

# Adventure Primer

Cult of the Flame Kissed is a Fifth Edition adventure intended for three to five characters of 3rd to 4th level and is optimized for four characters with an average party level (APL) of 3. Characters who complete this adventure should earn enough experience to reach half of the way to level 4. A demonic cult is kidnapping children to power a ritual that will summon their patron from the Abyss. This adventure takes place in the [Freelands campaign setting](#) but fits into any existing campaign with a demonic cult in a town near a forest with only a few modifications.

## Background

The Flame Kissed, a cult of demon worshippers, are attempting to bring their demonic patron out of the Abyss and into the material plane. They are kidnapping children from the nearby town of Ashenvale and conducting blood sacrifices in their secret temple hidden in the Shimmering Forest. The slew of sacrifices has opened a minor gateway to allow some lesser demons to enter, and they are preparing for one last sacrifice to open it completely.

Dimitrios Zarallis is an Inquisitor from the Order of the Crimson Circle, an ancient sect dedicated to hunting demons. The Order tasked him to investigate the disappearances in Ashenvale due to previous run-ins with the Flame Kissed. Some suspected cultists have come to his attention, but he has yet to determine the location of their hideout. Sensing that whatever the cult is up to is nearing completion, he is desperate to get to the bottom of the situation.

## Adventure Hooks

There are many different reasons why the adventures might be in Ashenvale and visit the marketplace where this adventure kicks off. Here are a couple of reasons that they might be there:

*New Gear.* The adventurers have some new coins burning holes in their pouches, and what better place to get some new gear than the marketplace in Ashenvale? It is famed for its abundance of goods from all over the Freelands, after all.

*Caravan Escort.* A merchant hired the adventurers to escort a shipment of goods from Haven to Ashenvale. They've completed their mission and are now looking to spend their new coin in the marketplace.

# Ashenvale

Ashenvale is a bustling town in the western border of the Freelands that sits on the Shimmering Forest's edge. A frequent stop for visitors traveling to the kingdom of Z'hing Tao, it's widely known for its artisans and marketplace. The bright green shingles and worked wood are reminiscent of the nearby elven kingdom's style and give elegance to the otherwise mundane stone buildings.

## Altercation in the Marketplace

The adventurers are perusing wares in the town marketplace when suddenly a cry rings out from across the square. Frightened townsfolk quickly empty the market and reveal a terrified young mother protectively hunched over her two small children. A group of men surrounds a robed Dragonborn who is staggering and clutching a bloody wound in his side.

*Encounter: Marketplace Scuffle.* The Inquisitor Dimitrios Zarallis (use the priest stat block) was shadowing a group of four Flame Kissed thugs and intervened when they tried to snatch the children. He will shout to the adventurers that he needs them alive while defending the mother and her children. If three of the cultists are defeated, the last one flees to the cult's warehouse hideout.

## Roleplaying Dimitrios

Dimitrios is a highly educated and devout believer in the mission of the Order of the Crimson Circle. He firmly believes that demonic invasion from the Abyss is an impending threat to the entire world. A proficient combatant against demonic foes, his skill as an investigator has made him a trusted and high-ranking Inquisitor within the Order. While he has a slight disdain for Tieflings and a great mistrust of Warlocks, his noble bearing, and natural politeness will not let him show too much. He firmly believes that no sacrifice is too great if it's for the greater good.

## After the Fight

The grateful mother is a local seamstress named Janis, and she thanks the adventurers profusely. Her twin children, eight-year-olds Erik and Marta, give the adventurers hugs; Marta gives one a flower and calls them her hero. Janis shuffles the children away and hurries home.

Cultists who are captured or charmed by the adventurers can be interrogated for information (see the sidebar "What the Cultists Know"). The town guard who arrives after the fight ends will not be pleased if the adventurers killed the cultists. They grudgingly let the group go after Dimitrios explains he was tracking the cultists under the town council's authority. After any interrogation occurs,

Dimitrios will introduce himself officially to the party and request they join him at The Crown & Copper, a nearby tavern, and hear his story.

