

# SALT AND SANCTITY

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An adventure for Dungeons & Dragons 5e

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Read or paraphrase the following text:

The parapets crawl with soldiers. Halberds and lances sway in practiced rhythm, their boots striking stone in a relentless, martial cadence. Beneath the crenulated walls, pressed into the thin mercy of shadow from the midday sun, your band of adventurers waits.

In your possession is a letter, delivered to each of you personally by Apostle Gretiore. It reads:

*Dear Adventurers, I pray this letter finds you in health and haste. The Guildmaster provided me with your names. I now require your services. A great fear has taken hold of me, a dark malicious presence that paints my thoughts with maladies and shrouds my eyes from what lies in front of me. Because of the affliction, I cannot discern whether the desolation approaching our city comes from without, or from the corruption festering within mine own walls.*

*Do not introduce yourselves to me. Whatever grips my mind may compel me to detain you, or otherwise hinder your purpose. Instead, observe me and my congregation. Discover the source of the unholy corruption within this city.*

*Yours in faith,  
Apostle Gretiore.*

Beyond the portcullis, peasants stream into the city, fleeing the desolation rapidly approaching. You would expect bowed heads and hollow eyes from those whose lands have just been decimated.

Instead, most stand tall, bright-eyed, their gazes fixed upward on the alabaster palace that dominates the city skyline.

A strangled, pealing horn blast rips through the air as the last stragglers pass beneath the gate. Soldiers strain at the winch, and the portcullis lowers with a heavy, final thud.

As you move with the flow of the crowd toward the palace, the streets are littered with pale grains of salt, forming a deliberate path from the gate all the way to the palace steps.

Just outside the palace gates stand members of the congregation, hurling handfuls of salt before the approaching masses while chanting in unknown tongues. Those sensitive to magic feel pulses of holy energy ripple outward as the grains strike stone.

As the crowd draws near, the congregation parts, gesturing toward the pale path of salt they have laid across the street.

At the end of that path stands Apostle Gretiore in all his glory—his sun-darkened face stark against pristine white robes, gold trim catching the light of his unnaturally golden eyes in an elegant, unsettling display.

He presses one hand to the salted ground and murmurs a chant, barely audible. Light flashes. A transparent barrier surges upward, sealing the city beneath a shimmering dome.

With a satisfied nod, the Apostle turns and walks toward the palace's inner sanctum as members of the congregation scatter salt before his every step.

At this point players can roll a **DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana)** check to identify the spell that the Apostle had just cast.

Sacred Ground 7th level evocation (ritual)
Casting Time: 24 hours Range: Touch
Components: VSM (purified salt used to trace a continuous boundary, which the spell consumes)  Duration: Until dispelled or the salt boundary is broken
You touch a path of salt and imbue it with holy power, consecrating the area enclosed by the boundary. The shape and size of the sacred ground are determined by the placement of the salt, which must form an unbroken perimeter.  Until the spell ends, the affected area is subject to the following effects:

- Fiends and undead can't enter the area, and they can't target or affect creatures within the area by any means.
- Each fiend or undead creature within the area is subjected to purifying radiance. At the start of each of its turns, such a creature takes **3d10 radiant damage** while it remains within the area.
- When a spell is cast within the area that restores hit points or deals radiant damage, the spell's casting time is halved
- The purified salt used to create the boundary cannot be moved, scattered, or altered by nonmagical means. If any portion of the boundary is broken, the spell immediately ends.

At this point, the characters can choose one of two courses of action:

- **Follow Apostle Gretiore** into the palace
- **Remain with the congregation**, observing as they aid the refugees admitted within the city walls

### **Following the Apostle**

If the characters attempt to follow Apostle Gretiore into the palace's inner sanctum, they must bypass the palace guards and ritual attendants.

Have the party make one of the following group checks (player choice):

- **Dexterity (Stealth) check, DC 10**, to slip through unnoticed
- **Strength (Athletics) check, DC 15**, to force or maneuver their way inside under the guise of labor or assistance

### **Success**

On a success, the characters gain access to the inner sanctum shortly after the Apostle enters.

Inside, they observe Apostle Gretiore fall into an uncomfortable stupor akin to meditation.

If the characters remain hidden and continue to observe, they witness the Apostle sleepwalk and unconsciously disturb the salt boundary connected to the Sacred Ground ritual, gradually weakening the barrier protecting the city.

Any attempt to directly rouse or confront the Apostle immediately draws the attention of congregation members stationed outside the sanctum, who enter and attack the party.

## **Failure**

On a failed check, the characters are intercepted and turned away before reaching the inner sanctum. Palace attendants redirect the party and they are asked to help situate the populace. The characters are then treated as if they chose to follow the congregation.

### **Following the congregation**

If the characters remain with the congregation as they settle the populace within the city walls, they have an opportunity to observe the clergy more closely.

Have the party make one of the following checks (player choice):

- **Wisdom (Perception) check, DC 10**, to notice suspicious behavior
- **Intelligence (Investigation) check, DC 10**, to track inconsistencies in movement, duties, or ritual patterns

## **Success**

On a success, the characters notice several members of the congregation gradually withdraw from their assigned duties. Moving with deliberate caution, these individuals slip away from the crowds and descend into a cellar entrance hidden beneath a structure adjoining the palace's inner sanctum.

If the characters follow, they arrive in the cellar as the corrupted members of the congregation, secret servants of fiends, are in the midst of a dark ritual. Through whispered incantations, the cultists channel magic intended to manipulate Apostle Gretiore, compelling him to destroy the Sacred Ground barrier he created.

## Failure

On a failed check, the congregation becomes aware of the characters' scrutiny.

The characters are restrained and taken to the cellar beneath the palace. Once restrained, each character can attempt one of the following to escape:

- **Strength saving throw, DC 15**, to break free of the bindings
- **Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check, DC 10**, to slip the restraints

A successful escape places the characters in the cellar just as the corrupted congregation begins—or continues—their ritual.

### Protecting the Apostle

Once combat begins, whether in the cellar or near the inner sanctum, two corrupted members of the congregation disengage from the encounter and move to assassinate Apostle Gretiore, who remains trapped in his trance.

## Combat Clock

The party has **7 rounds** to prevent the Apostle from being incapacitated.

At the end of each round, assume the two corrupted congregants continue their assault against the Apostle unless intercepted.

- If the characters defeat all hostile creatures in the encounter before the end of the seventh round, they reach the Apostle in time to protect him.
- If the seventh round ends and the Apostle has not been saved, he is knocked unconscious. The Sacred Ground spell immediately ends as the salt boundary is disrupted from within, and the protective barrier collapses.