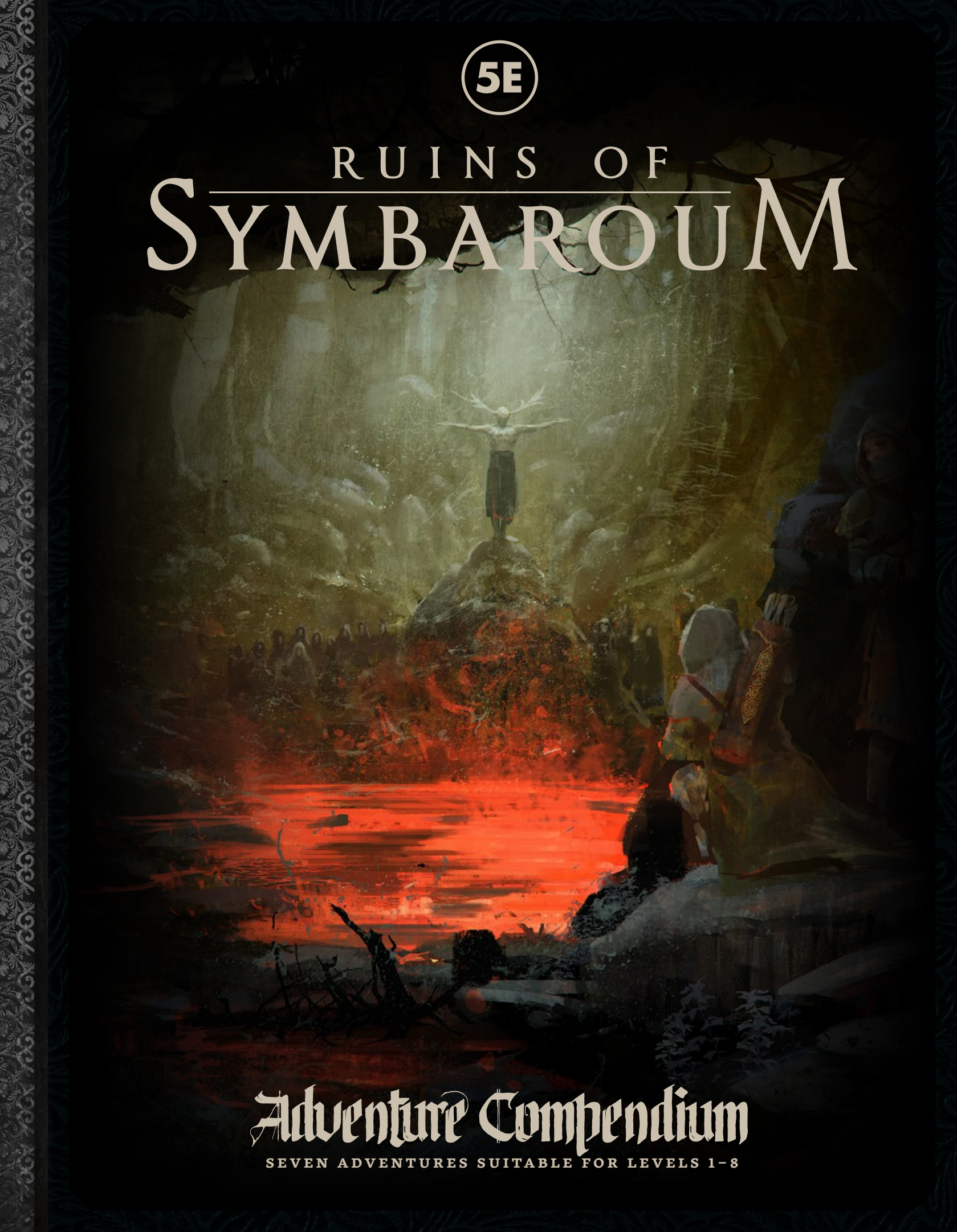
5E

RUINS OF SYMBAROUM



Adventure Compendium

SEVEN ADVENTURES SUITABLE FOR LEVELS 1–8

5E

RUINS OF SYMBAROUM

Adventure Compendium

LEAD GAME & SETTING DESIGNERS
Mattias Johnsson Haake, Mattias Lilja, Jacob Rodgers

COVER ART
Martin Grip

ILLUSTRATIONS
Martin Grip

GRAPHIC DESIGN & LAYOUT
Dan Algstrand
(based on *Symbaroum* by Johan Nohr)

MAPS
Johan Nohr, Lars Strömqvist

TRANSLATION
Niklas Lundmark

PROJECT MANAGER
Mattias Johnsson Haake

PROOFREADING
Brandon Bowling, Krister Persson, John Michael Warkentin, Stefan Patey

EVENT MANAGER
Anna Westerling

PR MANAGER
Boel Bermann

STREAMING
Doug Shute, Matthew Jowett

CUSTOMER SUPPORT
Jenny Lehto, Daniel Lehto

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THUS SPOKE AROALETA

... and the people bowed to different gods,
with different names and different figures,
with different tones and different legacies,
with different tastes for style and form.

The People fought to honor the gods,
with similar spite and similar weapons,
with similar goals and similar methods,
with similar love and similar hate.

But none of the gods acknowledged the people,
not the mother, nor the child,
not the guard with axe, with spear.
They only spoke to King and Priest.





Preface

IF YOU ARE seeking adventure, then look no further! Between the pages of this tome, you will find everything from murder mysteries to forest expeditions and witch hunts; set in cities, villages and expanses of wilderness; treating you to encounters with dark-minded cultists, roaring monstrosities and raging abominations. Yes, the seven adventures of the *Ruins of Symbaroum Adventure Compendium* do a great job of exemplifying the wide variety of stories that are waiting to be told in the world of Symbaroum.

Prior to the concluding Appendix with rules, artifacts, handouts and player maps, this book is structured in accordance with the seven adventures. You will also note that there are underlying connections between some of the adventures, as they are characterized by different themes and written for player characters of different levels of experience. Together they form, and can be played as, an introductory campaign to the setting and special rules of the game, ranging from level 1 to 8.

The first three adventures constitute a series of tutorial scenarios, specifically designed as a way of introducing you to *Ruins of Symbaroum*: *The Promised Land* introduces the players to the setting and the base rules; *The Mark of the Beast* takes a firm grip on the rules of problem-solving, by giving the player characters a chance to unravel a gruesome murder plot; while *Tomb of Dying Dreams* takes them on an expedition to the resting place of a long dead king in the depths of the forest of Davokar. As for the level of challenge, these adventures have been designed for low-level characters.

The two adventures that follow deal directly with the central theme of the Symbaroum game world: the conflict between civilization and nature. In *Fever of the Hunt*, the digging and looting of treasure-seeking humans threatens to awaken a feud between two ancient powers; if this happens, and if the player characters fail to act, the bloody effects will likely be felt far beyond the borders of the forest. And in *The Bell Tolls for Kastor* a cult of monster worshipers who recently managed to outsmart and defeat a rival sorcerers' cult have taken control of the town and are brutally searching for information that can help them return their monstrous dragon lord from the Yonderworld. As a suggestion, these scenarios are suitable for characters of fourth or fifth level.

The final two adventures deal with Ambrian politics. In this case, the plots are related to the growing schism within the Ambrian Sun Church, between followers of the "Lawgiver" and the "Lifegiver". *The Howling of Damned Gods* is about the relocation of a convicted heretic, from a prison in old Alberetor to the dungeons beneath Templewall, while *What's Bred in the Bone* starts off as a murder inquiry but develops into an armed conflict between the two religious factions. Which side the player characters align with, if any, is completely up to the players.

Of course, as Gamemaster you are welcome to use these adventures however you like, and to adjust them however you want. The challenges can be made easier or more difficult, by tweaking the stats of the opposition, or by adding or removing adversaries. You may also decide to relocate the adventure sites, to better suit the story evolving at your gaming table. Always remember that pre-written adventures, such as these, are meant to be adapted to the preferences of each gaming group and the composition of the adventuring party. As designers, our only ambition is to enable fun, and since what is deemed to be enjoyable varies, we are happy to leave it in your capable hands to turn this tome of text, art and maps into a series of great gaming sessions!



THE LAND YOU ARE LEAVING is barren and dead, ravaged by dark magic. Before you lies Ambria with its rampant rivers, bountiful forests and fertile soils, promising well-earned rest for weary souls. But will it deliver? The region you are headed for is ancient. Under the sublime surface, age-old conflicts still run hot and the northbound refugees gush out over the landscape like lamp oil over a smoldering hearth.

A wintry breeze follows you and your companions through the Titans, the mountain range separating the dead Alberetor in the south from Ambria up north. It is still far from certain that you will reach your destination. Many of your exiled brothers and sisters have perished on the way, from hunger or exhaustion or in the jaws of predators roaming the wilds. And for you there is yet another cause for concern – some of your companions claim to hear a whispering voice in the gusts of snowy mountain air...



The Promised Land

FOR LEVELS 1-2

This adventure deals with a perilous journey through the Titan Mountains. The player characters can be Ambrians about to make their first contact with Queen Korinthia's new realm or travelers from the north who so far have kept their distance from the newly established civilization.

As a suggestion, the characters are traveling together with a liturg of the Sun Church named Edira. If you are using the pre-generated player characters that can be downloaded from the Free League Symbaroum page (*freeleaguepublishing.com*), they come with a defined relationship to the priestess. Should you instead want to create your own characters, make sure they are directly or indirectly tied to Edira's quest – to bring a mystical artifact called the Sun Stone from the dead land of Alberetor, over the mountains, to her old colleague Master Vernam who is said to live in Thistle Hold. Read more about Vernam in the second adventure, *The Mark of the Beast*.

Onward to Yndaros

THE PLAYER CHARACTERS have ended up in a caravan camp just south of the Titans. The camp spans a vast area, vegetated by slender trees whose leaves have started to shift in autumnal nuances. About forty wagons are parked in a random pattern and between them tents have been raised. Most of the tents are tiny and weathered but a few of them look like small palaces made of cloth – evidently belonging to some of the nobles who have waited until the last moment to leave their estates. In a dozen places fires burn day and night, some of them surrounded by logs, others by more or less sloppily crafted benches.

Most of the people in the camp give face to a mixture of sorrow, relief and hope. They are sad to leave the place where their family has lived for generations, where their ancestors are buried and where so much of themselves is tied to the earth, the landscape and the now abandoned buildings. They are relieved to finally be on their way, to have left the ash deserts of the south and reached the still living soils of the mountain region. And the hope they feel can be seen in their slightly curved lips; the hope that the world north of the Titans shall prove to be as flourishing and welcoming as everybody says.

The Lost Land

Player characters who have been raised in some part of Alberetor or have been there some time all carry dark and haunting memories from the journey to the camp.

South of the camp the ground has enough vigor to still nourish vegetation, but the crops soon to be harvested are not what they once were. The fields are sparsely vegetated by pale stalks with shrunken ears of grain; the orchards that used to be full of apples, lemons and sweet plums are all but naked; and scrawny cattle can be seen everywhere, grazing in the all but naked fields, roaming wild after being left adrift by their previous owners and caretakers.

The ones who come from someplace further south or out east have witnessed even darker scenes. There the soil is blackened and completely lifeless, often transformed into dusty deserts incapable of absorbing water from either rains or rivers. Abandoned cities, deserted residencies and castles, ghostly farms whose livestock enclosures are occupied by nothing other than carcasses – Alberetor is dead and all but gone. All that is left is what the people of Queen Korinthia carry with them on the journey over the mountains.

Overview

THE PURPOSE OF this first section is to introduce the characters and have them sign on to Argasto's caravan. As long as the characters have made arrangements to travel north, everything is fine. Some players might refuse to fight Argasto's guards in mock combat (see next page), in which case Argasto will charge them a couple of silver pieces each to cover hiring another guard or two.

Beginnings

YOU CAN OPEN the game as the characters are clustered around a meager campfire somewhere in the camp site – a good place for the players to describe their characters to one another. By the fire is also one or more of the persons who are to become their traveling companions, possibly the talkative coachman Telk, maybe also the pathfinders Belun and Ludo. The priestess Edira is eating by herself, in her tent.

The Cast of Characters

If you're using *The Promised Land* to introduce people to *Ruins of Symbaroum* you may want to use pre-generated characters for a quick start. You can download these characters from the Symbaroum page at *freeleaguepublishing.com*.

The folk around the fire prepare supper and discuss the latest in a long list of bad news: the caravan owners have decided to stop and shelter for winter on the south side of the Titans, because of the rapidly approaching snows. The question is if they are right in assuming that the mountain passes soon will be closed off or if there still is a chance to make it through before the winter reigns supreme.

After a while, yet another person joins the circle around the fire, Telk's friend Keler. He is visibly excited and leans in to whisper something in the ear of the coachman. A character who succeeds at a **DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check** can make out the essentials: there is one caravan owner who has decided to brave the danger and dare an attempt to reach Ambria before the snows. Edira notices the commotion and emerges from her tent, soon setting off heading towards the caravan.

We stay at the campfire

Experienced players starting a new adventure are often on the lookout for hooks like the ones above, but sometimes new players might not seize such opportunities. If for some reason, the heroes remain behind, Telk and Keler return in a few moments: Argasto is willing to brave the mountains but wants more guards and scouts in his group. Telk tells the characters they look like just what Argasto needs and won't they please come with him to meet the caravan master?