## **At the Crown & Copper**

Dimitrios grabs a table at the tavern and introduces himself further, and explains that he is on a mission from the Order of the Crimson Circle, a sect of demon hunters, sent to root out a suspected demonic cult. He has determined that the cult is much larger than he can handle alone and he requests

their assistance. He can be persuaded to pay up to 100gp per adventurer to hire them.

## **What the Cultists Know**

If the adventurers successfully charm or convince the cultists to talk with a successful DC 15 Charisma (Intimidation) check, they will give up the location of their warehouse hideout in town as well as the following information:

- The Flame Kissed are close to finishing a gateway to the Abyss that will let their master Galmath physically enter this plane.
- The ritual they are using to open the gateway and summon their patron requires sacrificed children's blood.
- The cult burns themselves with hot irons as a way to worship their patron. Their leader, the warlock Kiernan Blackhand, has burned his entire body in exchange for Galmath's favor.
- The cult is holding the prisoners in their hideout.
- There is a magical trap on a door in the hideout, and the password is "Jath'turoth."

If the adventurers discerned the hideout location from captured cultists, skip ahead to "Raiding the Warehouse." Otherwise, Dimitrios informs them he has narrowed it down to the town's warehouse district with only a single suspect remaining. He warns that they must move quickly because the earlier altercation may have alerted the cult to his presence.

There are a few ways to determine the hideout's location:

- A successful DC 12 Charisma (Persuasion) check in the marketplace will get a vendor to mention they have seen all of the men from the attack earlier hanging around outside an abandoned warehouse recently.
- A successful DC 10 Intelligence (Religion) check of the warehouse district will uncover a building bearing a demonic symbol scratched above a doorway.
- A successful DC 12 Dexterity (Stealth) check while following the suspected cultist from their home will lead the adventurers to the warehouse's secret door.

Once the warehouse's location is determined, Dimitrios will keep a lookout while the adventurers infiltrate. A successful DC 18 Charisma (Persuasion) check can convince him to join.

## Raiding the Warehouse

The warehouse is a nondescript building that does not stand out from the other buildings other than its outward appearance of long-term abandonment. The second-story windows are boarded, and an iron chain is padlocked across the large double doors that are the only visible entrance. Anyone actively checking the padlock can determine that it is not locked. The doors are unlocked and screech loudly if opened, alerting the cultists in the warehouse loft.

*Secret Door.* The adventurers can discover a secret door in the wall of the warehouse with a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check. It's obscured from sight by stacks of large empty crates.

The warehouse itself is a 60-foot wide and 40-foot deep rectangular building that is empty except for a thick layer of sawdust and a few broken crates. A wooden ladder leads up to a loft that the cult uses as a lookout post. A pair of lazy cultists are here and are supposed to be keeping a lookout.

*Trap: Net Snare.* Just inside the front door is a net hidden under a layer of sawdust that can be seen automatically by an adventurer with a passive Wisdom (Perception) of 15 or by an active search with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check. Anyone who triggers the trap must succeed a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw with a failure resulting in being hoisted in the net 10 feet above the ground and being restrained. The net will drop once 1 point of slashing damage is dealt to the rope holding it up. If it is not let down gently, anyone inside will take 1d6 bludgeoning damage from the fall.

*Encounter: Cultist Guards.* There are two cultist scouts who are lazing about the loft. They will use the crates in the loft for cover and ambush from range. After three rounds of combat, they will throw a rope ladder out of one of the windows to escape outside and head to the hidden Temple of Galmath.

*Secret Trapdoor.* A trapdoor is disguised as a broken crate and leads to the basement below. An adventurer actively looking will find it with a successful DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check.

## Warehouse Basement

This basement is composed of three rooms: a chapel, storage room, and office. The stairway leading from above leads directly down into the chapel. The basement is empty of cultists — they took the prisoners to the Temple hours ago.

### Chapel

The 30-foot wide square room's wooden floor is painted in demonic symbols, and the rough stone walls with splashes of old, dried blood. A raised wooden dais sits along one wall and bears a large black stone statue of a demon standing over a naked man's supine form. Stone claws pull entrails upwards, dripping in blood. An inspection reveals the blood on the statue is fresh. Two doors sit on opposing sides of the statue.

