

ZOTHRA, the Gatekeeper

« She who watched over the dead now watches over the living.
No one passes by, except to offer what he cherishes most. »

- Engraving found at the foot of the entrance portal to
the Necropolis of Thoth

There was a time when Zothra was but an eager apprentice, a sorceress whose insatiable thirst for the Major Arcana led her down forbidden paths. She sought to understand the mysteries of the Outer Planes, to decipher forgotten runes, and to wrench the secrets of the universe from the gods themselves.

But her pride became her downfall.

Zothra was born in **Aelthor**, a legendary city where the Major Arcana are still taught to the most promising mages. Aelthor is a crossroads of knowledge and power, a place where every stone seems infused with ancient magic, where every breath of air carries echoes of millennia of wisdom. From a young age, Zothra displayed an extraordinary intellect. She absorbed the teachings of the greatest sorcerers, but she was never content with the limits imposed by her masters. Rather than submit to their rules, she sought out forbidden knowledge, the kind even the oldest magi deemed too dangerous to pursue.

She scoured the world for lost grimoires and forgotten rites, appropriating the power of forbidden arcana, questioning troubled minds, and explored ruins no one dared approach. She set no limits, using anything that could help her bypass obstacles in her pursuit of knowledge. Step by step, she unraveled deeper secrets. One day, she ventured into the Necropolis of Thoth and soon realized that this place was no mere burial ground, but a rift between world.

There, the barriers between **the Continent of Korinth** and the outer planes were thinner than anywhere else. Driven by a burning desire to open these paths, she attempted a forbidden ritual and challenged **the Dark Lords** themselves to reveal the keys of the universe.





If not for her naïveté, her audacity certainly drew the attention of these primordial entities. They saw in her an opportunity - a mere mortal daring to defy the laws of existence, yet one who might serve them. Rather than destroy her, which would have granted her eternal rest, they chose to make her their instrument. For her boundless vanity, the Dark Lords denied her death and imposed eternal punishment. Zothra's flesh was transformed, altered - her being reshaped into a monstrous winged creature. Her once hauntingly beautiful face became that of an aged woman crowned with four black horns, her shadowy wings spread over the Necropolis of Thoth, and her tail, lined with venomous barbs, turned into a deadly whip. She had become a manticore.

There is a forgotten legend that even the oldest scribes of Aelthor hesitate to record: before she was cursed, Zothra is said to have spoken a **Third Wish**. Two others had preceded it - one for knowledge, the second for power. The third remains a mystery. Some believe it was a plea to see beyond the veil of the world; others, that she offered her soul not for wisdom, but for the right to defy fate itself. That Third Wish, never revealed, may well have sealed the true nature of her damnation.

THE NECROPOLIS OF THOTH

« Here, the living forget, and the dead wait. »

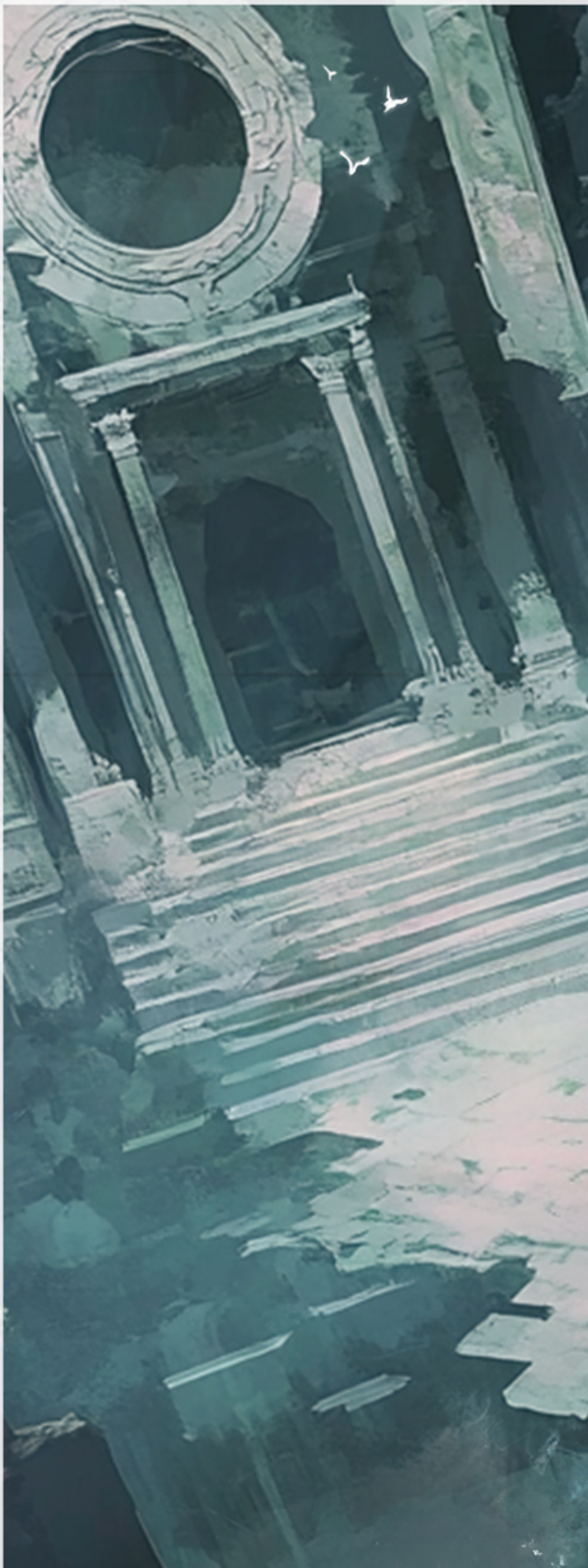
This vast cemetery of broken stones and endless crypts became her domain of suffering and power. She is now its eternal mistress, condemned to haunt its shadowed labyrinths, where wandering souls drift and the secrets of forgotten worlds rest beneath ancient gravestones. The rift at the heart of this place is a swirling abyss - a tear in the fabric of reality - and Zothra is its guardian. If she is the soul of this sanctuary, it is because she is also its prisoner.