If none of the characters should hear what is said they will probably still understand what is going on – Telk brightens up like a midsummer sun, excuses himself and rushes to his tent to pack his belongings. The player characters can either extort the truth from the weak-willed Keler with a successful **DC 5 Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion) check**, or they can without further ado tag along with the duo as they walk towards the northern part of the camp. There Master Argasto is preparing to leave, as soon as the next morning comes.

The Tryouts

ARGASTO SITS IN his pavilion inspecting his inventory before the trip. At the same time he takes the opportunity to interview potential companions. Outside a small line has formed, and in front of the characters and Edira stands Telk and Keler, maybe also Belun and Ludo. All the latter can brag about having survived a number of trips over the Titans and will consequently leave the tent with bright smiles on their lips. Then it is time for Edira and the player characters to enter the pavilion.

Master Argasto – a plump man in his fifties with rose-red cheeks, dressed in baggy clothes made of felt and skins – glances at them briefly before returning to his list of equipment with a short: *"Well?"*. Edira walks right up to the table and places the Sun Stone in front of him, with a short: *"You will need me and the warmth of Prios if you are to survive the journey."* Argasto's eyes widen and he gives a short nod, before looking up at the player characters: *"Them?"* Edira only shrugs her shoulders, apparently not willing to vouch for her traveling companions.

It is now up to the player characters to try and convince the caravan owner that they are suitable for a place in the caravan, and that they will prove to be more useful than troublesome. When they have made their arguments he looks up: *"Can you defend yourselves? I am not convinced..."*

He stresses that there is a limit to the number of people he can accommodate, and the ones who receive a spot need to be *"individuals of competence"*, meaning persons who improve his chances to get the wagons across the mountains. If the characters want to tag along, they must prove that they are worthy by participating in a fighting test against some



Master Argasto

of his loyal caravan guards. This isn't a real battle, just a bout with the flats of blades and butts of spears. The characters will recover any lost hit points after a short rest, without spending any Hit Dice.

Argasto picks out a number of guards equal to the number of characters, plus one. *"Just to keep things interesting,"* he says, if challenged, and indicates a clear area near the camp about 40 feet in diameter. He doesn't provide any specific rules, other than *"no sharp edges and yield before you're seriously hurt."* This means each of the guards will yield once they have 5 or less hit points, but the players are free to continue if they wish. Argasto has a practical approach to magic and won't be upset unless a mystics does something to seriously injure or affect his guards.

The extra guard will attack whoever seems to be the biggest threat. Once the combat is over Argasto is satisfied. Even if one or more of the player characters yielded, they still fought bravely.

The caravan will leave at first light.

Caravan Guards

These men and women are from Ambria and have crossed the Titans several times in service to Argasto.

Caravan Guard

Medium humanoid (human)

Armor Class 13 (studded leather armor)
Hit Points 11 (2d8 + 2)
Speed 30 ft

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	9 (-1)

Skills Intimidation +1, Perception +3, Survival +3
Senses passive Perception 13
Languages Ambrian
Challenge 1/8 (25 XP, proficiency bonus +2)
Manner grins confidently, swings their swords provokingly
Shadow unpolished copper (Corruption: 0/3)
Equipment 2d10 ortegs, chewing tobacco or a silver amulet of Prios

Aggressive. As a bonus action, the guard can move up to its speed toward a hostile creature that it can see.

ACTIONS

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) piercing damage.

In the Company of Thieves

Argasto's caravan has left the camp and the journey north has begun. The landscape is still forested, often so densely that the characters cannot see more than trees and the wobbling wagons on the road ahead. The journey goes slowly upwards, winding between wooded hills and shallow canyons. At times the wagons reach a crest from where towering mountains can be seen further north.

THE SUN SHINES from a clear blue sky, as if the Sun God Prios has heard the travelers' prayers for good weather conditions. Argasto walks at the head of the wagons with Edira by his side. The woman proudly proclaims: *"The Lawgiver's face smiles warmly over the pass; that bodes well."*

At dusk it is time to make camp, and the caravan forms a corral. The player characters are there to do their part, while Edira walks off on her own, as she usually does, shaking her head at anyone who offers her company. But this time something happens: when the campsite is close to finished, the voice of the priestess can be heard: *"Thieves, thieves!"*

While Edira was washing the road dust away in a nearby stream, someone sneaked up and went through her coat – the Sun Stone was taken from an inside pocket! This

mystical item is an artifact of the old kingdom (see page 195) that the priest was charged with delivering to Thistle Hold. Also, with the artifact gone, the caravan may not be able to keep warm if the worst happens high up in the mountains. Argasto tells it like it is: *"Retrieve the Sun Stone or we must turn back, favored by Prios or not!"*

Overview

THE GOAL OF this second session is for the player-characters to find and recover the Sun Stone. This alerts them to the presence of the artifact and its potential power. It can also serve to introduce Mal-Rogan as a recurring villain. Even if he remains only a rumor in these scenes, he can still be used again in future adventures.

Finding the Thief

IT IS EASY for the characters to identify the thief, but harder to catch up to him. The villain is the mule keeper Keler who has gone missing. His wagon team does nothing to try to hide his absence, quite the opposite. However, his best (and only) friend, Telk, is withholding some information, and might be persuaded to talk.

There are two ways of finding the thief: they can either follow his trail from the crime scene, or they can convince Telk to speak up. After all, the Sun Stone may prove to be essential for the survival of them all.

PERSUADING TELK

Keler was part of a larger team but he primarily confided in another mule keeper, Telk. Telk knows that Keler is a thief and a liar but found the friendship heartening; he must be persuaded if he is to divulge any leads as to the whereabouts of Keler.

Characters speaking to Telk (many can confirm that he was the one closest to Keler) have to succeed on a **DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) check** to get information from the mule keeper: *"Keler mentioned some kind of hideout hereabout; I can point you in the right direction."* If so, the characters gain advantage on their checks to follow the trail (see below).

TRAILING THE THIEF

The thief has left tracks that can be followed from the crime scene (the place on the riverbank where Edira left her coat). Keler has made an effort to hide the tracks and has also rigged a trap at the end of the trail, as described below.

Trailing the thief to the watermill ruin takes two successful **DC 13 Wisdom (Survival) check**s. If Telk gave them directions, they have advantage on the checks. If it takes multiple attempts to follow the trail, you might decide that the robber baron Mal-Rogan has already arrived at the meeting.

An alternative to tracking is to try to sense the direction to the Sun Stone by mystical means, such as the *locate object* spell. This will allow the group to reach the windmill clearing automatically.

Retrieving the Sun Stone

KELER HAS HIDDEN a trap right where the trail enters the clearing. It is the sort of spring-loaded leghold trap that slams shut when stepped on. If a character has a passive Perception of 15 or higher then they spot the trap automatically. Otherwise, the first character to enter the clearing must make a **DC 13 Dexterity saving throw** as the trap is triggered! On a failed save, the target takes 1d8 piercing damage and becomes restrained by the trap. It takes a **DC 13 Strength (Athletics) check** to open up the trap.

Even if the saving throw succeeded, the trap makes a loud enough noise to alert Keler, who is on the third floor of the Windmill, next to a window (half-cover, +2 to his AC). Go ahead and roll initiative. On his turns, Keler shoots with his crossbow as long as he can see a target.

If the trap was avoided, the characters may try to sneak up to the ruin and go inside. As long as half or more of the characters succeed at a **DC 13 Dexterity (Stealth) check**, they make it inside the windmill without alerting Keller. Inside the windmill, they must make another Stealth check at the same difficulty to climb the ladder without alerting the thief. Once they reach the third floor of the windmill they can surprise him by attacking or executing any other sort of plan.

If Keler sees the player characters close in on the ruin he shouts: *"You will regret this! The undead Mal-Rogan will find you and chop you to pieces. Not even death could beat him; you think you are a match for Mal-Rogan, the Master of Death!?"* He will not enter into melee. Instead he throws both himself and the crossbow to the ground if the characters come close. The Sun Stone is in his pocket.

If Keler is brought back to the caravan he will be the target of harsh words as well as of pebbles and dirt. Argasto will deprive him of food and tools and then send him into the wilderness as punishment for his crime. If the player characters should suggest some other form of reprimand, Argasto will concur with their argument since they were the ones who found the stone and captured the villain.



Keler, Second-rate Thief

Keler sees himself as a misunderstood genius and in particular as a misjudged master thief. Due to his curiosity and watchfulness he took notice of Edira's treasure, when she pulled it out of her pocket to warm her frozen fingers. In order to prove his superiority, Keler decided to pinch the artifact and make for the hideout of the gang of robbers he once was a member of. There he is determined to wait for his former companions to arrive, hoping that they will regret kicking him out when he hands them the Sun Stone. The best plan he has had in years, according to himself.

Keler fires his crossbow and pulls his dagger if backed into a corner. But as soon as it is evident that he will get hurt, he throws the weapons away and pleads for his life.

Keler, Second-rate thief

Medium humanoid (human)

Armor Class 14 (studded leather armor)
Hit Points 18 (4d8)
Speed 30 ft

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	8 (–1)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)

Skills Perception +2, Sleight of Hand +4, Stealth +4
Senses passive Perception 12
Languages Ambrian
Challenge 1/2 (100 XP, proficiency bonus +2)
Manner shifty eyes, stutters
Shadow darkened silver (Corruption: 1/4)
Equipment the Sun Stone, 3d6 shillings, lucky charm (dysfunctional), 12 bolts in a quiver

Cunning Action. On each of his turns, the thief can use a bonus action to take the Dash, Disengage, or Hide action.

Sneak Attack (1/Turn). The thief deals an extra 7 (2d6) damage when he hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of the thief that isn't incapacitated and the thief doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

ACTIONS

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.

Light Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage.

Mal-Rogan Arrives

IF THE PLAYERS choose to wait for Keler's companions, a ragged band of robbers soon arrives from the south along the overgrown footpath. A couple of robbers act as scouts and the leader follows behind – Mal-Rogan may be undead, but he is not stupid. There are as many robbers as there are characters in the party.

Mal-Rogan, Undead Robber Chieftain

The Queen's guard Rogan Gorinder died in the war against the Dark Lords. He got an arm chopped off in combat, the wound festered and the healers were powerless to neutralize the black blood infection that coursed through his veins.

But instead of dying, Rogan arose as an undead, with pus dripping from his truncated arm and blackened veins visible on his neck and temples. Why? No one knows, but Rogan took it as a dark sign that he had been chosen for greatness. Nowadays the robber baron calls himself Mal-Rogan and leads a band of robbers in the mountains where he grew up, dreaming of founding a veritable bandit kingdom.

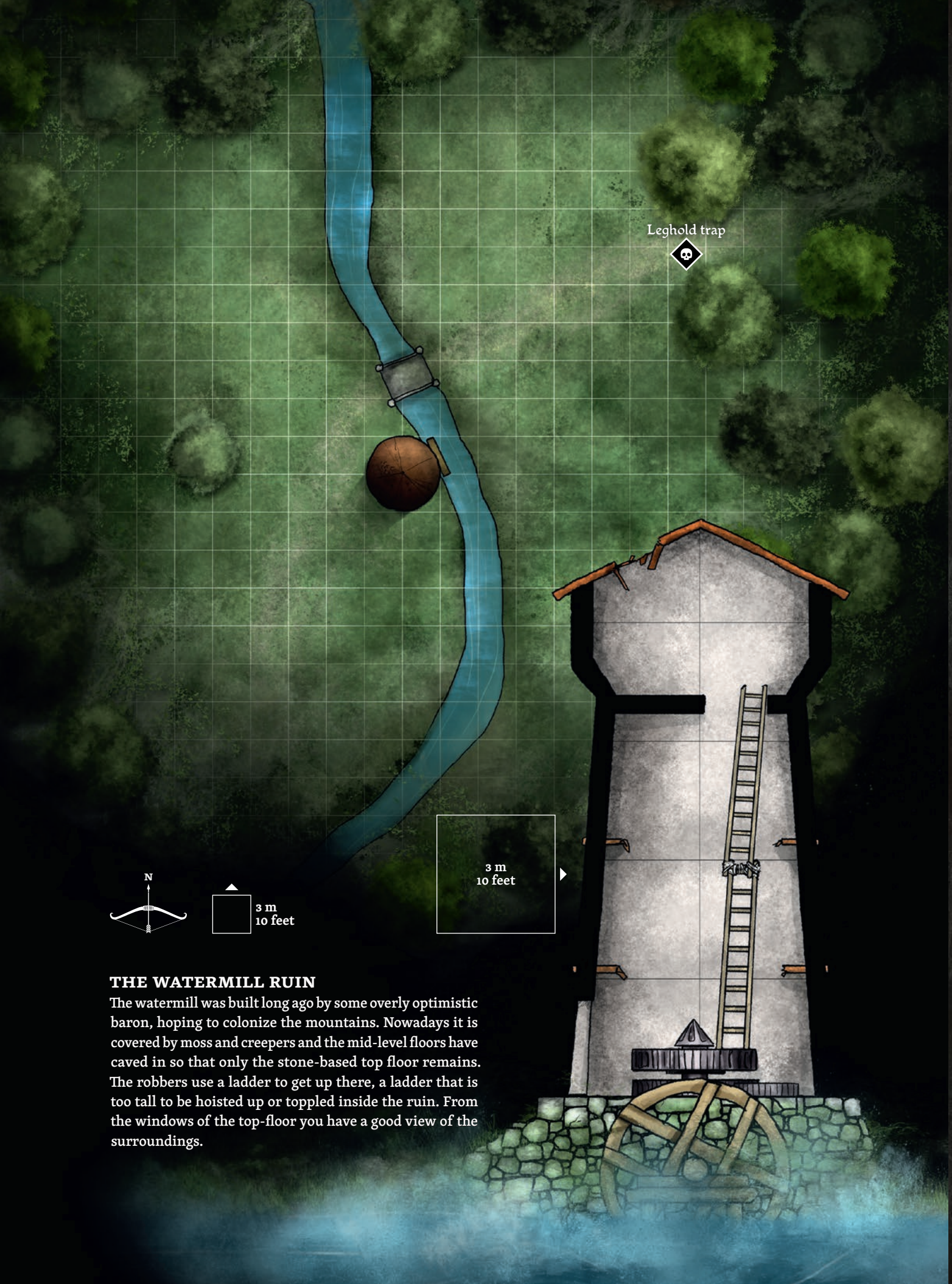
An Undead Future

Mal-Rogan is an enemy beyond the range of starting heroes. Keler will beg for the group to surrender to the undead chieftain or insist on fleeing if they refuse to hand over the Sun Stone.

