

MULCIBER'S FLUTE

AN ADVENTURE LOCATION BY MICHAEL PRESCOTT

THE SITUATION

Below some wretched city or other is a hellish, parasitic inferno of suffering. Built brick by brick from the body of a titan demigod of an earlier age, it draws down vulnerable souls to resurrect them into forms made for suffering. The corrupt living are drawn, too, and a **cult** has found its way down to the **mouth of hell**.

THE CRACKS

Over the centuries, the **mouth** has bored crazed, twisting cracks up to the surface, burning into softer seams with breaths of acidic steam. Piercing the sewers of the undercity and the minds of the hateful, the cracks reach up like inverted roots, pulling, tickling, and whispering invitations.

The **cult** has descended through these, and the simplest path is marked by their pitons, ropes, and the stink of their fear.

THE CULT—BLESSED CHILDREN

Cibur Mulce led his 20 followers down to the mouth. Smug to have found such impressive 'proof' of his made-up twaddle, he dared to touch the skull. His followers saw him flayed of his skin and dropped into hell, a mewling wretch.

Since that time, the traumatized cultists have debated returning to safer work. Brave Pulsha, however, stood nearest and tasted the **mana** of his death. She wants more, but (for now) thinks the skull is the only source.

THE MOUTH OF HELL

The skull of the smashed god rests in a pool of brine. It stares up at the gods

defiantly, seething at their injustice. A divine relic, none in its presence can look away. With great, astral breaths it inhales hapless souls from the lands above and blows them down to the burning slopes. Anyone touching the skull is torn from their body and **instantiated**.

INstantiation

Dead souls trapped here are recycled into new, vulnerable bodies by the **instantiator**, to suffer eternally. Each body is different (see the table for ideas). The newly risen appear at a random spot on the burning slopes.

As the supply of body-stuff is finite, repeat fatalities must wait as ghosts in **Pandæmonium**. The first instantiation takes nine

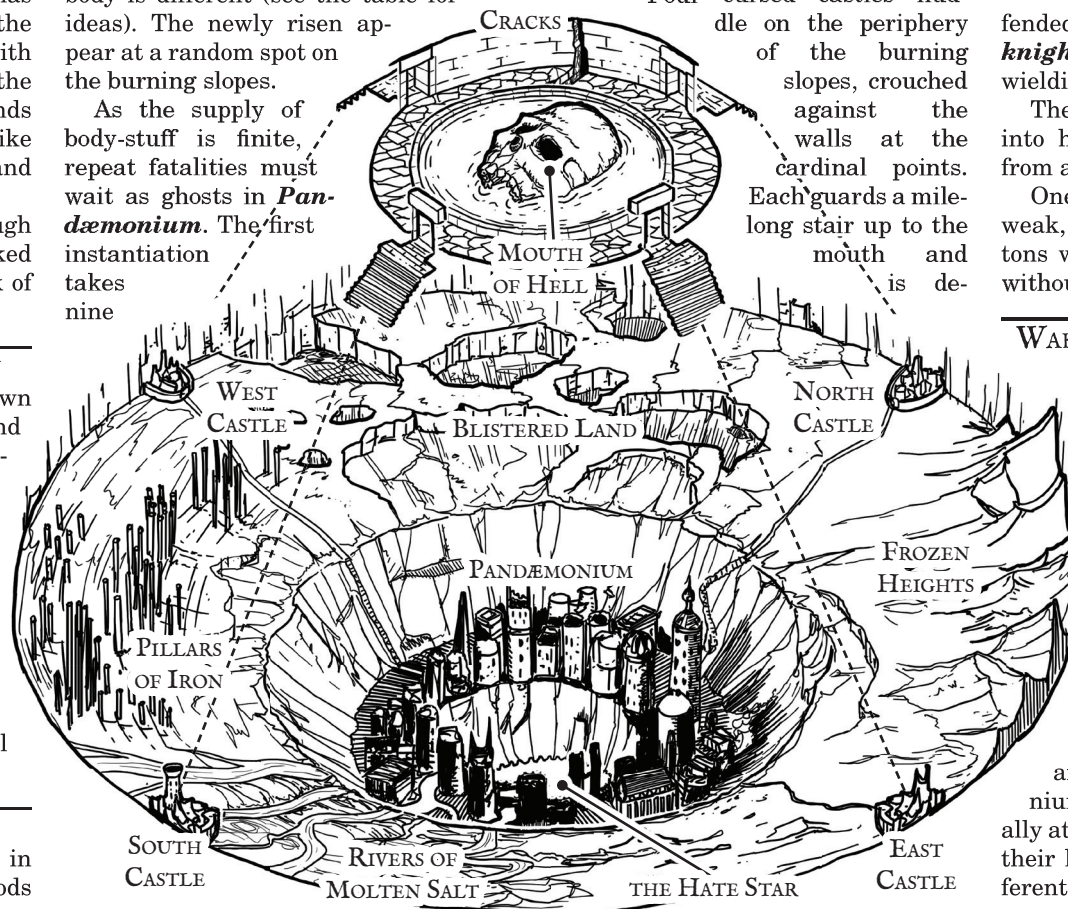
minutes; the next nine hours, then days, weeks, months, and years.

