Theater of Whispers

"Theater of Whispers" is an adventure scenario for 5th level 5e characters set in the trap rooms beneath the main theater of the City of Arches known as the Theater of Whispers. This scenario is intended to work with any 5e-based system including *D&D 2014*, *D&D 2024*, *Level Up Advanced 5e*, *Tales of the Valiant*, or others. It can also be modified to support other fantasy RPGs.

This scenario is part of a series following the Key of Worlds campaign arc in the *City of Arches* sourcebook. This series begins with the *Scroll of Akrave*.

This scenario is the first of three scenarios leading to the Brazier of the Betrothed – one of three braziers locking the extradimensional vault of the Key of Worlds.

You can instead modify this scenario to run as a stand-alone adventure in any campaign or setting.

This Isn't a Typical Adventure

This scenario isn't laid out like a traditional adventure. Instead, it presents a scaffold around which to build your own adventure for your own group, campaign, and story. This scenario offers adventure hooks, histories, secrets and clues, notable NPCs, potential encounters, locations, and potential treasure.

Use these components to build your own adventure and customize them to best suit your campaign, the situation in the adventure, the interests of your players, and the pacing of your game.

Each section in this scenario suggests how to use these components.

Paths to the Blackfire Braziers

This scenario is the first of three scenarios leading to the Brazier of the Betrothed. Two other three-scenario paths lead to the other two Blackfire Braziers – the Brazier of the Nameless King and the Brazier of Grayon.

At this point in the campaign, the characters possess one of the two Blackfire artifacts – the *Sword of Irixthius* or the *Staff of Servlyn* – each of which can ignite the Blackfire Braziers. The characters also learned the locations of the three braziers in the *Lake of Monoliths* scenario.

This scenario assumes the characters seek the Brazier of the Betrothed. If you choose, another rival group of explorers such as the Children of Ibraxus or the Knights of the Nameless King might seek one of the other two braziers. Thus, the characters likely complete *two* of these Blackfire Brazier paths while skipping the third after their rivals lit one of the other braziers.

If this is the first brazier the characters seek, they're likely 5th level. If they've already found and ignited another brazier, they may be 8th level. In the latter case, you may want to increase the number or type of monsters to better match the characters' level. Alternatively, you can leave it as it is and give the characters an easier series of encounters. Decide what's right for you, your players, and the pacing of the game.

Scenario Summary

With either the *Sword of Irixthius* or the *Staff of Servlyn* in hand, and having discovered the locations to the Blackfire Braziers at the Lake of Monoliths, the characters learn that one such brazier lies in a location known as the Crypt of the Betrothed beneath the Theater of Whispers.

Through clues given by NPCs or their own investigations, the characters learn that they must pass beneath the haunted trap rooms of the Theater of Whispers seeking a great seal leading below.

During their exploration, the characters learn of the tale of the two previous stars of the theater and their bloody reenactment of a twisted and tragic play. They also learn of the influence of two dark gods – King Paimon and Queen Leigh who may have subverted the minds of these two actors, leading to their terrible end. The characters decide how to navigate this situation as they approach the seal leading below to the next scenario –Vault of Infernal Machines.

Scenario History

For over a thousand years the Theater of Whispers entertained the people of the City of Arches. In the dreadful days of the Nameless King, brutal gladiator bouts and gruesome executions bathed the arena in blood. The theater continued to serve as the venue of entertainment centuries after the Nameless King's curse and exile, though with far less bloody shows.

Six hundred years ago, explorers of the trap rooms found a shaft leading to chambers below containing unused war machines of the Nameless King. Fearing the infernal power of these machines, the explorers sealed the shaft to this vault under a massive iron plate in a central chamber of the trap rooms.

Three hundred years ago, a play known as the Tragedy of Sillipha and Raodin took the theater by storm. Two of the theater's most talented actors, Bellinda Copperstone and Lucan Angilla, took on the leading roles. On the final night of their performance Lucan murdered Bellinda in the play's final tragic

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scene and both their souls were trapped in the instrument of the murder, known as Paimon's Dagger. Now their spirits haunt the trap rooms, animating dead stagehands and twisted props to do their bidding and harrowing actors who dare to use the trap rooms as their own dressing rooms.