The Necropolis and Zothra are one. She finds within it a strange form of power and redemption, but also a wellspring of solitude and sorrow. The memory of her quest and her fall is etched into every stone, in every shifting shadow among the tombs.

She watches over the Gate to the Outer Planes with inscrutable malice. Travelers are drawn by the promise of access to new worlds, unexplored realms. But the door to these worlds is a deadly trap, and her gaze - deep as the void - weighs upon any who dare step onto her domain. She no longer serves any of the Masters of the Outer Planes directly.

Their authority no longer frightens her, for she is no longer a mere servant of the universe's mysteries. She is the guardian of a place whose key she has seized and shares only with those she deems worthy - or mad enough to play her game.

Her words are soft and beguiling, her laughter echoes like a whisper among the graves, and none can tell if she mocks the foolish travelers... or herself.



At times, when boredom strikes or the thirst for vengeance overwhelms her, Zothra chooses to aid certain adventurers who cross her path - by chance or by fate. But her help is never free. The travelers she selects might sometimes be capable of weakening the Dark Lords. In her tormented mind, any opportunity for revenge against her oppressors is a gift. If these adventurers survive her trials, they may pass through the Gate to the Outer Planes - but at what cost? For Zothra's gifts are as dangerous as the worlds she guards.

The Necropolis of Thoth is a maze, a twisted sprawl of stone and shadow, a realm where time seems to have stopped, a place of faded beauty in decline. Its winding paths weave between yawning crypts, its stones worn smooth by centuries of silence, still bearing the inscriptions of a forgotten civilization upon which the Necropolis was built long ago.

Shattered obelisks stretch toward a sky that no longer exists, and mutilated statues guard sealed doors, behind which no one knows what lies.

At the heart of this sanctuary of the dead lies its greatest mystery - a rift tearing through the fabric of reality itself. This pulsating chasm of energy spins endlessly, projecting fleeting visions of other worlds, other planes. This vortex of light and wavering shadows, nestled at the sanctuary's core, offers those who find their way a chance to cross the borders of existence. Those who enter it without Zothra's consent are inevitably destroyed - scattered between dimensions, lost in the infinite.

But the Necropolis is not empty...

The darkness harbors unspeakable things - forgotten aberrations. Lost monsters from other planes lurk in the necropolis' hidden corners. Crouching between opened tombs and broken arches, these creatures cower when the Gatekeeper appears. As mistress of the place, the Manticore sometimes allows them to feast on careless intruders - for her own amusement.

THE OSSUARY OF WHISPERS

Among the countless places within the Necropolis, there is one where Zothra often lingers - **the Ossuary of Whispers**. A chasm of bones piled high through centuries, where the shattered skulls of those who failed her trials lie scattered in grotesque heaps. The air is thick with indistinct echoes, words whispered by spirits that have never found peace. Some say this place has a consciousness of its own, that every intruder who perishes in the Gatekeeper's games leaves a fragment of their soul behind.

Here, Zothra sometimes reclines, coiling her spined tail around the broken marble pillars, toying absently with the skulls of those who failed to meet her expectations. Visitors to this place feel a supernatural chill - a weight like a burden on their soul - as if the ossuary itself were pressing down upon their shoulders. But it is not a place where one lingers, unless they wish to join the whispers of the forgotten.





