchment scribbled with generator override instructions has been tucked into a forgotten maintenance and operation manual for the observatory. If the party has noticed the unpowered doors to the Astral Mechanism and has spoken to Cri (see 'Cri the Astronomer'

section) and decided to search this room for the manual override instructions, a successful group DC 18 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation) check is required to locate the instructions. Characters can contribute to the group check with either of these skills. Each check represents 15 minutes of searching through shelves and documents. This check can be repeated, but time is of the essence—as the regulatory pressure (see ‘General Features’ section) within the observatory is continuous.

3. ASTRAL MECHANISM

Not only are the doors to this chamber locked, but Tetras has used its regulating presence to deliberately interfere with the facility’s generator, diverting power away from the doors so that it is less likely to be interrupted in its efforts to create a permanent alignment. Opening the doors will require restoring the generator to its proper functioning. A character who makes a successful DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check can recognize that these doors, unlike the others throughout the facility, have lost access to power.

Cri knows that manually overriding the generator is likely to restore power to the doors. If Cri is accompanying the party, she recalls that tucked away in the Celestial Records room is a document detailing the manual override instructions for the generator, which include manipulating the control panel’s buttons and levers in long and complex order. Cri knows that this document exists, but doesn’t know exactly where (see ‘Finding the Manual Override Instructions,’ page 5).

When the party enters the room, read aloud:

A hemispherical room sprawls before you. Its walls, floor, and curved ceiling are coated in meticulously detailed star charts, displaying a myriad of shimmering celestial bodies. Dominating the center of this cosmic panorama is a grand astrolabe. The intricate contraption stands proudly, its brass arcs and dials reflecting the stellar patterns surrounding it. A hulking figure of clockwork composition stands before the astrolabe, guiding its mechanisms with slow, gradual movements.

The clockwork figure guiding the astrolabe is Tetras. At over seven feet tall, its form is entirely composed of precisely interlocking gears, pistons, and plates of gleaming, cold iron, each piece moving in perfect synchrony with the others. In contrast to its mechanical nature, Tetras’ optics flicker with an intelligence and determination that’s unsettlingly human, producing a vivid, blue luminescence that bathes the surroundings in an ethereal light. It normally communicates in an oddly melodic series of whirrs, clicks, and low hums, but can articulate Common fluently through a built-in voice modulator. Tetras does not immediately engage with the party unless attacked, it takes its time before turning away from the astrolabe to address them. Tetras will take the same approach it took with Cri, by offering to explain its motives and giving the party the opportunity to commit themselves to not getting in its way.

Non-violently convincing Tetras that its motive is illogical and to stand down and return to its home plane is possible, but difficult. Doing so requires using well-reasoned arguments and accruing three successful DC 17 Charisma (Persuasion) or Intelligence (Persuasion) checks before two failures. After two failures, Tetras refuses to negotiate further and will move to dispatch the party. Tetras uses **clay golem** statistics, though it does not have an Acid Absorption feature and is instead vulnerable to acid damage.

Once Tetras has been destroyed or convinced to return to its home plane, the effect it was having over the observatory ceases immediately.

4. CHART DISPLAY

This hallway expands into a narrow alcove. Two elegant desks rest within this space, their surfaces meticulously organized, showcasing a collection of celestial charts that map out distant constellations and far-flung galaxies. Scattered among the stellar blueprints is a medley of unusual tools including telescopic lenses, gleaming sextants, and intricate compasses.

Charts and tools are put on display in this corridor for public viewing, which occurs during designated visiting times. Clockwork agents present in this corridor keep watch to ensure none of the material is pilfered or disturbed.

5. CRI’S QUARTERS

This living area is divided into three rooms; one for meeting and meal preparation, one for sanitation, and another for sleeping.

Behind the locked door that leads to the bedroom is Cri (see ‘Astronomer Cri’ section).

6. GENERATOR

This space is dominated by a massive contraption, its purpose unmistakable: a generator. Two sizable brass vats are connected by a baffling tangle of gears, levers, and pipes. To one side, a control panel bristles with a variety of buttons, switches, and levers, each marked with a runic symbol or numbered sequence. Around the room, metallic conduits trace paths along the walls and floor, humming with barely restrained energy. The air smells of ozone, and the low thrum of contained power fills the room.