THE MANA OF PAIN

All bodies made here share a metabolic dependency on cruelty: unless they cause suffering, they will starve. The invisible mana produced by cruel acts alleviates this hunger. It also strengthens muscles, speeds healing, sensitizes nerves, and is a potent catalyst for sorcery. Instantiated wretches must have it, but anyone can become addicted to its subtle flavors.

CASTLES CARDINAL

Four cursed castles huddle on the periphery of the burning slopes, crouched against the walls at the cardinal points. Each guards a mile-long stair up to the mouth and is de-



d8 Burning Slopes Encounters

1	d8 wretched instantiated
2	Bone-armored horror leading d20 brick-cutting wretches
3	Elephant demon; it speaks by sprouting homunculi which each say one sentence, then boil away
4	Wakewasps for d8 hours
5	Molten pewter titan worm
6	Hell Knight , d20-5 instantiated
7	Tar Semminus , Hell Knight
8	Exiled pit lord building an army to reclaim its seat

fended against escapees by 3 **hell knights** and 2d12 armored wretches wielding rustblades and spiked chains.

The knights allow entry (not exit!) into hell, but accepting a cruel blow from a notched sword is the price.

One castle (it's not known which) is weak, guarded only by armored skeletons whose brittle limbs are swift but without force.

WAKEWASPS

Blown like ashes on the breeze, these slender wasps are drawn by the dozen to merciful stupor of any kind. Their sting is painless, but the venom burns away sleep (not fatigue), unconsciousness, intoxication, denial, and dissociative fugues (not fear)—preventing anything that interferes with fully savoring pain.

HELL KNIGHTS

The armored executioners, poets, and warlords outside of Pandæmonium. Hell knights do not traditionally attack one another, the only perk of their high station. Though each is different, all wear ornate, anachronistic

TRILEMMA ADVENTURES

d10	Instantiated Form
1	Short-lived aberration—either no lungs, no holes for breathing, or a tiny, insufficient heart.
2	As in life, but with amphibean skin, needing constant moisture
3	As in life, but no digestive tract
4	Horse-sized slug with a sulphur allergy
5	Beautiful youth with all the limbs on backwards
6	Covered in nutritious, sensitive orange-sized growths
7	As in life, but with rhino hide and tusks
8	Skinless dog
8	Smoldering, skeletal undead
10	As in life, but boneless mollusc

armor from a dozen forgotten aeons.

They carry a sulphur stone, a sphere of yellow, fuming nastiness caked around a flake of the *hate star*. The noxious gases make every breath painful; hell knights can breathe nothing else.

Their notched swords leave flesh undamaged, but shatter bone into needle splinters.

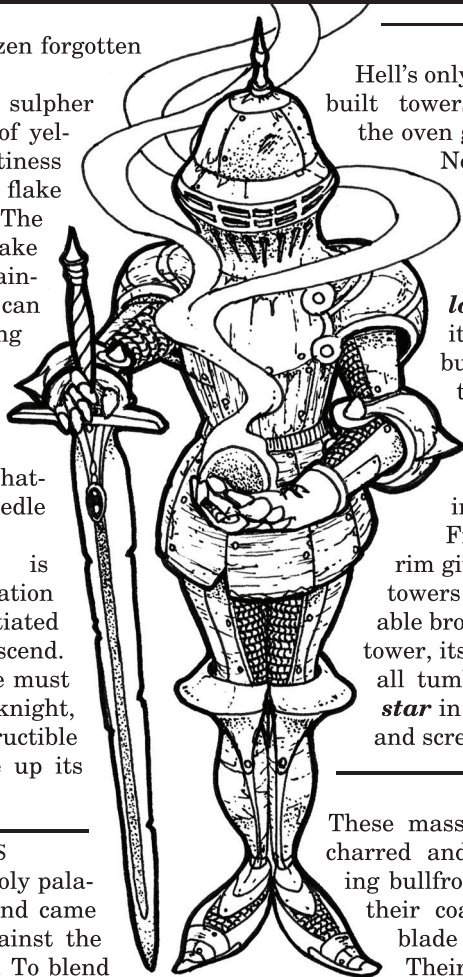
'Hell knight' is the highest station to which instantiated wretches can ascend. To win it, all one must do is kill a hell knight, don its indestructible armor, and take up its notched sword.