THE TRIALS OF ZOTHRA

Every traveler, whether a humble adventurer or a mighty mage, must offer tribute to continue their journey through the Necropolis: *the Trial of Offering.*

For each soul entering the Necropolis, the Gatekeeper demands a gift - an item of inestimable value to the traveler. Gold and gems mean nothing to her; what she desires above all is a piece of their soul: a relic steeped in emotion, a precious memory, an unbroken vow.

If the offering is found unworthy or false, the bones of the fool will join those already scattered across the broken stones of the Necropolis and beneath the ossuary. But if the offering pleases the Gatekeeper, Zothra then confronts the traveler with her game of riddles, where wit and cleverness become the keys to salvation.

Then comes *the Trial of Riddles.*

Once the offering is accepted, the Manticore reveals her terrifying form and finally appears before her visitors. She proposes a game, posing questions in the form of riddles to be solved to earn passage beyond the Gate. Her riddles are as old as the threads of fate and the whispers of the void. Those who fail are doomed to wander the eternal ruins, while those who succeed are shown the path to the Gate of the Outer Planes.

Among her favorite riddles, she particularly enjoys asking these of the unwary:

The Key of Shadows. I am what the wise seek, what the mad fear. I am invisible, yet I can weigh more than the world. Without me, stars fade. With me, they burn brightly. What am I?
(Answer: Knowledge)

The Eye of the Ancients. The greater I am, the less you see. The smaller I become, the more I reveal the infinite. Without me, day cannot exist, and with me, night never leaves. What am I?
(Answer: Darkness)

The Beginning and the End. I am the end of a king and the start of a tyrant. I am invisible, yet I can tear empires apart. What am I?
(Answers: Doubt or Betrayal)

THE TALE OF ASGAR THE DAUNTLESS

Asgar was both warrior and scholar - a man who believed that strength and intellect combined could overcome any trial.

Driven by the desire to cross the Gate to the Outer Planes and claim forgotten power, he entered the Necropolis of Thoth. As tribute, he offered the amulet of his deceased sister - a charm that had always brought him luck. Zothra accepted it, amused by the sincerity of his sacrifice.

But when the riddle trial came, Asgar underestimated the Gatekeeper's cunning.



The Broken Flight. I live in the light, I am everywhere, yet if you hold me in your arms at nightfall, I die at once. What am I?
(Answer: A shadow)

Asgar hesitated, suspecting a trick. He answered « a candle ».
Zothra smiled, gleeful. She gave him a second chance.

The Cry of Silence. I speak without a mouth, hear without ears. None can see me, yet all can feel me. What am I?
(Answer: The wind)

Once again, Asgar doubted. He whispered hesitantly, « the soul ».
The Gatekeeper, disappointed, condemned him with a sinister laugh.
He had failed!

Asgar immediately felt a deadly cold seep into him, poisoned by a stinger from the manticore's tail. His body aged in an instant, crumbling into dust. He tried to pray, to scream, but no sound came from his lips - his voice was gone. Zothra murmured something, and an amulet appeared on one of the countless niches lining the Necropolis' wall, beside a small figurine - a miniature frozen in terror, the final witness of his failure.

Thus ended Asgar the Dauntless - not in glory, but in oblivion...

THE MANTICORE'S GAME

A rumor circulates among necromancers: some wonder whether Zothra is truly who she claims to be. What if the Manticore is just a mask? A mask hiding something far older - an unnamed entity that uses the memory of Zothra as a disguise to haunt the worlds?

It is not mere obedience to some ancient ritual that drives Zothra. In her endless darkness, she pursues her own goals - chief among them, the weakening of the Dark Lords. These void-born entities, omnipotent and merciless, who rule the Outer Planes, are tyrants in her eyes - ones who must be punished. Their power threatens the balance of all worlds, and Zothra, in her own way, may prove an ally to those who dare stand against them.

She selects those who can sow chaos across the Outer Planes. She helps them... sometimes... offering aid only when it amuses her. She manipulates those foolish enough to believe she supports their crusade against the Dark Lords. These fragile alliances, laced with mischief, are just another form of her entertainment. She chooses those with bravery, cunning, and above all, the wisdom to strike back at the Lords of Darkness. Her aid is rare and never comes without a price. Zothra plays no game for the glory of mortals - only her own interests matter. She relishes seeing the Dark Lords feel vulnerable, playing with their schemes, destabilizing and weakening them. She might choose an adventurer in whom she sees the instrument of an ancient revenge.

Such is Zothra, implacable mistress of the Necropolis of Thoth, eternally damned, and sole gatekeeper of the paths leading to gods and hells alike. She is both the key and the lock, the door and the abyss.

Will you dare to play her game?