*Trap: Cursed Statue.* Anyone who touches the statue must succeed a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw or become cursed for 24 hours. While cursed, the victim has disadvantage on all Wisdom ability checks and saving throws. A *remove curse* spell ends this effect.

### Storage Room

The 20 foot by 10-foot wide room has one wall lined with stacks of crates and barrels, while the opposite wall holds an iron chain attached to it. Manacles with freshly dried blood hang empty from the chain. The containers are likewise empty except for small scraps of cloth and broken glass.

### Office

*Trap: Explosive Rune.* The door to this room is trapped with a *glyph of warding* (save DC 15) set to Explosive Runes when touched. The password to disable it is "Jath'turoth".

The office is a 10-foot square room holding a simple bookshelf and desk with a chair. If the *glyph of warding* was triggered, the room is in shambles from the blast, with papers and books scattered everywhere.

*Treasure: Spell Scrolls & Statue.* Among the papers in the bookshelf is a *spell scroll of burning hands* and a *spell scroll of hellish rebuke*. These scrolls can only be found if the *glyph of warding* on the door to the office did not trigger, otherwise, they were destroyed in the blast.

The adventurers can find a small locked box that contains a tiny golden bust of an elven woman (25 gp) screaming in terror on the bookshelf or amidst the wreckage of the room. The chest can be unlocked by someone proficient with thieves' tools who succeeds a DC 15 Dexterity check.

An encoded journal is either among the desk's wreckage or on top of the desk. If the adventurers do not search for it, Dimitrios will insist on looking through the office himself.

## **After the Raid**

The adventurers reconvene with Dimitrios after clearing out the hideout, and he suggests they rest up while he decodes the found journal. The next morning he delivers grim news: the cultists have kidnapped Janis and her daughter Marta. Erik managed to escape and find Dimitrios, who then hid him in an Order safe house. He has decoded the journal enough to determine The Flame Kissed cultists have a hidden temple in the nearby Shimmering Forest. They have repurposed an underground ruin from a town called Lockwood that was razed during the Great War a century ago. Dimitrios gravely informs them that they intend to summon a demon prince from the Abyss.

# **The Temple of Galmath**

The town of Lockwood was burned to the ground by the Holy Ignis Empire during the Great War over a century ago. Only a few stone walls remain along with the shell of a manor's basement the Flame Kissed have repurposed into their temple.

Dimitrios quickly finds the temple entrance, guided by the decoded journal and an old map of the area he has in his possession. A large tree is growing around a stone archway with broken stone steps leading down into the temple.

*Encounter: Round Two.* If the two cultist scouts from the warehouse and the cultist thug from the market escaped, they will attempt an ambush in the ruined town.

## **General Features**

These features are prominent throughout the temple unless otherwise noted:

*Floors, Walls, and Ceilings.* The ceilings are 12 feet high throughout the temple. The temple is constructed of old stone and mortar that is crumbling in places.

*Doors.* The temple doors are newly constructed oak planks bound in iron. Locked doors can be unlocked with a successful DC 15 Dexterity check by someone proficient with thieves' tools. Each door has an AC of 15 and 20 hit points and is immune to poison and psychic damage.

*Lights.* The temple is dimly lit throughout by a demonic red light that does not seem to have a source. Where noted, some braziers shed bright light for 20 feet and dim light for 20 feet further.

*Death & Decay.* The temple is splashed with fresh blood and bits of gore that the demons have not yet eaten. The smell of rotting meat mixed with sulfur pervades the entire temple.

*Desecrated Ground.* Where noted, certain temple areas are considered desecrated ground. Demons and Undead in these areas have advantage on all saving throws and attack rolls. A vial of Holy Water will purify a 10-foot-square, and a *hallow* spell will purify the desecrated ground within its area. A *detect evil and good* spell cast within range reveals the desecrated area's presence.