If they do face off against Mal-Rogan, they should have a chance to realize the danger of the fight. For new players it is a good idea to call a time-out and explain that in *Ruins of Symbaroum*, there's no guarantee of a fair fight. That way, if they do fight, then it's on the heads of the players.

Otherwise, Mal-Rogan may decide that he *needs* the Sun Stone for his grandiose plans and resolve to follow the party to Ambria and beyond. He might even show up when the characters are threatened by the elves (see page 21) and offer to help if they give him the Stone.

If you want to increase the horror and revulsion, then Pansar Rogan might have been known to the characters before his corruption and dark resurrection.



THE WATERMILL RUIN

The watermill was built long ago by some overly optimistic baron, hoping to colonize the mountains. Nowadays it is covered by moss and creepers and the mid-level floors have caved in so that only the stone-based top floor remains. The robbers use a ladder to get up there, a ladder that is too tall to be hoisted up or toppled inside the ruin. From the windows of the top-floor you have a good view of the surroundings.



Mal-Rogan, Undead Robber Chieftain

Medium undead

Armor Class 14 (chain shirt)
Hit Points 30 (4d8 + 12)
Speed 30 ft

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	12 (+1)	17 (+3)	11 (+0)	13 (+1)	4 (-3)

Skills Perception +3
Senses passive Perception 13
Languages Ambrian
Challenge 3 (700 XP, proficiency bonus +2)
Manner speaks in a croaking voice, tilting his head back and forth
Shadow black as tar (thoroughly corrupt)
Equipment his own mummified hand on A rusty chain around his neck (artifact, see page 194), 4d6 thaler

Exceptional Strike. Mal-Rogan adds double his Strength modifier to melee weapon damage on a successful attack.

Undead Fortitude. If damage reduces Mal-Rogan to 0 hp, he must make a Constitution saving throw with a DC of 5 + the damage taken, unless the damage is radiant or from a critical hit. On a success, Mal-Rogan drops to 1 hp instead.

ACTIONS

Flail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (1d8 + 6) bludgeoning damage. Also if Mal-Rogan makes a critical hit, if the target is a creature it is knocked prone in addition to taking damage.

If the player characters cannot stop the blight-stricken nobleman he will make a name for himself throughout the southern parts of Ambria, where he roams around as a raving horror leaving desecrated corpses in his wake.

Robbers

The robbers fire a salvo with their crossbows before attacking with swords. They try to stay alive while Mal-Rogan kills the enemies one by one.

Robber

Medium humanoid (human)

Armor Class 13 (studded leather armor)
Hit Points 16 (3d8 + 3)
Speed 30 ft

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)

Skills Intimidation +2, Perception +3, Survival +3
Senses passive Perception 13
Languages Ambrian
Challenge 1/4 (50 XP, proficiency bonus +2)
Manner stares with misty eyes
Shadow rusty iron (Corruption: 2/4)
Equipment 4d6 ortegs, card deck or dice set, chewing tobacco, 6 bolts in a quiver

ACTIONS

Short Sword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) piercing damage.

Light Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) piercing damage.

Toll of the Mountains

On the road up to the mountain pass the weather continues to be favorable, even if the cold bites on exposed cheeks and fingers. The Sun Stone has not been activated yet. By "the laws of magic", which stipulate that every lit candle creates shadows, this must not be done until truly called for. Those who have befriended Edira also sense that the priestess knows that waking the warmth of the stone will come to affect the one doing so – another reason for not waking it prematurely.

THE CHARACTERS DO not know it yet, but among their fellow travelers are a couple of persons who have been active in the forest of Davokar, as pathfinders for treasure-hunters from Thistle Hold. Because of that they have managed to attract the interest of the Black Cloak Lestra, who fell out of favor with the Iron Pact, and also contracted a horrible curse that has already killed most of her previous companions. This third chapter describes what happens when the elves of the Iron Pact catch up to their prey.

Overview

UNLIKE PREVIOUS SECTIONS, this final section does not have a definitive plan of progression. Instead, the characters are free to address problems as they are introduced, or to even ignore one challenge in exchange for dealing with another. Remember the silver rule of GMing – plans mean nothing, but planning is necessary. In other words, you'll want to be familiar with each of the various non-player characters and their goals, so that you can have them react appropriately to the player characters' actions.

A Bit of History

The background to Belun and Ludo's state and why they are so afraid is described in the textbox What Really Happened on page 21, and further developed in the introduction to the next adventure *The Mark of the Beast* (page 27). In truth, the brothers are right to fear. The Iron Pact (an alliance of elves and other Elder Folk) has marked them for death for their intrusion. Also, the Black Cloak Lestra who is traveling with the caravan suspects the brothers. Belun already shows the signs of a grave blight-sickness. It may be up to the player characters to support or thwart Lestra's attempt to claim the pathfinders for her order.

The Price of Firewood

SUN STONE OR not, for the freezing nights in the pass you also need firewood. For that purpose, the travelers make short forays into the increasingly sparse vegetation on the hills. Suddenly the roaring of a beast is heard, soon merged with desperate cries from humans. The characters are nearby and arrive first on the scene. By then the following stage is set:

A monstrous wolf – a **DC 10 Intelligence (Nature) check** identifies it as a *hunger wolf* – stands snarling and drooling in front of the two pathfinders and a Black Cloak. Behind the monstrosity, a number of smaller wolf beasts have formed a half-circle – a **DC 10 Intelligence (Nature) check** marks them as *jakaars*. There are as many jakaars as there are player characters.

Consequently, the upcoming fight will involve the characters and a group of enemies, one of which is more dangerous (the hunger wolf) than the others (the jakaars). The characters also have a couple of non-player characters on their side, to make use of in a tactically sound manner.

If the players refrain from giving orders – a **DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) check** is required if the order entails facing the hunger wolf – the pathfinders will take on the jakaars, while the Black Cloak heals them (and searches them for signs of corruption). If so, that fight can be handled summarily and without rolling any dice; the main fight is the one between the characters and the hunger wolf. If you decide to roll dice for everything, see pages 22–23 for Lestra and the pathfinders (Belun's entry on page 22 is only for once the abomination growing within him erupts forth).

THE MOUNTAIN PASS

The pass is in truth two passes, fringed by high slopes to the east and west and with a vast plateau between them.





Lestra



Belun



Ludo

Note that the pathfinders and the Black Cloak Lestra can be hurt or struck down in this fight, but are not supposed to die at this stage. The reason for involving the trio in the scene is for the characters to get to know them. Should the Gamemaster prefer to swap them for other travelers who can die here, you can use a couple other generic pathfinders. They have the same stats as the brothers but no corruption.

Hunger Wolf, the Elf Scout Keri-Las in Her Wolf Shape

Keri-Las tries to get to the barbarian scouts and will kill them if she cannot catch them alive. She tries not to kill others (like the player characters), but will hurt them if they stand in her way. If the hunger wolf dies she transforms back to her original shape:

A severely battered elf lies on the ground, as lifeless as the beast just killed by the characters. She is dressed in a simple wool coat and carries no weapon. In truth her name was Keri-Las and she was a scout for the group that has been hunting the brothers.

She wears a nicely decorated bracelet round her left upper arm. A player character can make a **DC 15 Intelligence (History) check** to realize that it must be an ancient elven oath ring; a symbol for the Iron Pact, supposedly an age-old alliance or agreement between humans and elves.

See page 140 of the *Bestiary* for the **hunger wolf** statblock.

Jakaars

The jakaar is a canine pack animal, as likely to capture its own prey as it is to eat from cadavers left by other beasts. The pack following Keri-Las takes the chance of attacking together with the hunger wolf. The jakaars trail the hunger wolf and attack one opponent each (or the pathfinders if the characters take on the hunger wolf).

Jakaar

Medium beast

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 13 (2d8 + 4)
Speed 40 ft

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	4 (-3)	12 (+1)	2 (-4)

Skills Perception +3, Stealth +4
Senses passive Perception 13
Languages —
Challenge 1/4 (50 XP, proficiency bonus +2)
Manner slinks behind the hunger wolf and then strikes out
Shadow green like spring grass (Corruption: 0/2)
Equipment none

Keen Hearing and Smell. The wolf has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing or smell.

Pack Tactics. The wolf has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the wolf's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (2d4 + 2) piercing damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 10 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Tracking the Hunger Wolf

IT IS NOT unlikely that the players will want to backtrack the movement of the hunger wolf to the elven camp. To do that the characters must make three **DC 13 Wisdom (Survival) checks**; each represents about two hours of tracking, so it will be late in the afternoon before they see the elf camp. In this case, the event described under the header Stormnight will commence between the second and third check.

THE ELVEN CAMP

The elven camp is located about halfway over the plateau, on the western slope (the Gamemaster decides on a suitable location). The camp is simple, with an earth-toned tent, some equipment and three beds on which to rest or meditate. One of the elves is always on guard and the camp is skillfully concealed, although possible to find by following their tracks.

Godrai and Saran-Ri patiently wait for Keri-Las to return, their small tents and careful fire blending into the mountain scenery almost effortlessly. An elk is tethered nearby, with a saddle and other riding gear on it.

A **DC 10 Wisdom (Insight) check** lets a player character realize that attacking the elves is a very bad idea; sure, there are only two of them, but elves are long-lived and these two seem to have great power. If the players accept this, two options remain: sneak up and listen to them talk or approach them openly in the hope of starting a conversation.

To sneak up on the elves requires a group **DC 16 Dexterity (Stealth) check**. If half or more of the group fail, the elves stand up warily but do not immediately attack. If instead the check succeeds, a character that understands elvish can sneaks up and listens to the elves' conversation:

Saran-Ri: *"Let us strike them all, we don't know who else is infected."*
Godrai: *"No, the two are enough, no others."*
Saran-Ri: *"Keri-Las should have been back. She is dead, I know it, I feel it."*
Godrai: *"If so, her sacrifice will not be forgotten. But the killing ends with the blight-stricken humans. We won't start a war today."*
Saran-Ri: *"Huh, you know as I do that war is inevitable. If not today..."*
Godrai: *"Enough!"*
Saran-Ri growls and backs away.

There is something beast-like in how Saran-Ri moves, a **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check** reveals that Saran-Ri is a shapeshifter, just like Keri-Las.

If the characters approach the elves for a talk, openly or after having failed the Dexterity check, Godrai will respond in broken Ambrian. There will not be much of a discussion. He asks if they speak for the company including two humans named Belun and Ludo. If the characters lie, he just sends them on their way; if they are truthful, the conversation will flow much like described under the header The Ultimatum: the elf gives them the ultimatum to carry back to their companions. Before turning his back, he rounds off with a very serious threat: *"I will have those two. Blood will flow if you refuse. Look for us at next sundown; you have until then to decide."*

Note that this means that the events described in The Ultimatum become obsolete.

Godrai, Elf of Late Summer

This elf has a lordly stature and stern expression; it is clear that he is in charge.

Godrai

Medium humanoid (elf – late summer)

Armor Class 15 (lacquered silk cuirass)
Hit Points 97 (13d8 + 39)
Speed 30 ft

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	12 (+1)	17 (+3)	19 (+4)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Intelligence +7, Wisdom +5
Skills Arcana +10, Perception +5, Survival +5
Senses passive Perception 15
Languages Ambrian, Elvish
Challenge 5 (1,800 XP, proficiency bonus +3)
Manner stern and lordly
Shadow bluish red (Corruption: 2/14)
Equipment Two quivers with 12 arrows in each (the arrows in one of them are coated with moderate poison), headband of rusty iron

ACTIONS

Magic Missile. Godrai releases between 3–7 glowing darts of magical force. Each hits a target within 120 ft. and does 1d4 + 1 force damage. More than one dart can hit the same target. Godrai gains Corruption equal to 1d4 + 1.

Ray of Frost. Ranged Spell Attack: +7 to hit, range 60 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 13 (3d8) cold damage, and its speed is reduced by 10 ft. until the start of Godrai's next turn. Godrai gains 0 Corruption.

Shortbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) piercing damage. Godrai can use his bonus action to select a poison arrow, if so the target must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for one minute.

Turn Weather. Godrai causes the weather to shift further along one axis: increasing or decreasing precipitation, temperature, or wind speed by one step. Godrai gains 5 Corruption.