Secrets of the Theater

Deliver the following secrets and clues as the characters investigate the Theater of Whispers and explore its halls. Characters might discover these clues from discussions with NPCs in the theater, conversations from the restless dead in the trap rooms, hidden paintings behind chipped plaster on the walls, and old playbills and posters from time past. It's not critical the characters discover every secret – think of secrets like treasure uncovered as the characters explore the tomb

- The Theater of Whispers was once an arena of bloodshed and executions during the time of the Nameless King.
- Today the theater hosts non-lethal contests, plays, circus acts, and other performances under the talented eye of Kaylex Thren, the theater's director.
- Staff and performers use rooms below the arena in the theater's trap rooms, but many hear sinister whispers and singing behind the walls.
- Some performers, new and old, worship two sinister gods of tricks and performances known as Queen Leigh and King Paimon. Each are depicted by smiling masks surrounded by thorned flowers.
- Explorers who delved into the theater after the fall of the Nameless King found a shaft leading to a vast chamber containing the king's infernal war machines. They sealed the shaft with a magical seal.
- Centuries ago, two of the theater's best performers died when one of them stabbed the other with a cursed dagger during the last performance of a popular play known as the Tragedy of Sillipha and Raodin.
- The souls of the two performers, Bellinda Copperstone and Lucan Angilla, are trapped within the Paimon's cursed dagger hidden somewhere in the vaults.
- Some say Lucan found the dagger hidden in the stone of the trap rooms beneath the theater, hidden there for centuries before he murdered Bellinda.

Key NPCs

The following is a list of key NPCs for this adventure.

- **Kaylex Thren.** The dragonborn minstrel and directory of the Theater of Whispers. Kaylex is a showman and loves nothing more than putting on performances for the people of the City of Arches.
- **Bellinda Copperstone.** The former lead actor in the Tragedy of Sillipha and Raodin, murdered by her colleague, Lucan. She now haunts the theater as a **banshee**.
- **Lucan Angilla.** Former lead actor in the Tragedy of Sillipha and Raodin. He found *Paimon's dagger* in the stonework of the theater, left there for centuries. For weeks it whispered to him until, on the final night of their performance, Lucan used it to kill Bellinda. On doing so, both lost their souls to the blade.
- **Sophia Garvette**. The current lead actor and singer at the Theater of Whispers. She's planning to leave the company due to the strange whispering and singing she hears in the theater's trap rooms.

The Tragedy of Sillipha and Raodin

The following is a summary of the play, *The Tragedy of Sillipha and Raodin*.

In the days of the warlords, before the days of the Nameless King, an alliance formed between two powerful warring nations. The son of one nation married the daughter of the other, joining the two nations together. For thirty years they stayed wed, until they too became the rulers of their people.

Over the years a deep love grew between them. But such love did not diminish Sillipha's sinister purpose.

Since birth, Sillipha had been raised to thwart her family's opposing nation. Upon her ascension, she began to secretly dismantle their kingdom. She seeded plots and rumors throughout the court, turned nobles against nobles, and caused a famine that wiped out thousands. It tore the kingdom apart. But her own nation remained strong in secret. Fueled with stores of food and trained for war in locations far removed before she unleashed them.

When her warbands tore through the remaining kingdom, she confronted her husband, telling him of her love for him and her secret purpose to destroy the nation of his birth. Enraged, Raodin drew his father's dagger and plunged it into her chest. The dagger, cursed with his hatred and her deception, tore his soul from his body and bound the two of them forever in the blade.

Scenario Start

Use one of the following hooks to draw characters into this scenario:

- After learning of the location of the Blackfire Brazier from the psychic projections of the Lake of Monoliths, the characters visit the Theater of Whispers to find the seal covering the entrance to the chambers below.
- Having studied ancient texts of the Knights of the Black Flame, the Kartan sage Danvon of Duskwater hires the characters to find the seal blocking passage to the Vault of Infernal Machines and the Crypts of the Betrothed.
- A splinter of the spirit of Bellinda Copperstone visits one of the characters, begging them to end her imprisonment in the trap rooms of the Theater of Whispers.