## Keyed Locations

The following description corresponds to the keyed locations on the provided map of the temple:

### 1 - Entrance

Read aloud the following:

*The crumbling stairway leads down to an equally crumbling room. Roots push their way through crumbling mortar, and broken tiles lay scattered across the floor. There is a foul smell wafting from a corridor to the west. A newly constructed wooden door sits on the eastern wall and is oddly out of place in the crumbling basement.*

*Trap: Hellfire Door.* The door to area 3 is trapped with a *glyph of warding* (save DC 15) set to cast *Hellish Rebuke* at 1st level when touched. The password to disable it is "Jath'turoth".

*Invisible Guard.* Kiernan Blackhand's quasit familiar is polymorphed into a centipede that is clinging to the ceiling. It will alert its master to the adventurer's presence. A successful DC 18 Wisdom (Perception) check will alert the adventurers that it is acting a bit strange as if it's watching them, at

which point it will turn invisible. It will follow and ambush the party from behind when they engage in combat.

## **2 - Collapsed Hallway**

Decades-old rock and rubble fill the hallway and block sections off completely. As the adventurers go further, the smell of decay and sulfur gets more robust, and the adventurers hear the wet sucking and crunching sounds of the demons.

*Encounter: Demon Lunch.* There are three manes eating and playing with a fresh corpse in the northern section of the collapsed hallway.

*Treasure: Cultist Remains.* The corpse is a Flame Kissed cultist who was killed and tucked into this dark corner. A blood-soaked pouch contains 25sp, 15 gp, and a crumpled and stained note with a single word written upon it: "Jath'turoth."

## **3 - Bloody Hallway**

After opening the door to this hallway, the smell of death and decay intensifies exponentially. Bits of gore splatter the floor and walls around bloody demonic symbols. The entire hallway is considered desecrated ground (see "General Features").

*Encounter: Imp Guards.* There are a pair of imps playing catch with a severed head at the intersection in the northern part of the hallway. They will cackle and criticize the party for being "too late" because "Galmath is coming!"

## **4 - Prison Chamber**

The door to this room is locked (see "General Features"), and the key is on a cultist in area 5.

When the adventurers enter the room, read the following aloud:

The stench of human refuse and rotting meat rolls through the doorway as the door swings inward. Fresh blood pools on the floor, mixing with older patches that cover the entire room. Someone has drawn demonic symbols using the blood as paint. A glassy-eyed woman covered in blood is chained to the far wall staring blankly into space, her manacled hands hanging limp.



Janis's manacles can be unlocked with the cultist's keys in area 5 or opened with a successful DC 12 Dexterity check by someone proficient with thieves' tools. The manacles are attached to an iron ring embedded in the wall, and it can be pulled loose with a successful DC 18 Strength check.

She is in shock and will not respond to anyone speaking to her, and screams at being touched. A successful DC 12 Charisma check will calm her enough to beg the adventurers to save her daughter. Janis overheard a cultist say to another that they are close to summoning their demon prince and that the chapel will be warded and protected by "Briz'gunno." She flees the temple at the first opportunity and hides in the forest outside.

## 5 - Lesser Chapel

A brazier burns with a red flame in the center of this room. Statues of robed figures with melted faces stand in each corner, staring silently into the fire. A pair of their living counterparts stand with arms raised next to the brazier, chanting in Abyssal. The cadence of their chant rises and ends as they smile in triumph. A roar fills the room as the brazier's flames grow higher and spread across the ceiling, and a demonic hound steps out of the pillar of flame.

This room is desecrated ground (see "General Features").

*Encounter: Guard Dogs.* The two Flame Kissed cultists have just summoned a hell hound. They fight to the death.

*Treasure: Pouch & Keys.* A cultist has a pouch containing 30gp, a pair of severed fingers, a white pearl (100gp), and a set of keys that unlocks the door to area 4 as well as Janis' manacles.

*Wall of Force* The door to the Sacrificial Chamber (area 7) is protected by a *wall of force* that can be disabled by stating the password "Briz'gunno".

## 6 - Sleeping Quarters

Spread across the room are a handful of filthy bedrolls and a pair of wooden chests. The smell of human refuse is powerful here.

*Trap: Poison Needle.* One of the chests is locked and trapped with a poison needle trap. Whoever attempts to open the chest takes 1 piercing damage and 11 (2d10) poison damage and must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be Poisoned for 1 hour.