Godrai

Saran-Ri, Elf of Early Summer

This shapeshifting elf will rush through the snow in his beamon form, fully prepared to sacrifice himself in order to kill the blight-stricken barbarians or defend Godrai.

Beamon

The black-furred bear creature known to clan folks as the Beamon is a solitary soul that takes its dominance for granted. It certainly has many enemies, both beast and human. The beamon is prized by the barbarians for its meat, and for many northern clans its slaying is a coming-of-age rite. Any person who has successfully hunted a beamon is considered to be an adult, and those who manage to bring the beastly bear down single-handedly are regarded as fully-trained warriors.

Saran-Ri in Beamon Form

Huge beast (elf – early summer)

Armor Class 13
Hit Points 105 (10d12 + 40)
Speed 40 ft., 30 ft. climb

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	17 (+3)	18 (+4)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)

Skills Perception +5, Survival +5
Senses passive Perception 15
Languages Elvish (can't speak in bear form)
Challenge 5 (1,800 XP, proficiency bonus +3)
Manner wary and alert
Shadow burning red with dancing flakes of soot (Corruption: 3/6)
Equipment ring of rusty iron

Keen Smell. The beamon has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The beamon makes two attacks, either two with its paws or one paw and one bite attack.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d4 + 4) piercing damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 14 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Paws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (1d12 + 4) slashing damage.

REACTION

Swipe. If a creature enters its reach the beamon can make a single paws attack against that creature.

The Dead Elf

IF THE PLAYER characters refrain from tracking the hunger wolf, what follows will play out differently. With the shapeshifter dead, they must decide what to do with the corpse – hide it or bring the dead elf to Argasto's attention. Should Keri-Las instead be captured alive, she will reluctantly transform back to her elven form. In halting Ambrian she tells her captors that Belun and Ludo have broken the law of the Iron Pact and must be given over. She hints that there are more elves coming to rescue her. Anyone who makes a **DC 13 Wisdom (Insight) check** (or who has a passive Insight of 13 or higher) notices that the presence of the elf makes both Belun and Ludo very nervous.

The Black Cloak Lestra may ask pointed questions, such as *"Who was the hunger wolf out to get?"* while glancing significantly at the two pathfinders.

With the caravan members in general, the reactions to the events of the morning will depend on who knows what and how the fight was resolved. It is possible that the body of Keri-Las could be hidden quickly so that most members of the caravan won't know about the presence of an elf. But Lestra insists on meeting Argasto with the characters to talk things through. If they refuse, she goes to him and he tracks them down, threatening that the caravan will abandon them if they refuse a meeting again.

In his tent, Argasto shakes his head when he learns who was hidden under the pelt of the hunger wolf. He becomes even more eager to get a move on. *"Elves are bad news, we must hurry to Yndaros, we'll be safe in the city of the Queen!"*

If Lestra was able to use Shadow-sight during the battle, she tells Argasto that she wants Belun and Ludo shackled, so that she can take them to a nearby monastery of the Twilight Friars for healing and study. Argasto looks troubled by this and says he won't make a decision on her request until after a good night's sleep. Lestra is frustrated but nods. The player characters are free to express their opinions on the matter as well.

Neither Lestra nor Edira can tell the player characters much about Keri-Las' bracelet, but both seem very interested in the shapeshifting magic. *"The work we do is blessed by Prios but the evils of the world still fight against us. Their magic is different: more primitive – witchcraft, in other words."*

Stormnight

THE CARAVAN STRUGGLES up the steeper and steeper road toward the pass. As the first crest is traversed the wagons roll out onto a plateau, and suddenly the weather changes for the worse. The wind picks up, the sky grows dark and snow starts falling.

Argasto orders the wagons to form a corral for protection against the storm. A character with the feature Shadow-sight may realize that the storm is conjured (the elf Godrai has used the spell *turn weather*) and the character hears a wrathful voice singing in the winds. If none of the characters hear it, the Gamemaster can let Lestra do so, if only for the effect.

The travelers in the caravan cover any openings on their wagons, put blankets over the huddled pack animals and prepare for a long night in the cold.

The Corral

The six wagons of the caravan form a corral each evening, or when under threat. Between the wagons wooden gates are placed, leaning against barrels. All travelers have a designated post in the event of danger, at a gate if the person can fight and otherwise in shelter behind the wagons.

Finding one's place in the corral is a well-rehearsed routine which does not require instructions – an alarm from a guard or an order from Argasto is enough for everyone to rush to their assigned place, weapon in hand.

THE CORRAL



The Ultimatum

WHEN MORNING COMES the storm subsides. But the situation is far from ideal; it is doubtful that the caravan can continue since the snow lies deep across the plateau. A brawling discussion erupts between those who want to push onwards and those who would rather not risk getting stuck down the road.

Right then two shapes emerge out of the light snowfall, one astride a majestic elk, the other keeping pace with the mount. They approach the corral. The lookout Telk cries: *"Elves, I think they're elves!"* The quarrel dies out and everything is silent.

The elf on the elk dismounts and walks forward. He introduces himself as Godrai and his quiet friend as Saran-Ri. He says *"We want the ones called Belun and Ludo."*

If asked why, he replies: *"They have violated the treaties; they have tunneled too deep into the soil of old Davokar. They are blight-stricken and must be purged."*

If the characters do not speak up and refuse to hand over the pathfinders, Argasto will. Godrai's companion whispers something in the ear of the leader, who responds calmly. (This is much the same conversation that the characters might have overheard at their camp and anyone who understands elvish can make a **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check** to make out what is said, see page 18.) After the sibilant conversation Godrai says: *"I will have those two. Blood will flow if you refuse. We will return at sundown."*

The elves leave and the people of the caravan are left to discuss the ultimatum.

What Really Happened

If the characters are afforded the opportunity to question Ludo and manage to make him speak (requires a successful **DC 13 Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion) check**, along with credible threats) he has the following story to tell: He and Belun were hired as pathfinders by a group of treasure-hunters, headed by an unpleasant individual named Gorak and his second, the changeling Alahara.

The group traveled deep into Davokar but did not reach the planned target: the darker parts of the forest and its well-preserved ruins. Instead, they came across a smaller tomb, the final resting place of a king from the early days of Symbaroum. The others in the team got away with gold, jewelry and mystical objects; all that Gorak wanted for himself was the verdigris-covered copper crown worn by the dead lord; a crown that had merged with the cranium.

Once they returned to Thistle Hold, the expedition's members lived like kings for a while. Then they started to die, or change (if Belun already has changed, Ludo says that the same happened to the others). Gorak and Alahara disappeared after having talked to Lasifor Nightpitch, the Mayor of the Hold. Then Belun started to feel as if someone was watching him and he fled to the south with Ludo.

Ludo suddenly remembers another detail: one evening by the fire everyone in the expedition got to hold the cranium with the crown. He recalls that the skull, despite being dead, was warm to the touch and that he for a moment felt as if its dead eyes looked back at him in the glow from the camp fire...

Negotiations under the Axe

THE CARAVAN COMPANIONS have to make up their minds: do they hand the pathfinders Belun and Ludo over or do they defend them when the elves (re)appear? The caravan owner Argasto is full of doubt but will be forced to make the final judgment. Before he does, he wants to learn what others think on the matter.

The Black Cloak Lestra wants to put the brothers in shackles and take them to the monastery of the Twilight Friars on the northern slopes of the Titans, where members of her order can *"care for them if they are sick."* The Black Cloaks are very interested in everything related to the blight and corruption of Davokar. Lestra will say and do whatever it takes to make this happen. She is, for instance, willing to lie about knowing how elves of the Iron Pact always operate: they will kill everyone, extradition or not, for safety's sake.

The two barbarians are of course opposed to being extradited; something that Ludo loudly proclaims while Belun mutters it. The mule keeper Telk wants the brothers to be surrendered: *"Better them than me!"* Concurring mumbles and cries are heard from many others in the caravan.

The characters will tip the scales, either for extradition to the elves or for being taken to the monastery. No matter which decision is made, Argasto goes to shackle the two pathfinders. Precisely then, faced by the severity of their desperate situation, Belun undergoes a horrific transformation. Ludo is as shocked as anyone.

Belun, Blight-born

Belun dies a bloody death when something terrible literally claws itself out of his skin: a towering creature with bare muscles, with fingers transformed into knives of bone, and with outgrowths from the cranium, as if it wore a pointy bone crown.

The abomination is furious and famished, and will kill indiscriminately until it is slain. In death the body collapses into a bloody, shapeless heap that rapidly begins to rot. All that remains is the deformed cranium.

Blight-born

Medium abomination

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)
Hit Points 38 (7d8 + 7)
Speed 30 ft

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	15 (+2)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	2 (-4)

Saving Throws Constitution +3, Wisdom +4
Skills Perception +4, Stealth +4, Survival +4
Senses passive Perception 14
Languages —
Challenge 3 (700 XP, proficiency bonus +2)
Manner first trembling with fear, then trembling from the dark power that surges through him
Shadow oozing black (thoroughly corrupt)
Equipment none

Berserker. The blight-born can use its bonus action to enter a rage. While in a rage, it is resistant to non-magical bludgeoning, piercing and slashing damage. It has advantage on attack rolls and attacks against it have advantage. Its attacks do an extra +2 damage. It loses its rage if it ends its turn without having attacked a creature since its last turn or taken damage since its last turn.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The blight-born makes two attacks with its claws.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (2d4 + 3) slashing damage.

Ludo

Ludo wears a stigma as a sign of his growing corruption – he has wounds that will not heal in the creases of all bodily joints. Note that if Ludo is saved, he too will sooner or later reach the same end as Belun did. When Ludo is transformed the Gamemaster can reuse the appearance and stats of Belun. His inevitable corruption will take 1d4 more days to occur.

Ludo

Medium humanoid (human)

Armor Class 13 (studded leather armor)
Hit Points 16 (3d8 + 3)
Speed 30 ft

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)

Skills Perception +3, Survival +3
Senses passive Perception 13
Languages Ambrian, Barbarian
Challenge 1/4 (50 XP, proficiency bonus +2)
Manner distracted and worried
Shadow black iron (Corruption: 3/4)
Equipment 1d6 shillings

ACTIONS

Short Sword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) piercing damage.

Extradition or Combat

WITH THE FIGHT against the abomination laid to rest, there is still Ludo to deal with. Argasto's decision on what to do with the brothers either results in an extradition, or in a final battle between the people of the caravan and the elves (see below). Irrespective of what happens, the caravan owner will likely need the help of all capable companions.

A kind Gamemaster might have the blight-born Belun strike out at Ludo and slay him. If so, the elves can plainly see the evidence before them and are satisfied. However, Lestra is distraught. If the characters are Ambrian, she says *"You are seriously mistaken if you believe this strengthens our position. Prios, the One and the Giver of Laws, wants the corrupted brought to Ambria, where my brothers and sisters will care for them. This was a waste of life."*

Elven Extradition

IF LUDO SURVIVES and is handed over to the elves, Saran-Ri will transform into a beamon, bite hold of the barbarian and drag him away in the lessening storm.

The last the characters see of the pathfinder is his waving arms and desperate facial expression. Soon they disappear from sight and moments later the cries of Ludo go silent, either because they are drowned out by the cold winds of the mountain pass or because not even the blight-stricken can make sounds when they have passed over into the realm of the dead.

The Final Battle

IF THE PLAYER characters do not speak up for surrendering the pathfinders, Argasto decides to fight for them. In that case, combat with the elves is inevitable. The elves are dangerous. Godrai is a summer elf in full bloom and Saran-Ri a young summer elf skilled in battle – which becomes apparent when the fight begins. However, they are only out to get Ludo; the characters can surrender or flee at any time.

The elves make their move at sundown. They take aim at Ludo and will withdraw once the barbarian is dead; they will not hunt those who run or strike at persons that have surrendered. Argasto, Lestra and Ludo and some of Argasto's guards will fight alongside the player characters. There are two ways to handle the fight:

- The players get to handle one each of the above-mentioned non-player characters during the battle, relieving the GM from that task.
- The player characters fight either Godrai or Saran-Ri; the other elf faces Argasto and his companions. In this case the outcome of both fights is decided by what happens in the characters' fight – if they win, both groups do; if they fail, both fail.

Argasto, Caravan Master

If the decision has been made to defend the pathfinder, Argasto will do so to the best of his ability!

Argasto

Medium humanoid (human)

Armor Class 16 (scale mail)
Hit Points 22 (4d8 + 4)
Speed 30 ft

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)

Skills Investigation +2, Perception +3, Survival +3
Senses passive Perception 13
Languages Ambrian
Challenge 1/2 (100 XP, proficiency bonus +2)
Manner sighs deeply, shakes his head
Shadow bronze, dull and unpolished (Corruption: 0/7)
Equipment 2d6 thaler, 4d4 shillings

ACTIONS

Maul. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d6 + 2) bludgeoning damage.

Lestra, Black Cloak

Lestra is used to commanding Templars to do the dirty work once she has unmasked an abomination. But if that is what it takes to battle the feral forces of nature, she will face both abominations and elves with her sword in hand.