Encounters in the Tomb

While the characters explore the haunted trap rooms of the Theater of Whispers, they may run into one or more of the following encounters. Select from or roll randomly on the table below to add inhabitants to locations found throughout the tower.

1. A **banshee** singer offers to share their favorite song.
2. **Skeleton** ushers push the characters out of the trap rooms hissing "performers only".
3. **Bandits** and **thugs** hired by the Knights of the Nameless King seek the seal.
4. **Cultists** and **cult fanatics** of the Children of Ibraxus seek passage to the Brazier of the Betrothed.
5. Two **mimics** hide as stage props – one a giant sinister god's head, another a grand piano.
6. Suits of **animated armor** reenact a violent scene with the characters as their target.
7. A hulk of rotted stage props animates and attacks (use an **ogre** stat block with a type of construct).
8. **Wererat** thieves seek an easy score.

DCs, Damage, and Hazards

Ironically, the trap rooms contain no traps. They may, however, contain haunted hazards. Choose from or roll on the list of hazards to drop them in when they make sense and improve the pacing of the game.

DCs for detecting or disarming these hazards are all DC 15. Damaging hazards inflict 14 (4d6) for single-target traps and 11 (2d10) for multi-target hazards.

1. A tattered tarp tries to suffocate someone.
2. Ethereal screams flow through living creatures, causing psychic or necrotic damage.
3. A hidden trap door collapses into a pit full of splintered wood, broken glass, and rusty nails.
4. A huge ghostly hand tries to squeeze the life out of the living.
5. A possessing spirit takes over one of the characters, sending them against the others.
6. Green slime falls from the ceiling.
7. A book of vile rituals and fell magic whispers secrets. Any damage inflicted to the book instead harms whoever handled it last.
8. The spirit of King Paimon casts *hideous laughter* on multiple creatures, inflicting psychic damage on those it affects.

The characters may come across other once-living beings who succumbed to these hazards. These poor explorers may return as **zombies**.

Locations

The trap rooms of the Theater of Whispers lie below the main arena. They're as old as the theater – dating back thousands of years. Layers of plaster hide the marks of previous performers, gladiators, and prisoners painted on the wall in ancient blood.

The chambers are unlit with 10-foot-high ceilings in passageways and 15-foot-high ceilings in larger chambers.

1. Entryway into the trap rooms. New playbills cover the walls from various shows put on recently at the Theater of Whispers.
2. The only working dressing room in the trap rooms – mostly peaceful. A cracked mirror sometimes shows gruesome visages of those reflected.
3. The green room. Green slime drips from the ceiling, saturating destroyed furniture.
4. The rehearsal stage. Performers practiced their craft on top of a raised stage in the south-east corner of the room for an audience of fellow actors, singers, and stagehands.
5. Racks of rotted costumes. A hole in the south-east corner leads to narrow tunnels exiting into the Lower Reaches. Thieves sometimes enter the halls through this passage.
6. Stage props of ancient war machines.
7. Haunted dressing room with tattered tapestries, dressing tables, and mirrors.
8. Prop room filled with haunted weapons.
9. Pillars carved into the images of King Paimon and Queen Leigh smiling mischievously at one another. Dead flowers lie at their feet.
10. Slashed portrait on the wall of Sillipha and Raodin depicted by Bellinda and Lucan.

11. Chamber scrawled with messages by the undead remnants of Lucan Angilla begging for forgiveness and release.
12. Chamber holding *Paimon's Dagger* on a pedestal surrounded by four pillars carved with masks comic and tragic.
13. Treasure vault of the theater containing centuries-old coins and other treasures.
14. Chamber of Lucan Angilla possessed by King Paimon, now a **revenant** or **wraith**. Bodies of his victims lie on the floor.
15. Grim-looking armor stands in alcoves.
16. The great seal. A huge iron seal blocking a 200-foot-deep shaft leading to the Vault of Infernal Machines.

Bellinda and Lucan

The spirits of Bellinda and Lucan still haunt these halls. Bellinda, now a **banshee**, is often found in area 4 rehearsing her tragic songs in front of a dozen or more attentive **skeleton** stagehands.

Lucan, now a **revenant** or **wraith**, haunts the south-west halls but is often found in area 14.