TAR SEMMINUS

Semminus is a holy paladin of Serimet and came here to fight against the creatures of hell. To blend in, he wears hell knight's armor.

Through his love of righteous smiting, he has become addicted to the mana of pain and now cannot leave for want of it. He secretly fears he is no better than the demons.

He talks to himself of his dead wife (whom he expects to see when this is all over) and spouts an unending stream of oaths and prayers to Serimet. He claims to be the only righteous man in hell, but he is a hell knight in every way that matters. Wakewasp stings make him sullen and angry.



PANDÆMONIUM
Hell's only city is a forest of half-built towers, silhouetted against the oven glare of the *hate star*.

Nothing is repaired, and new towers perch on piles of rubble. Near the edge are the towers of the 13 *pit lords*. Each commands its army of wretches to build its tower higher than the others—only the tallest lets its lord sniff the mana wafting up from the inferno below.

From time to time, the rim gives way and one of the towers falls in. Like a miserable brown glacier calving, the tower, its wretches, and its lord all tumble down to the *hate star* in a shower of brickwork and screams.

THE PIT LORDS

These massive, squat beings are charred and distended like leering bullfrogs. Flames spurt from their coal-hot skin, which no blade can pierce.

Their gaze causes uncontrollable babbling—secrets, intentions, held incantations, and the true names of loved ones all tumble out.

Once per day, they may pronounce the irrevocable death of anyone present—the target dies within 13 hours.

If they were once human, they've forgotten, and fancy themselves alone in their clear-eyed grasp of hideous reality.

The blessing of a pit lord sets the skin aflame with a fire that scalds and blisters eternally but doesn't consume.

Their sulphurous bowels swarm with infernal, toothed slugs, which

emerge if the lord is mortally wounded. Should one somehow die, after 13 days *Mulciber* calls up the most loathsome soul from the *hate star* with his flute to take its place.

THE INSTANTIATOR

At the edge of Pandæmonium, in a tower of a hundred doors, is an undulating mantis of silver. It perches on a blade-whirl column, moving in such complex and maddening forms that musicians or watchmakers that see it will tear at their hands and eyes in despair.

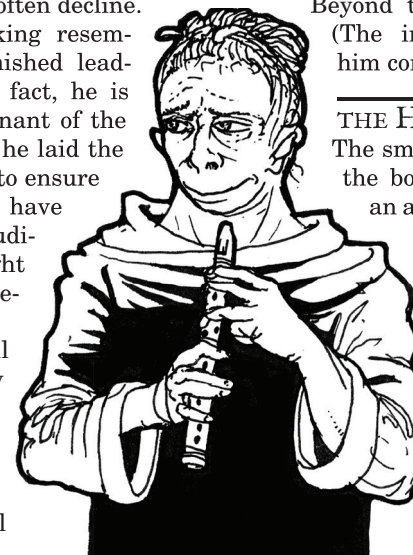
A master artificer with sorcerous training could disassemble it into a soul jar, seven wands of shapeshifting, and a lead parrot. Anyone of lesser skill who touches it explodes loudly into d20 confused homunculi.

MULCIBER

The music of the flutist is the only genuinely pleasant thing in hell. Painfully shy, frog-voiced, and awkward in body and manner, he moves about Pandæmonium offering solace to the tortured souls through his music. Wherever he goes, d12 followers hope for more, but he tires and must often decline.

He has a striking resemblance to the vanished leader of the cult. In fact, he is the surviving remnant of the smashed god, and he laid the first bricks of hell to ensure he would always have a worshipful audience and to blight the gods' newer creations.

Whenever hell has sucked dry the land above, Mulciber enters the tower of a hundred doors, and moves hell



to somewhere new. If attacked, blasts from his flute will burst ears and eyes.

Beyond that, he does not resist. (The instantiator will remake him correctly in d6 hours.)

THE HATE STAR

The smoldering star of hatred at the bottom of hell throbs with an afterburner heat shimmer.

Any who fall to its surface are crushed to two-dimensional, radiant flatness by its titanic gravity. There they lie, eternally slithering over and under one another, trapped by the millions in incandescent strata of suffering and rage.