Lestra

Medium humanoid (human)

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 22 (3d8 + 9)
Speed 30 ft

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (–1)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	17 (+3)	13 (+1)

Skills Deception +3, Insight +5, Persuasion +3, Religion +2
Senses passive Perception 13
Languages Ambrian
Challenge 1 (200 XP, proficiency bonus +2)
Manner bites her lip
Shadow brushed steel with a few dark spots (Corruption: 1/10)
Equipment sun symbol on a necklace, 2d6 thaler, scroll titled "The Inner Nature of the Abomination"

ACTIONS

Bless. Lestra chooses three creatures within 30 feet. Whenever the chosen creature makes an attack roll or saving throw they add 1d4 to the roll. This effect lasts as long as Lestra concentrates on it, up to 1 minute. She gains 1 Corruption by casting this spell.

Cure Wounds. Lestra touches a creature. It regains 1d8 + 3 hit points. Lestra gains 1d4 + 1 Corruption.

Sacred Flame. Flame-like radiance descends on a creature of Lestra's choice that she can see within 60 feet. The target must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or take 1d8 radiant damage. Lestra gains 0 Corruption.

Short Sword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

Spare the Dying. Lestra touches a living creature that has 0 hit points. The creature becomes stable. She gains no Corruption.

The Road North

No matter how the adventure ends, the storm finally dies out. The strong winds subside, the snowfall ends and soon the world rests peacefully under its snow-white blanket.

After two more days of struggles the caravan makes it across the snowy plateau, up through the last pass where the passengers get a fantastic view of the landscape that stretches out before them.

Below in the distance lays Yndaros, the grand capital city of Ambria, towering over farmlands covered in swaying fields and pierced by glittering rivers. Here and there are patches of forest, burning in yellow and red. The patches become more frequent and grow bigger and bigger the further the gaze wanders north, and somewhere far away the trees gain mastery over the lowland – trees that together make out the dark and mythic forest of Davokar.

It is probably only your knowledge of its existence that makes you imagine seeing the red flame of Thistle Hold's beacon, located at the forest's edge. Karvosti, the plateau ruled by witches and barbarian warriors, cannot be seen, as it lies deep in the woods; the same goes for the haunted ruins of old Symbaroum. And that is likely for the best, since the ruins are said to be monstrously beautiful, almost hypnotic in their overgrown splendor.

Argasto interrupts your daydreams with a high-pitched order to mount up. As soon as the cookware has been stowed away, the break is over, and the caravan can resume its journey towards Yndaros. The wagons sway on bumpy routes, with animals in front and exhausted travelers holding ropes tied to the wagons behind.

Weary faces are gleaming with sweat in the chilly mountain air. Steamy clouds fume from mouths and muzzles alike. But despite fatigue and cold, the eyes of the travelers shine as brightly as the pinnacles on the Queen's palace – the Promised Land is waiting for them to arrive.

Overview

THIS FINAL SECTION is intended to get the party to the edge of Davokar, where more adventures await. You'll want to make a judgment about the game so far and your players. Some groups will enjoy a quick wind-down after a big fight; other groups with younger or less experienced players might be reaching the limits of their attention or patience. In these cases, ignoring the optional scenes is probably for the best.

However, for groups who have made deep connections between the characters already or who want even more experience with the *Ruins of Symbaroum* you can draw out the following narration, giving folks chances to set watches and talk amongst themselves or with the caravan members.

The journey from the foothills of the Titans to the town of Thistle Hold is about 250 miles (400 kilometers), passing the capital city of Yndaros as well as Templewall, the seat of the Ambrian Sun Church. If you do as the adventure suggests, and have the characters escort Edira and the Sun Stone, they all follow the caravan to Yndaros where the priest hires the characters to accompany her to Thistle Hold. She can't afford much, just enough to pay for food and lodging during the trip, but promises to speak well of them to any potential employers.

As Edira is eager to arrive in the Hold with haste, it is suggested that the party abstain from entering the larger settlements – from an adventuring perspective, those sites are better left to be explored with the support of future modules for *Ruins of Symbaroum*.

If you agree, the party keeps to the roads, spending their nights at roadhouses or out in the open. They travel a rolling landscape covered in swaying fields of wheat, grain and sun-yellow rapeseeds; they pass small village centers with newly built timber houses and rose-cheeked inhabitants; they pass over arched bridges, from which they can see the shadows of big, fat trout struggling against the stream – as appearances go, the contrast to the land they left behind could not be bigger.

Here follows a couple of suggested events that you can use, or build on, if you would like to make the journey more eventful.

Interacting with the Caravan

BEFORE REACHING YNDAROS, the Gamemaster can set one or more events where the player characters get to interact with their traveling companions, summing up what has happened and reminiscing about the good, the bad and the horrible. Such an event can take place around the fire or on the road, depending on what suits the story best.

- **Argasto.** Argasto's attitude towards the player characters naturally depends on how they handled themselves during the key challenges of the journey: the theft of the Sun Stone and the blight-birth of Belun. If they were helpful and proved loyal to the caravan collective, he promises to keep them in mind for future travels. When in Ambria, he often stays in Yndaros, parked at the Refugee Camp – they can find him there or by asking around at the caravan station.
- **Edira.** Edira does not change much from the reclusive person they have gotten to know, but once in Ambria she is actually sometimes seen smiling to herself. If approached she informs the player characters of her plan, to follow the caravan as far as Yndaros and then continue to Thistle Hold, avoiding all large towns and settlements. She doesn't say as much, but if the player characters helped recover the Sun Stone from Keler, she is both thankful and impressed.
- **Lestra.** If Ludo was given over to the Black Cloak, she is long gone, having taken him to the Twilight Monastery in the mountains. Otherwise, she will likely look up the characters to try and educate them about the Lawgiver's new realm: *"Here, evil does not show, not like in the old country; here it hides in plain sight, even basking in sunlight, in what seems sound and true. All taint of corruption must be identified, then studied, and then cleansed – only that way can we hope to ever breath life into Prios and purify this realm from evil."*
- **Telk.** The mule-handler is a bit shell-shocked and amazed at all that has happened since the group and he sat by a campfire in Alberetor. He'll wonder aloud at how his friend proved to be a thief in league with the undead and how Belun and Ludo were corrupted by Davokar and hunted by elves! In short, he is the perfect person to use for a scene meant to give the players a chance to review the events of the road to the Promised Land.

Peddler on the Road

SOMEWHERE ON THE road between Yndaros and Thistle Hold, the party encounters a peddler leading a donkey-drawn cart. His name is Tavio, the donkey's name is Syna. He is headed to Yndaros but will stop for the characters if they would like to peruse his wares.

He has at least one of almost everything listed in the *Player's Guide* that has a cost in shillings or ortegs; should the price be in thaler, the gear is too expensive for him to carry. If the character wants more than one of the item, roll a d6. On a 4 or more, he only has one item. On a 1, 2, or 3, he has that many more of the item that he can find by rummaging around the cart.

If you would like another stab at the rules of combat, Tavio may also open up a chance for such an encounter. Maybe a band of highwaymen has followed the peddler, waiting for him to meet with one or more monied customers? If so, they have stats as Caravan Guard (page 10); they outnumber the player characters 2:1, and close in from all directions, hidden by bushes and tall crops.

The player characters have a chance to spot them before they are ambushed, by making a **DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check**. If unsuccessful then the player characters are surprised during the first round of combat.





HISTLE HOLD – the town of hopes and dreams. It is also the Ambrian settlement closest to Davokar and therefore the one which is both most favored by and most afflicted by the gifts of the forest. Tense whispers are heard saying that the murderer currently hounding the northern districts of town is an example of the darker gifts – that he must be one of Davokar's abominations.

Quarrels are flaring up in every dive and tavern. Opinions seem to diverge when it is said that the notorious witch hunter Baumelo is in town, hunting the Flayer. And the same goes for the rumor stating that Mayor Nightpitch has been questioned in connection to the killings. Maybe the coachman you heard mumbling to himself the other night has a point: *"In the shadow of Davokar nothing is what it seems. It is always worse. Always much, much worse..."*



The Mark of the Beast

FOR LEVELS 2-3

Introduction

Welcome to *The Mark of the Beast*, an adventure for Symbaroum meant to introduce players and Gamemasters to the town of Thistle Hold through a series of gruesome murders.

This is a classic type of adventure, with a beginning, a middle and an end. The text is structured according to a number of events which are likely to occur as the player characters strive to unravel the murder plot. But as always, the GM must be prepared to improvise. In order for Ambria and Davokar to come off as living and breathing, it is imperative that the players' initiatives are allowed to influence both the course and the final outcome of the adventure.

The Gamemaster's Introduction

***THE MARK OF** the Beast* is an adventure that features numerous agents besides the player characters. The basic plot is simple, but dealing with the situation may prove a challenging task.

The murderer known as the Flayer is a changeling named Alahara, whose goal is to keep his beloved Gorak alive. Gorak has been infected by an artifact that he stole from a tomb in the forest of Davokar – a withered human cranium wearing the crown of a king. Within the skull the corrupt spirit of the long dead king lives on, vindictive and full of hatred.

Alahara is fighting a losing battle, taking drastic measures in the hope of saving his love, or at least postponing the inevitable. While studying his books on sorcery, the changeling has read that the consumption of certain human glands may cure or alleviate symptoms of corruption.

Alahara has other gifts as well – he uses his *blood shrouding* spell and wanders the streets in disguise on the hunt for glands.

Below is a description of the story's main characters. The Gamemaster needs to understand who they are, what they want and what they are prepared to do to get there. This will serve the GM well when the player characters, as expected, do the unexpected in their attempt to save the day.

HURIAN-LO APAK, THE KING'S SKULL

During the era of Symbaroum, a long line of emperors and local rulers came and went. For a period of time the region now dominated by Davokar was governed by numerous regional kings. One of these was named Hurian-Lo Apak.

King Hurian was neither the greatest nor the smallest king at that time, nor was he the cruelest (then again, he had a lot of insane rulers to compete with in that category). Despite being a capable sorcerer he ended his days like most of his colleagues: in a crypt surrounded by his most precious belongings. But for the venerable King Hurian, death was not the end but the start of a long, long wait.

The bitterness over an all too premature death combined with well-developed mystical skills made his spirit cling to the lifeless body, waiting for a second chance to rule. That chance appeared when the treasure-hunter Gorak entered his crypt.

GORAK, BLIGHT-MARKED FORTUNE-HUNTER

Along with his partner Alahara, Gorak led an expedition to an ancient tomb deep in the forest of Davokar. The grave proved to be from Symbaroum's early days, a remote resting place for a barbarian king, as well as a virtual gold mine of treasure. Gorak was especially fascinated by the mummy king himself, and his crown in particular. Unfortunately, the copper crown had merged with the skull wearing it, so the whole cranium had to be removed and brought along. Adorned and burdened by the tomb's treasures, the expedition returned to its point of departure, Thistle Hold.

The Mark of the Beast and *The Promised Land*

This can serve as an independent sequel to the sample adventure *The Promised Land*. It is not necessary for the player characters to have made it through *The Promised Land* to be able to take on this adventure, but it will add to the experience.

Adventure Timeline

The early days of Symbaroum
King Hurian-Lo Apak is buried

About a year ago
Gorak and Odako meet

About 8 months ago
Gorak's expedition reaches the tomb

About 6 months ago
The expedition members live like kings in Thistle Hold
The members of the expedition start dying
Gorak goes into hiding

About 4 months ago
Odako kills the witch hunter Baumelo and assumes his identity

About 3 months ago
The last surviving members of the expedition are caught by the Iron Pact (*The Promised Land*)

About 1 week ago
Alahara kills for the first time in Thistle Hold

Two days ago
The false Baumelo (Odako) enters Thistle Hold

Back in town the members of the expedition lived like kings for a while. The boastful Gorak even showed mayor Nightpitch the king's skull during a drunken evening at the Salons of Symbaroum. Rumors began to spread about elves being sighted within the town walls and soon thereafter the expedition members began to die in more or less spectacular ways. A couple of them managed to flee south but were later hunted down and killed by the elves (or by the characters who played *The Promised Land*). Gorak and Alahara went into hiding, taking the king's skull with them.

Baumelo, False Witch Hunter

There are many small villages along Davokar's southern border. Among the population of these, the Black Cloak Baumelo has become known as a vicious witch hunter, especially after he burned the village of Anamark to cinders when hunting a blight-marked resident. In another village close to Davokar, Glimmervann, the charismatic cultist Odako lived with his followers. There the Black Cloak's hunt for abominations ended, as the cultists ambushed him and thrust a handful of daggers into his back.

Shortly thereafter, when Glimmervann was visited by a blight-marked treasure-hunter who rambled on about a whispering skull and a catastrophic expedition led by Gorak and Alahara, Odako and his followers devised a plan.

Odako was already acquainted with Gorak, since they had discussed the possibility of preparing and launching an expedition together. So he and his not so merry men traveled to Thistle Hold hoping to get a closer look at the talking king's skull, and they did so dressed up as Baumelo and his witch hunters. Dressing like this allowed them to move freely and interrogate those involved without interference, since next to no one dares get between a notorious witch hunter and his prey.

Baumelo (Odako)

Medium human (Ambrian)

Armor Class 17 (scale mail)
Hit Points 49 (9d8 + 9)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)

Skills Deception +6, Insight +4, Intimidation +6, Perception +4, Persuasion +6
Senses passive Perception 14
Languages Ambrian
Challenge 1 (200 XP, proficiency bonus +2)
Manner points at whomever he is speaking to
Shadow pale red with flaky segments (Corruption: 7/8 seen as 1/4 when exchange shadow is in effect)
Equipment book with prayers, tools for interrogations, 1d10 shillings

Ritualist. Baumelo can cast detect magic, exchange shadow, and heretic's trail as rituals (he gains no temporary Corruption for casting, spell attack +6, saving throw 14).