Both Lucan and Bellinda cannot truly be defeated until their spirits are freed from the cursed blade known as *Paimon's Dagger*. This can be done with a series of ability checks, casting the proper spells, or otherwise engaging in a ritual to remove their cursed souls from the blade.

The Seal to the Vault of Infernal Machines

Area 16 contains the ancient seal placed here hundreds of years ago to seal up a deep shaft leading to the Vault of Infernal Machines where ancient war machines of the Nameless King lie unused for over a thousand years.

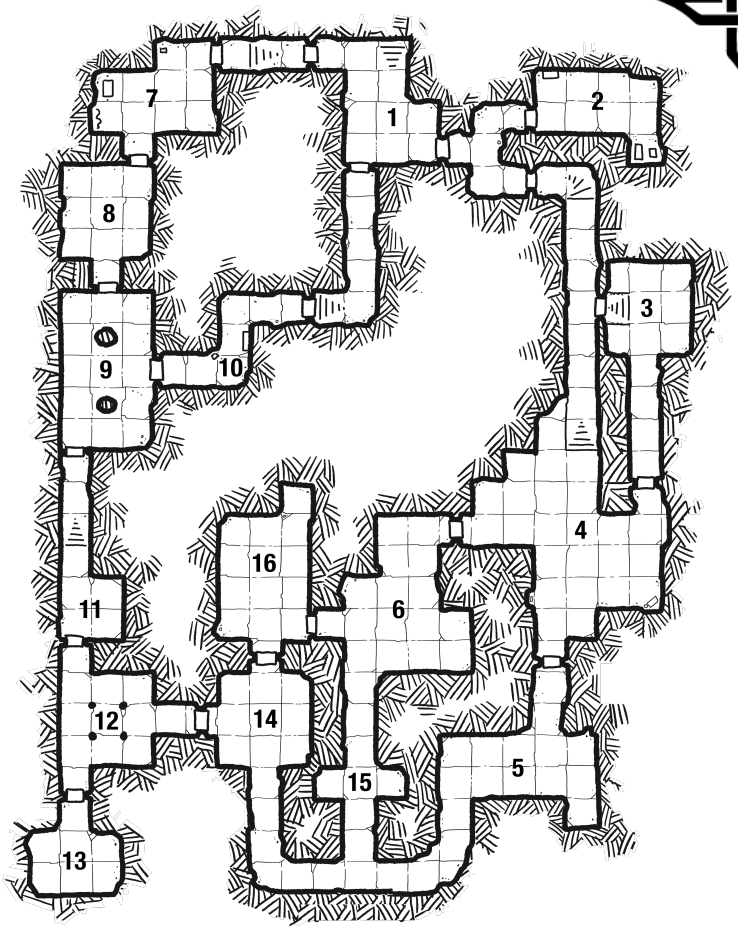
You can decide what breaks the seal. A powerful spell like *thunder wave* or *shatter* might do it. You could also run a side quest to recover a *horn of blasting* which can likewise break the seal and open the shaft to the vault below.

Treasures

Several areas in the trap rooms might contain treasures. Split the treasure parcels below if desired or put the treasure in area 13.

Monetary Treasure

- 102 SP, 1,264 GP, 117 PP
- 8 × 100 GP bloodstone gemstones
- 200 gp ghoulish gold-framed mirror
- Five 1-pound gold bars worth 200 GP



Consumable Magic Items

You can also include the following consumable magic items somewhere in the tower.

- *Potion of Clairvoyance*
- *Potion of Superior Healing*

Paimon's Dagger

This scenario includes *Paimon's Dagger* described below.

Paimon's Dagger. +2 dagger. As an action, a creature attuned to this dagger can cast the spells *hideous laughter* or *message*. The ability to cast each spell resets at the next dawn. This dagger contains a sliver of the personality of the trickster god Paimon.

Further Adventures

Once the characters remove the curse from *Paimon's Dagger* and free the souls of Bellinda and Lucan, the hauntings in the halls cease.

Once they find and open the seal in area 16, the characters can travel down to the Vault of Infernal Machines and the next stage of the quest for the Brazier of the Betrothed. This is covered in the scenario *Vault of Infernal Machines*.