A successful DC 20 Intelligence (Investigation) check allows a character to deduce the trap's presence from alterations made to the lock to accommodate the needle. A successful DC 15

Dexterity check using thieves' tools disarms the trap, removing the needle from the lock, and unlocking the chest. Unsuccessfully attempting to pick the lock triggers the trap.

*Treasure: Potion Stash.* Inside the trapped chest is a stash of two *potions of healing* and a *potion of poison*.

## 7 - Sacrificial Chamber

Once the adventurers enter the chamber, read the following aloud:

*A carved altar sits in a fresh blood pool that forms a demonic summoning circle—the blood pulsing with a light that bathes the entire chamber in red. Marta's unconscious body, still in her nightgown, floats above the altar as a deformed warlock stands behind her. A vortex of black and red light ebbs and flows above the small girl's body as if to swallow it whole.*

Standing before the altar and joining in the chant are half a dozen of the Flame Kissed cultists. They face the growing vortex with arms raised and joyful faces. At the sound of the opening door, they cease their chanting.

Kiernan Blackhand is the warlock behind the altar; he is wearing an ornate black and red robe and carrying a staff of charred wood. His skin is heavily scarred all over his body, and his face is akin to a melted candle; he's missing a cheek— it's now a window that reveals rows of blackened teeth. His namesake hands are as black as coal, caked in soot.

*Encounter: The Flame Kissed & Blackhand.* The six acolytes protect Kiernan Blackhand (priest with a quarterstaff instead of a mace and his abilities and spells deal necrotic damage instead of radiant) as he finishes the summoning ritual. The vortex above the altar swallows and negates any spells or projectiles fired at Blackhand. Anyone stepping within 5 feet of the altar will need to succeed a DC 12 Dexterity check with a failure resulting in taking 8 (2d6) fire damage from the vortex.

Once half of the acolytes are defeated, Blackhand will cast *spiritual weapon* and *spirit guardians*, taking that acolyte's place in the initiative count. He steps out from the vortex's protection and declares they are too late to stop the ritual now. He proceeds to attack the party "to sacrifice them" to his patron.

*The Fall of the Flame Kissed* As Blackhand falls defeated, he will die laughing even as he chokes on his own blood — "My lord comes!" will be his dying words. The vortex above the altar grows to cover the entire ceiling, giving a view of the swirling chaos that counts for a sky in the Abyss. Galmath, a massive horned Balor, peers down through the portal as if looking down into a muddy puddle. Its eyes are fire, and its grin splits into a blazing fanged furnace. Galmath's laughter crashes through the adventurers' minds, who must succeed a DC 20 Intelligence saving throw with a failure resulting

in being stunned. Its massive clawed hand will reach through the portal to take hold of Marta's body and pull it towards it. Its last thought that rumbles through the adventurers' minds is "I accept your offering, mortals." before the vortex snaps shut and the portal closes, leaving only silence.

## Aftermath

If the adventures were able to defeat the Cult of the Flame Kissed and rescue Janis, they have helped avert a demonic invasion. Dimitrios will thank them in the name of the Order of the Crimson Circle for their help, paying them their promised reward. Janis' mind is broken from her experience with the cult and Dimitrios swears that the Order will look out for her and her son. He will also offer the adventurers a chance to join the Order and help him in seeking more of the demons that look to invade their realm.

The Cult of the Flame Kissed is shattered and will no longer threaten Ashenvale. However, it will not be the last the world hears of Marta and Galmath; The demon is shrewd and devious even for his kind. It takes the young girl under its tutelage and imbues her with his demonic essence, turning her into something different, something powerful. The world will eventually meet and fear the Daughter of the Demon Prince.

If the adventurers fail to defeat them, the cult brings forth Galmath from the Abyss, and the world is forever changed. Darkness covers the Freelands as hordes of devils and demons flood through the gateways and brings about a thousand years of terror. The Order of the Crimson Circle is a beacon of light during those first few years, but Galmath's hordes eventually destroy them along with all of humanity's hope. Ω

## Credits

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**A special thanks to all my patrons, you rock!**