ACTIONS

Grappling Axe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) slashing damage or 8 (1d10 + 3) slashing damage if wielded with both hands.

Heavy Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 100/400 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d10 + 2) piercing damage.

MASTER VERNAM, AGENT OF THE IRON PACT

Thistle Hold is a vibrant city and things are quickly forgotten, even when it comes to a series of gruesome deaths where all victims had been part of the same expedition. When the victims of the Flayer appeared, one after the other, no one made a connection between the curse of the king's skull and the new wave of murders. That is, no one except the tutor Master Vernam, who had been informed of what happened during the adventure *The Promised Land* by his allies: the elves of the Iron Pact.

Alahara, the Flayer

As the members of their latest expedition started to die, Alahara and Gorak found shelter from the Iron Pact in an old warehouse belonging to the Blue Moon trading house. Gorak was already plagued by corruption and in bad shape, unable to embark on any longer journeys.

About a week ago Gorak slipped out, killed two people near the Toad's Square and consumed their entrails. Alahara found him in a pool of blood and lured him back to the hideout, where he tied his beloved to the wall. The changeling swore to do anything to save Gorak from becoming thoroughly corrupt. And so the Flayer was born.

A Classic Opening

An alternative for players used to a more traditional, direct, approach, this opening has the player characters get involved regardless of whether they have personal incentives to do so. If so, Master Vernam has seen the characters in a vision about the murders and written them a letter before he died. Vernam's letter (described on page 34) is then delivered directly to the player characters through his assistant Esbetha.

A goblin messenger runs up to them somewhere in the Hold, handing them a leather tube and holding out a hand as a sign that she wants to be paid (a single orteg or shilling will do). The goblin's happy grin exposes two rows of sharp teeth before she gives a short bow and runs off on new adventures.

The letter rolled up in the tube (see handouts on pages 203–204) will then lead the player characters to the home and workplace of the tutor.

Player Introduction

FOR THIS ADVENTURE to become truly enjoyable the player characters need incentives, first for approaching Master Vernam and later for wanting to solve the murders. Preferably these incentives can be rooted in the goals of the gaming group.

In groups that base their gaming on the personal goals of the player characters and the ambitions they have as a team, the Gamemaster is tasked with working out the motives for finding Vernam and solving the murder plot, preferably together with the players. Here are some inspirational pointers:

- **Delivering the Sun Stone:** If the characters have played The Promised Land and agreed to help Edira, she will want to present the Sun Stone to Master Vernam. After discovering the murder, she will also plead for their assistance in finding out what actually happened.
- **Contacts:** Player characters with the feature *Contacts* can know about Master Vernam if they ask themselves (that is, the GM) *"Who do I know in Thistle Hold?"* and then succeed with the check. Characters with contacts in the Queen's Rangers, Ordo Magica or among witches and fortune-hunters are most likely to have heard about the tutor, but the Gamemaster can be generous with who gets to make the check since Vernam was well traveled and had many acquaintances. His diligent work trying to craft a peaceful coexistence with the elves is renowned and not always appreciated, so his name is also recognized within Ambria's army, the Sun Church and among the nobles.
- **The Iron Pact:** If the player characters have encountered the Iron Pact before (maybe in the tutorial adventure The Promised Land), many Ambrian scholars can refer to Master Vernam, since he *"once served Ordo Magica but now behaves like an agent of the woodland elves."*
- **A referral:** The characters may be referred to Master Vernam if they are searching for an answer to almost any kind of learned or mystical mystery. The person they are talking to claims not to know the answer but is very sure that the tutor in Thistle Hold does.

The Chapters

BELOW YOU WILL find a summary of the adventure's three chapters, following the course of the murder investigation – from the characters' involvement (chapter 1), through their investigations (chapter 2), up to the final climax (chapter 3).

CHAPTER 1: THE QUANDARY OF MASTER VERNAM

The player characters seek to visit, or are invited to see, Master Vernam, one of the most hired tutors in Thistle Hold. As they enter his academy, they learn that the tutor has been murdered. If they have played through the Promised Land they will most likely conclude that the slaying is linked to an artifact found in the forest of Davokar, and that the tutor's death is connected to a series of other brutal killings in Thistle Hold.

Adding to that, the chapter introduces the notorious Black Cloak Baumelo, or in reality the cultist Odako who has murdered Baumelo and stolen his identity – all with the aim of acquiring the king's skull for himself.

CHAPTER 2: TRAILING THE FLAYER

In the second chapter the player characters get involved in the hunt for the killer, on their own accord or as a work for hire crew.

For player characters who have played the adventure *The Promised Land* it should be evident relatively early what is causing the murders. The murderer's victims can offer the player characters valuable clues, and witness statements provide further assistance. But finding the Flayer and putting an end to his killing spree is not easily done.

CHAPTER 3: THE WILL OF A KING

When the player characters finally have uncovered the plot and traced the killer back to his hideout, the hardest part still remains: ending the Flayer's reign of terror. This too has its intricacies. And when the murderer has been taken care of, yet another question begs an answer: what should the characters do with the cursed cranium!?

The Quandary of Master Vernam

At the start of the adventure, the player characters are in Thistle Hold or have just arrived. They have an incentive to visit Master Vernam and will therefore become involved in the murder mystery. The first event introduces the false witch hunter Baumelo, and after that come events describing the murder of Vernam and the examination of his office.

Divine Complications

A GIRL COMES dashing through the crowded streets; she bumps into one of the player characters and falls down. Close on her heels, about half a dozen men dressed in black come running, some of them with weapons drawn. The girl rises and grabs the character she bumped into, begging for her life: *"Don't let the witch hunter take me!"*

The henchmen form a half-circle in front of the characters, demanding that they hand over the girl. Behind them a large crowd of spectators gathers, many of them agitated and condemning. They point at the girl saying things like: *"There she is, the abomination, the Flayer!"* Others are more hesitant: *"Can it really be her, who has skinned all those people? She looks so ... normal ..."* Some know-it-all explains: *"That's what's so horrid with corruption sickness, it can hide where one least expects it."* Some solemn spectators nod agreement.

The leader of the hunters takes a threatening step forward, repeating his demand: *"In the name of the Black Cloak Baumelo, give us the heretic or be branded heretics yourselves!"*

The girl, who calls herself Tenid, claims that her neighbor has accused her of witchery in an attempt to lay claim on her henhouse. She admits to being skilled in the art of witchcraft, but denounces all accusations of having dealings with dark powers.

If the characters are about to hand her over, Tenid tries to break free; a successful **DC 13 Strength check** is required to maintain a grip on her. Should the player characters refuse to obey, the henchmen (use the **thug** entry from page 187 in the *Bestiary*) draw steel and attack. The actual fighters outnumber the player characters by one (e.g. if there are four players then five thugs attack). However, they will only fight until the characters have proven that they can defend themselves, in this case once half of the attackers have fallen or been neutralized some other way. As they retreat the leader raises his fist and shouts: *"Baumelo will hear of this!"*

Player characters who are priests or are knowledgeable about the Sun Church for other reasons may make a **DC 10 Intelligence (Religion) check** to recall that Baumelo is a famous Black Cloak whose witch hunts have destroyed whole villages. Baumelo himself enters the stage in "The Black Cloak Arrives" on page 40.

The Academy of Master Vernam

UPON REACHING THE academy a pale-looking woman meets them at the door, introducing herself as Esbetha, a junior tutor. She is noticeably shaken; her lower lip quivers. Once the player characters ask to see Vernam and have assured her that they have peaceful intentions, Esbetha quietly guides them up the stairs to the top floor. No pupils are moving around the house and if asked Esbetha answers that she has sent them home.

She stops at a wooden door and turns towards them: *"What you are about to witness is ... horrifying. I've seen it, right before you came."*

The door swings open and there is blood everywhere. The skinned body of a man hangs upside-down from the ceiling, and its entrails and skin lies below. One window is opened and bloody footprints lead out onto the roof of the adjacent building.

The Academy

The tall and narrow academy building of Master Vernam lies just north of the Park of the Elders. It is four stories high, with an entry hall and offices at the ground level, and lecture rooms on levels two and three. The top floor contains two smaller rooms for private tutorship and Vernam's private office.

The player characters have at least three ways to start the investigation: check the murder scene, follow the murderer's footprints or question Esbetha. A fourth option is to cast a spell, if the player characters know any.

The event they are trying to get a grip on played out as follows:

- Master Vernam came to his room and sat down to do some work.
- A while later the elf Tara-Kel (Iron Pact member) came by to report that the king's skull had not been recovered and that it probably remains in Thistle Hold, hidden away.
- Tara-Kel left the residence and Vernam wrote a letter to Mayor Nightpitch. Then someone knocked at the window; it appeared to be Tara-Kel but was Alahara dressed in the elf's skin (see *blood shrouding*, page 190). Vernam let "Tara-Kel" in, and was soon strangled and slaughtered by Alahara hunting for glands and a fresh skin that would make it possible for him to enter Ordo Magica's tower and learn the spell *dispel magic*.
- In other words, it is "Master Vernam" who leaves the murder scene over the roofs, or more exactly: Alahara dressed in the skin and clothes of the late tutor.

THE MURDER SCENE

There are a number of clues at the murder scene:

The body. Esbetha can confirm that the body hanging from the ceiling matches the physiognomy of Master Vernam. The skinned corpse is missing two digits on its left hand which makes it easy to identify (he lost the fingers while living with the witches in Davokar).

A successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine) check** (characters with the Medicus feature have advantage) provides further information – Vernam was strangled before he was skinned; and although most of the entrails are there some glands are not: the adrenal, thyroid and pineal glands. According to some scriptures, these precise glands may contain energies that counteract corruption. Interestingly enough, all those organs can be removed without skinning the body, and yet all skin has been carefully removed, strip by strip...

A **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check** reveals that the hair on the floor is brown, but an oil painting nearby depicts Vernam with black hair. Furthermore, a closer examination of the skin exposes an elf 's pointy ears. Clearly, Master Vernam hangs from the ceiling, but the skin underneath does not belong to the tutor. His skin is gone.

A successful **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check** allows the character to remember having heard of a sorcery spell called *blood shrouding* (page 190), with which a mystic can flay a body and assume its form for a day. This probably has nothing to do with the glands, which must serve some other purpose.

The Iron Pact Ring (artifact). With a **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check**, one of the characters finds a rusty ring of iron on the floor beneath Vernam's desk. The ring is bloodied and was most likely tossed aside by the murderer while skinning his victim.

The inside of the ring is inscribed; the Loremaster feature allows a character to recognize it to be in Elvish (which is hardly ever written) and read the inscription: "Nevermore". The character realizes that it is a ring of the Iron Pact, a symbol of a long dead alliance between the Elder Folk and an unknown number of human princes, aimed at fighting back the darkness spreading from Symbar.

A character can recognize that the ring is an artifact by casting *detect magic* or *identify*, by using the Shadow-sight feat, or by making a **DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check** after discovering the Elvish writing (page 194).

The letter for Lasifor Nightpitch. A letter lies on the floor, stained with blood but apparently written by Vernam and addressed to Mayor Nightpitch. What little is discernible reads as follows:

Dear Master Nightpitch,

I know that we seldom see eye to eye, but let me [...] *and that the skull of the King was shown to you, numerous sources have told me* [...] *infects all who touch it, infects with the power of corruption. You appear to have escaped its destructive powers, maybe you never held it* [...] *how the atrocities and the killings are connected to all this I cannot claim to know, but from a reliable source I have heard that* [...]

A successful **DC 13 Intelligence (Alchemist's Supplies) check** allows a player character to use vinegar and other fluids to wash the blood away so the whole text appears:

Dear Master Nightpitch,

I know that we seldom see eye to eye, but let me once again try to explain why I believe that Gorak's failed expedition is connected to the current killings, performed by the so-called Flayer. I know that Gorak sought you out and that the skull of the King was shown to you, numerous sources have told me as much, and I realize that a possible link between the murders and the skull is politically delicate.

The King's skull infects all who touch it, infects with the power of corruption. You appear to have escaped its destructive powers; maybe you never held it which, if so, was wise. My elven friends have told me that their soothsayers dreamed of the dead king at the time when Gorak was parading around town with his cranium, and they have returned to me saying that they are still dreaming, meaning that the corrupting powers of the skull are still active here in Thistle Hold.

Precisely how the atrocities and the killings are connected to all this I cannot claim to know, but from a reliable source I have heard that the art of flaying is an ancient and baneful one, born of darkness.

Never more the Dark,
Master Vernam

THE FLAYER'S ROUTE

As mentioned, the window is ajar and bloody footprints lead away from the body.

A successful **DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check** shows that the window and frame are undamaged. It must have been opened from inside; Vernam probably let the killer in. From the scene of butchery, a trail of bloody footprints leads back to the window. A **DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check** makes it possible to track the trail out onto the roof: the killer stopped to wipe their feet. The trail leads along the rooftop, and acrobatically over to nearby buildings. Close to the Toad's Square the killer climbed down and their footprints are lost among hundreds of others. They could have continued along the roofs, so there must be a reason for their descent, something of importance near the square.



Versions of Master Vernam's letter in various conditions are available for reproduction on pages 201–202.