The Astral Mechanism and telescope require large amounts of power to function appropriately. The observatory’s arcano-steam power generation system is unique in Bharzul; the work of one of the city’s founding engineers. Because the power generation method proved exceedingly difficult to replicate without the engineer’s specific experience, it never developed past the prototype that powers the observatory.

Power can be routed to the doors of the Astral Mechanism room in one of a few ways:

Manual Override. If the party has found the manual override instructions (see 'Finding the Manual Override Instructions' section, page 5), then following those instructions to manually override the generator and restore its default functioning is simple.

Divert Power Mechanically. A character who inspects the control panel and makes a successful DC 17 Intelligence (Investigation or Arcana) check can interpret its mess of symbols, buttons, and levers to correctly identify which sequence of commands to enter in order to restore power to the Astral Mechanism doors. This check can be attempted no more than twice, as two failures to enter the correct sequence will cause the control panel to lock out any further input for a 24-hour period to prevent further tampering.

Divert Power Manually. A character who inspects the conduits within the room and makes a successful DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation or Arcana) check can notice that the conduits can be physically redirected in a precise manner to reroute power to the Astral Mechanism doors. The conduits, weighty and rigid, can be redirected with a successful DC 18 Strength (Athletics) check or a DC 18 Dexterity check using tinker's tools. These checks can be repeated until success, but each failure triggers a short circuit, sending a blast of arcano-steam throughout the room. Each creature within the room during a short circuit must make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw, taking 10 (2d10) fire damage on a failed save, or half that amount on a successful one.

7. GALLERY

This narrow gallery of purple carpet runs along the perimeter of the observatory's second level, overlooking the celestial records hall below.

8. BALCONY

Two life-sized brass statues of eagles are perched atop the battlements of this balcony, their wings frozen in mid-flight. Between them, a ballista is mounted against the wall, its formidable presence standing as a silent guardian over the observatory and the surrounding city. A humanoid-shaped construct of gears, cogs, and levers stands near the doors to the observatory.

Many buildings in Bharzul double as strategic defence locations in case of assault against the city, and the observatory is no exception, though the populace is lucky that the ballista perched atop its balcony has never needed to be fired. In the northeast corner of the balcony is a trapdoor which connects to Cri's quarters below; a defensive weakness of the building. The trapdoor, though locked, is not powered by the facility's generator and can be opened much easier than the rest of the observatory's doors. It can be opened with a successful DC 12 Dexterity check using thieves' tools or a DC 16 Strength (Athletics) check.

Encounter: Clockwork Steward. The construct standing silently on the balcony is a senior steward (use **shield guardian** statistics) that surges to life and attacks any creatures present on the balcony for longer than a single round. It fights until it is destroyed, or until the balcony is clear of threats.

9. TELESCOPE

A raised platform claims the center of the gallery. Commanding the platform is the observatory's centerpiece: a massive telescope of brushed metal and gleaming glass. Its robust cylinder structure stretches upwards, while myriad smaller gears and devices cluster around its base, allowing meticulous adjustments for celestial exploration.

The engineers throughout the city of Bharzul claim apocryphally that the Stonechiper telescope is the most accurate that has ever existed. Cri spends much of her time within the observatory here, gazing up at the heavens.

AFTERMATH

If the party was successful in destroying Tetras or convincing it to return to its home plane, the threat of incursion from the Regulated Realm is extinguished and the observatory and city of Bharzhul are safe. Cri thanks the party profusely, and offers to petition to the city authorities for the party's recognition and reward in exchange for their service to the populace. She is also sure to make note of the alignment which opened the temporary rift to the Regulated Realm, and sets to work on a series of calculations to determine if there may be other alignments that might pose similar problems in future.

If, instead, the party was unsuccessful in dealing with Tetras, it is only a matter of days before a semi-permanent portal is established between the Material Plane and the Regulated Realm. Gearlings and other agents of order begin to pour through and demand intervention, with the fate of the city of Bharzhul hanging in the balance.

REFERENCES

This work includes material taken from the System Reference Document 5.1 (“SRD 5.1”) by Wizards of the Coast LLC and available at <https://dnd.wizards.com/resources/systems-reference-document>. The SRD 5.1 is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode>.

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