Vernam and the Iron Pact

Master Vernam was allied to the Iron Pact, one of very few humans to do so, and all but unique among Ambrians: this was his true reason for stepping down from a position of power in Ordo Magica. To Vernam, the fight against the corruption of Symbaroum comes first, and he could not serve the order wholeheartedly while at the same time fighting for the Iron Pact. He remained a member of Ordo Magica, because of its vast knowledge but also because he hoped that he – however unlikely – would be able to convince more wizards that the struggle of the Iron Pact is righteous. Had he succeeded it would have meant a great victory in the battle against the Dark.

INTERVIEW WITH ESBETHA

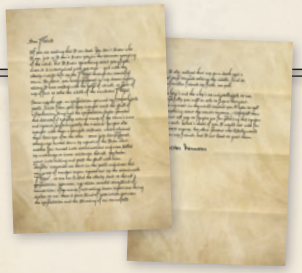
Besides the killer, Esbetha was the last one to see Vernam alive, and it is likely that the player characters want to know if she has noticed anything that can help them.

Esbetha has the following to say about the day's events: Master Vernam came home after running some errands and seemed to be his usual, calm self. He tutored a couple of students after which he closed the door to his study – also his usual routine. Sometime later she heard a loud bang, and Esbetha asked about it through the door. Master Vernam told her not to worry; it was only a window beating in the wind. After that all was silent and it was not until an hour or so later, as she went to his room with wine and biscuits, that she found her employer murdered and skinned.

Since then, Esbetha has been sitting in her room by the entry hall and she is sure that no one has entered that way; a bell rings as the front door is opened.

A successful **DC 11 Wisdom (Insight) check** reveals that Esbetha is hiding something. A successful **DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) check** or questions about the rusty iron ring from the murder scene make her add to the story:

Some time after Vernam had shut himself in his room but before the bang, an elf came to visit. She does not know the elf's name but recalls having seen her before. Esbetha does not even try to hide her profound dislike of elves and Master



Master Vernam's letter is reproduced on pages 203–204.

Vernam's dealings with them: *"He was a member of their sect, or whatever they call it; I knew it would come to this, sooner or later!"* By sect Esbetha means the Iron Pact and if asked why she detests elves she answers that they are unwholesome nature-worshipers, and that anyone who regularly visits the temple of Prios shouldn't need to ask.

VERNAM'S LETTER TO THE CHARACTERS

If the Gamemaster wishes, the following can be added to the investigation: a letter from Vernam to the characters, to be delivered in case of his demise. This may not fit all game groups and is not required for the adventure to be played. Some players might perceive its content as blatant and feel that it undermines the mystery in the name of unnecessary exposition.

But for other groups the letter can be seen as a perfect embellishment that functions as a deeper and more dramatic sounding board for the adventure. Only the Gamemaster, who understands their players, will know if it is suitable or not to include the letter in the story. If so, play out the rest of this event:

Esbetha suddenly looks up and says: *"By the way, I have something for you."* She walks away only to return with a sealed letter. It carries the seal of Master Vernam. She says that he gave her the letter about a week ago (the day of the second Flayer killing). He left no specific instructions, only that it should be *"given to the first persons who come to visit me after my death."* Esbetha did not think much about it at the time; Vernam was very eccentric and this was not nearly the strangest thing he had asked of her. The letter reads:

Dear Friends,

If you are reading this I am dead. You don't know who I am, just as I don't know you in the common meaning of the word. But I know something about your faith, since it is intertwined with my own – and with the bloody tracks left by the Flayer through our beautiful town. In short, you have appeared in my dream sights, visions I have evoked with the help of rituals, as part of my effort to solve the riddle of the murderous Flayer.

Some months ago, an expedition returned to Thistle Hold. Aside from gold they brought back the skull of a Symbarian King and the expedition leader paraded this distasteful trophy around many of the town's inns and taverns. Unfortunately, the treasure-hunters also brought with them a horrible sickness, which claimed their lives one after the other – some just disappeared, others were hunted down by agents of the Iron Pact, another few turned into abominations and were killed by watchmen or brave residents. Gorak, the leader, went into hiding and took the skull with him.

Peoples' memories are short in the Hold and since this new wave of murders began, carried out by the abominable "Flayer", no one has linked the bloody deeds to Gorak's expedition. However, my vision revealed some kind of connection; after many frustrating dream sights one thing is clear to me: there is some kind of association between the expedition and the skinning of our townsfolk. Alas, I also realized that my own death was a crucial step towards solving the riddle. And so, my unfamiliar friends by faith, are you. The how's and the why's are unintelligible to me, but hopefully you will be able to figure them out.

If ever we meet in the world beyond you'll have to tell me everything about the events to come. Till then I can but ask you to forgive me for placing this burden on your souls. What's ahead of you I would not wish for my greatest enemy, let alone persons who likely would have been my friends, had I but lived to greet them.

Master Vernam

MYSTICAL PATHS TOWARDS UNVEILING THE MYSTERY

Below you will find a summary of what spells or rituals may be effective in solving the murder mystery, and specific suggestions on what they can reveal regarding Vernam's murder. Many of them are likely beyond the player characters' current capabilities – they might have a contact who can cast one of the spells for them, or you might choose to run this adventure for higher level characters, knowing that this might make the investigation components easier.

Commune

The Theurg may ask three yes/no questions regarding the adventure. Questions about the past are easy to answer, but it is harder for the GM to know what will or will not happen in the future. If uncertain it is recommended that the GM responds by stating the answer is "unclear, ask again" so the player may rephrase or change the question.

Speak with Dead

The player character may ask Master Vernam up to five questions. Questions that are hard to answer can be met with silence, giving the player a chance to rephrase or change the question.

Contact Other Plane

With a successful Intelligence saving throw the Witch may ask up to five questions; the GM is required to answer with the truth but be very succinct. The key to an effective use of *contact other plane* in the game is to never give the player character exactly what they are after, but always provide something helpful.

The answer can be a sudden vision or a name, depending on what the Gamemaster thinks may provide enough information without spoiling the entire mystery. Examples of questions and answers:

- **"Who killed Master Vernam?"** – *"The elf Tara-Kel"* (Alahara was in the elf's shape when the murder was committed.)
- **"Who wore the elf's skin?"** – *"The changeling Alahara"*
- **"Who's the next victim?"** – *"Harulo"*

- **"Who is behind the killings?"** – Many possible answers, but *"King Hurian Lo-Apak"* is recommended, followed by a flash image of the King at the prime of his life, wearing his shining copper crown, sitting on a throne in a hall full of subjects kneeling before the grim gaze of the ruler. King Hurian's hand rests between the horns of a lindworm that is chained to the throne, casually scratching the beast with long fingernails.
- **"Where is the Flayer?"** – it is recommended that the GM provides the current position of Alahara in response. If posed during the murder scene investigation Alahara visits Ordo Magica; later he goes to Blackmoor hunting for a new victim some distance from Gorak's hideout. Alahara makes short stops at the warehouse to feed Gorak the glands, but he never stays longer than necessary.
- **"Where does the Flayer sleep?"** – Alahara sleeps in different places and uses stimulants to sleep as little as possible. The spell might provide a vision of an inn, a shed and a muddy tunnel all as a sign that the killer does not linger in one place for very long.
- **"Where is the King's Skull?"** – the question results in a vision of a cellar where someone (Gorak) sits bound to the wall and the skull lies whispering on a broken pillar. A slender shadow is also seen (Alahara), that feeds, comforts and weeps by the captive.

The Value of Spells and Rituals

It is very important that the GM rewards the players with something helpful when they make use of rituals and spells; the players have made an important choice by selecting that resource and then (likely) taking on Corruption in order to use it. The GM should also exploit the limitations of magic to maintain the mystery, but remember that even if the players learn who the Flayer is and why he commits these murders they still have to find him and put an end to his horrible deeds. And that is a great challenge in itself – especially for a group of characters who have focused on problem-solving abilities.

Trailing the Flayer

This chapter introduces a small adventure landscape, with a series of events that are likely to appear as the characters investigate the recent murders in Thistle Hold. The player characters may tackle these next scenes in whichever order they like, and they do not even have to face them all in order to move on to the third chapter and its grand finale.

The Tower of Ordo Magica

SLY CHARACTERS WILL reach the conclusion that the killer – now in Master Vernam's form – can gain entry to places that the tutor had access to. If they ask about locations Vernam used to visit they are given four options. Only two of them are relevant for the adventure but the GM can use this opportunity to introduce the Hold to the players. Esbetha, or someone else, can testify that the tutor regularly visited the following places/persons:

- **The Salons of Symbaroum**, for food and drinks.
- **Father Sarvola at the Mission House**, since the tutor helped with the education of orphaned children and the cultivation of goblin juveniles.
- **Captain Tallios of the Town Watch**, who he visited to keep updated on the Flayer killings.
- **His Alma Mater, the town's Ordo Magica chapter**, to study rituals or read something in its library. The tower of the order, with its well-equipped ritual chamber, was Alahara's actual goal.

The Tower of Ordo Magica

Aside from the Beacon, the seven story tall tower of Ordo Magica is the tallest building in town. It is located in the southwestern district, close to Nightpitch's residence, standing on a walled plot that also contains a garden full of strange plants gathered in Davokar. A spiral stair runs up the center of the tower from the entry hall.

Through openings on the different levels you can see libraries, teaching rooms and dimly lit hallways. The ritual chamber is found at the top, behind a locked door to which none but the Masters have the key.

DOORKEEPER GODALG

Gaining access to the tower of Ordo Magica can be easy, take time or not be possible at all, depending on who the characters are and how they choose to introduce themselves.

The elderly goblin Godalg is appointed to be the tower's doorkeeper and takes his job very seriously. His task is to greet everyone arriving at the chapter and do so with the main aim of not letting them in. All manner of people come knocking on the door hoping to *"gain an audience with the Masters,"* who in turn have no desire to be of service. Even the more prominent residents of Thistle Hold can be made to wait before meeting a Master, and none of them can be sure of having access to the Chapter Master, Cornelio.

Members of Ordo Magica are let in without question and are welcome to explore the tower. Player characters with a certificate from Mayor Nightpitch are also welcome (see page 38). All others must display proper behavior. In order to gain entry, one needs an errand that appears reasonable to Godalg – which the characters have, if they stress that one of the current visitors may be a killer in disguise.

But for Godalg to disturb a Master, a **DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) check** is required. If successful, the player characters are immediately given an audience with Master Eufrynda. If failed, the goblin says that the Master will send for them when she has time to greet them, which proves to be about six hours later.

THE LEDGER

The player characters may try to gain information from Godalg, which requires a valid argument. The character must make a **DC 10 Charisma (Perception) check**. On a regular success, Godalg discloses that "Master Vernam" has been to the tower, but that he has since left. The goblin did not think twice about the tutor's appearance. However, a quick comparison of Vernam's latest signature in the ledger (made by Alahara) with the one made earlier clearly shows two different writing styles. This strengthens the characters' arguments for meeting a Master – a character can repeat the request to see a master with advantage on the check. If they want to know what Vernam did at the tower, Godalg tells them to ask Master Eufrynda when (or if) they gain an audience.

If the character succeeded by 5 or more, the doorkeeper claims to be fairly certain that the tutor visited the ritual chamber – the place for the ritual library and also for the tower's Magic Circle. Moreover, Godalg explains that only Masters can provide entry to the chamber, thus the characters must wait for an audience to get in. Of course, Vernam could enter at his convenience, being a Master of the order.

THE RITUAL CHAMBER

In case none of them is a Master of Ordo Magica, the player characters need the company of someone else if they want to enter the chamber. Characters who are granted an audience will get to meet and talk to the haughty, pipe-smoking Master Eufrynda.

Among the towering and cramped shelves there are spell scrolls containing copies of most spells covered by the tradition of Wizardry. In a ledger Master Vernam's name can be found next to the entry for a scroll containing *dispel magic* prepared by a Master (Alahara intends to sever the magic between Gorak and the king's skull). Curiously, the Master was Vernam himself and Eufrynda can explain that the Master would have little use for the scroll, being able to cast it directly.

The Bloody Past

SOONER OR LATER the characters will show an interest in the previous murders. The best way to gain information is to start by talking to Corpse Examiner Ilantro, and Captain Tallios who oversees the district where the killings took place.

THE CORPSE EXAMINER

Ilantro is the Medicus of the Town Watch. The murders weigh heavily on the elderly drunkard; he has never experienced anything like the Flayer victims before. He is happy to talk about the murders but gaining access to his journals is harder.

After some pressure he claims to have examined the corpses thoroughly, but that is not quite true: because of malaise and intoxication he has done a very poor job. He says that the bodies were identified by the skins found next to them, but withholds that the actual work was done by his assistant. He did a more detailed study of the first victim; in the later cases he never did much more than determine

that they were also missing the three glands. Altogether, this means that the conclusions of the Corpse Examiner contain grave errors.

Ilantro has the following to say about when and where the victims were found:

Victim #1
Gerek, trapper, by the Toad's Square, north side of the Beacon, six days ago. Actually, the skin from Gerek (whose body is in the Blue Moon warehouse) and the body of Lenn, victim #2.

Victim #2
Lenn, treasure-hunter, in a shed opposite to the Salons of Symbaroum, four days ago. Actually, the skin from Lenn and the body of Shanda, victim #3.

Victim #3
Shanda, barmaid at the Rose Garden, by her home near the North Gate, two days ago. Actually, the skin from Shanda and the body of Teoman, victim #4.

Victim #4
Teoman, chimney sweep, in a backyard hen-house near Master Vernam's home, same day the tutor was killed. Actually, the skin from Teoman and the body of the elf Tara-Kel, victim #5, whose skin was found next to Vernam's body.

Depending on what conclusions the characters made at the murder scene they may be able to correct Ilantro on some points, and there are also new deductions to be made:

- The skins next to the bodies belong to the previous victims.
- Consequently, the first Flayer victim Ilantro examined was not the first victim; there is another skinned body to be found somewhere in town.
- The victim prior to Vernam was an elf.

Garrison

Both the Corpse Examiner and Captain Tallios can be found at the garrison of the Town Watch, close to the South Gate. Aside from the Headquarters – where the Queen's Border Patrol and the northern division of the Queen's Rangers also have offices – there are stables, barracks and a clinic inside the walls. The gates to the area are open around the clock, not least because two of the barracks normally serve as dormitories for paying visitors. However, anyone who has a specific errand should address the gate guards, for instance if arriving in the hope of meeting one of the captains.

A successful **DC 10 Charisma (Persuasion) check** gives access to the Corpse Examiner's journals, by which the characters can come to yet another conclusion ...

Before the Flayer's killing spree started, two persons were butchered in an alley by the Toad's Square. Ilantro has not linked these to the Flayer killings, but characters who have tracked the murderer over the rooftops may see a connection – they lost the trail in that precise neighborhood. The two victims were ripped to pieces and not even race or sex was possible to determine, but they must have been killed simultaneously in the alley where they were found, nine days ago.

THE CAPTAIN'S TESTIMONIES

Captain Tallios has collected testimonies about the four Flayer killings in a special archive folder. Provided that the characters come off as trustworthy and claim to be investigating the murders they may look at the files for the victims who ended up like Vernam. The testimonies for the previous killings they have to ask for specifically, since the captain has failed to realize that they are connected.

Gorak's victims and witnesses:
Victim: Gidia, dancer at the Salons of Symbaroum.
Statement: *"It was dark but the abomination was darker still. The victim screamed like a child, then came the sound, as if someone tore a body in two, as if it were made of damp sailcloth. I ran."* – Alkered, sellsword

Victim: Bolgo, treasure-hunter
Statement: *"The man was huge, but the beast was bigger. First, I mistook it for a bear, but it sounded like... like... I don't know. Maybe it had been human once, one such abomination? But they only exist in Davokar, deep in the forest, right?"* – Natan, homebound construction worker.

The Logic of the Murders

The first two, positively beastly murders were committed by Gorak who hungered for glands, hoping to slow down the corruptive process. After that, Alahara took it upon himself to procure the "medicine" for his beloved, and with that the Flayer was born. When Tara-Kel started searching for the murderer as an agent of the Iron Pact she became a target. Master Vernam helped the elf and became a target himself. The fact that the tutor also had access to Ordo Magica was a welcome bonus, since a visit to the tower might provide Alahara with a spell that could free Gorak from the king's skull (a false assumption, but Alahara is desperate).

Alahara's victims and witnesses:

Victim #1

Statement: *"It just lay there, in the alley opening. People must have passed it by thinking it was slaughterhouse waste. But I noted that it was freshly butchered and when I came closer I saw that it was human. I lost my dinner, then I called for the Town Watch."* – Merkilo, Medicus

Victim #2

Statement: *"The body hung like a slaughtered animal; I thought it a strange place for tendering beef. But there was another man close by, a rough type, looked like a hunter so I didn't think much of it. But the day after I heard about the murder and went to tell the Town Watch about my observations. What if it was the killer I saw, the huntsman? He looked like just anyone. Unbelievable that such darkness, such raging blackness, can be hidden within a human being."* – Teodin, Innkeeper.

Victim #3

Statement: *"It wasn't a body, more like a pile of meat, as if someone had torn the person apart one sliver at a time. I threw up and ran home. I threw up even though I'm used to skin and tanning acids. Still I vomited! On the way home I bumped into a woman who seemed as surprised as me. I tried to warn her about what was in the alley, don't know if she heard me. Anyway, I ran straight to the Town Watch."* – Delker, tanner apprentice.

Victim #4

Statement: *"It smelled strange and I got suspicious; why the smell of slaughterhouse from a henhouse? The Town Watch told me what was in there but I never saw it myself. Life doesn't get better from seeing such things. I saw no one in the vicinity."* – Albogd, spice peddler

The Tale of Lasifor Nightpitch

THE PLAYER CHARACTERS know of one single person who has been close to the damned skull and still lives: Mayor Lasifor Nightpitch. This undoubtedly makes him an interesting witness, possibly also a suspect.

An audience at Nighthome is not easily arranged, but can be approved if the characters have the letter Vernam wrote moments before his death. The guards at the gate can be convinced to disturb their employer, but only if the player characters tell them the truth about their errand and succeed at a **DC 10 Charisma (Persuasion) check**.

If the check is successful, the guards will escort them through the gate and up the hill to the wooden residence. They have to wait on the front porch as one of their escorts goes to address the Mayor. But before long the doors swing open and they are welcomed inside.

Until Lasifor has time to greet them, they get to wait in a room with a large, varnished table surrounded by ten chairs. After more than a little while the Mayor enters along with his constant shadow, the witch Yagaba. He gives her a short introduction, but after that the witch stays in the background, watching the characters in silence.

Mayor Nightpitch puts on a lighthearted face as long as the characters are polite and refrain from accusing him of being involved in the murders. Open allegations or threats mean that the meeting is over and that the characters are escorted out.

If asked whether or not he touched the skull, Lasifor squints towards the character and responds with a question: *"Would I be sitting here today if I touched everything shown to me, or that I dug up in the forest myself?"*

Lasifor's tale of Gorak's expedition and what happened upon its return reads as follows:

Gorak claimed to know about a secret location in the woods and gathered a following that soon vanished into Davokar. The unfriendly changeling Alahara went along, devoted to Gorak as always, trailing his steps.

The remains of the expedition returned a couple of months later. They had not reached their original target – something about meeting an arch troll – but had instead found the tomb of an early Symbarian King. When they reentered the Hold they did so burdened with treasures. Gorak was most proud of the cranium of the dead king and its crown of copper, green from verdigris and merged to the skull. He paraded it around, talked to it and scared people with it, while his companions spent their grave gold.

About a week passed before one of the survivors transformed into a raging abomination; then they vanished one by one. A couple of them were found dead, but most just disappeared into thin air. At the same time there were rumors about elves infiltrating the town, but that was never confirmed.

Gorak and Alahara most likely went into hiding and their final remaining companion became blight-born and slew a couple of watchmen before she was cut down. All in all, they were all gone in a matter of weeks.

The Mayor is very anxious to have peace returned to Thistle Hold, and stopping the Flayer is therefore his highest priority. Hardly anyone in town says no to Lasifor Nightpitch, so if the characters come off as serious about solving the murders he can provide them with some assistance. In short, he composes a letter of introduction, instructing the reader to give the player characters all possible support in the hunt for the killer.



Another Murder

YET ANOTHER MURDER takes place, with the same bloody modus operandi as before. The victim is a stable boy called Harulo – he was all alone in the stable making him a perfect target for the opportunistic Alahara. By now, it is probably unofficially known among the authorities in town that the characters are working to solve the killings, which is why one of their contacts will call them to the scene.

THE STABLE

The corpse is in a small stable close to the Toad's Square. The body hangs upside-down and is skinned from its feet to the waistline. It appears as if the killer had to hurry. Like before, the three glands are missing but there is no skin by the body. Half a dozen Watchmen and Sergeant Milos keep the gathering crowd at bay. The guards seem to know who the characters are and they are free to enter the murder scene. One female member of the Town Watch, witness to the murder, stands alone in the stable.

With a successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check**, a character can discover a trail of blood leading from the scene, north towards the palisade. See page 40 on how to follow the trail to the murderer's hideout.

What happened in the stable?

Alahara, who looked like Master Vernam, was bleeding from the leg after a fight with the victim. When Keitara arrived, the changeling used his Change Self feat to shock her by assuming her appearance. After that, Alahara hurried to grab the glands but did not have time to get a new skin shrouding.

INTERROGATIONS

The guard Keitara witnessed the murder, or at least the skinning. She heard the sound of a fight and ran to the stable where she saw a scholar with blood-stained glasses carve into a body hanging from a beam. The killer looked at her and she came to a halt, mesmerized: the killer suddenly looked exactly like her!?

Keitara could not move but screamed for her colleagues. The Flayer stopped his work and left the scene limping; he was gone before anyone else had arrived. It looked like the murderer bled from the leg, but she is not sure – it was hard to tell since there was blood everywhere.

THE BLACK CLOAK ARRIVES

During the ongoing investigation and interrogation, the witch hunter Baumelo arrives with his entourage. The false witch hunter leads the group, with the pale youngster Terr following behind on a leash. Next come the surviving henchmen from the first event (page 31), if any.

Baumelo recognizes the characters from earlier and begs forgiveness for the harsh methods of his companions: *"They are used to thoroughly corrupt villages along Davokar's border, not with the complex conditions of a town."* The henchmen glare at the player characters but obey their master.

After the apology Baumelo whispers something to Terr, who then starts inspecting everyone around intensely, one at a time. When done he whispers something back.

The youngster is a psychic and was previously used by the real Baumelo the same way Odaka uses him now: his Shadow-sight feature makes him able to spot individuals and objects that are infected or otherwise tainted by the dark of Davokar.

Baumelo interrogates Keitara by casting *detect thoughts* and gains the same information as the characters. After that he questions the characters as a group, without demanding a telepathic hearing – he already knows all he needs to know. Finally, he suggests that he and the characters join forces and track down the Flayer together.

Asking for Assistance

If the player characters ask their contacts for assistance (for example to get help with spells, tracking or relevant lore) the Gamemaster can handle it in two ways:

- Make the aid into a Deus ex Machina, that is: let the contact solve the problem at the expense of the characters not receiving any experience for the challenge; after that the story continues as usual.
- Alternately, the contact may have a difficult demand for the characters, in the form of a task to be dealt with after the adventure. The task should not be in line with the characters' or the company's goals; it should feel like a burden. With this arrangement, the experience due is held hostage by the counter request – the Experience for the challenge is awarded when the contact's demand has been met (together with the experience from challenges in that future scenario).

The Flayer's Tracks

IT IS HIGH time for the player characters to find Alahara and put an end to the killings. This can be done in several ways. The most probable sequences of events are covered by the scenes below.

THE BLOOD TRAIL

The characters must succeed with a **DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check** to trace Alahara from the stable to the hideout under the warehouse of the Blue Moon. If they rejected Baumelo's collaboration offer, they will also realize that they are being shadowed if they make a successful **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check** or if any character has a passive Perception of 13 or higher.

The shadows can be lost by taking detours and making a **DC 13 Dexterity (Stealth) check**. When this is done, the characters arrive at the warehouse and Chapter 3 starts.

Odako and Alahara

The questioning of earlier witnesses and the latest telepathic interrogation of Keitara has made Odako realize that the Flayer is Alahara and that they actually have met before. This happened about a year ago, when Odako had a secret meeting with Gorak about a potential expedition into Davokar. Also Alahara was there, proudly introduced by Gorak as his "personal assassin".

BAUMELO'S AID

If the characters have a hard time dealing with the situation on their own and do not think to use their contacts – or lack relevant contacts – they can employ the aid of Baumelo. He is happy to perform a ritual which lets him "follow the blood trail" (a lie, see below). The trail will take both groups to the abandoned warehouse by the palisade, where Chapter 3 begins.

A successful **DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check** reveals that Baumelo uses the ritual *heretic's trail* (see page 190). The players will have to figure out for themselves how strange this is; the spell requires that the mystic has met the abomination in person and "Baumelo" denies that he has!

Deus Ex?

To let Baumelo track Alahara can look like a classic Deus ex Machina, meaning that the Gamemaster uses non-player characters to solve a challenge which the characters cannot handle themselves. Do let the players believe that is the case. This "help" comes at a high cost, aside from the characters not getting experience points for tracking Alahara. When Baumelo exposes himself for what he really is, the characters will have to pay.

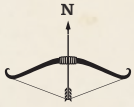
The Will of a King

Chapter three begins when the characters have located the old storage of the Blue Moon trading house. The whole chapter is set in and under the building that Alahara has made into the hiding place – and jail – of his beloved Gorak. Gorak is trapped halfway towards becoming an abomination and Alahara commits his heinous acts in a desperate attempt to stop the transformation. Also the king's skull is there, as a silent witness to the inescapable process.

Blue Moon

THE BLUE MOON trading house previously had a storage facility here but has abandoned it for a better location near the Antique Plaza. Technically they still own the building, but they have no knowledge about the occult activity now taking place in the dilapidated wooden structure.





1.5 m
5 feet

1. THE GATE

The warehouse door is locked from the inside and opening it without alerting the undead Gerek requires a **DC 11 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand or Stealth) check**. Inside are empty crates and the stench of death.

2. WINDOW

At the back of the building a window stands ajar. Climbing up there requires a **DC 10 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check**. On a success, the character can enter without alerting Gerek, on a failure they fall 10 feet.

3. STACKS OF CRATES

All these crates are empty.

4. SINGLE CRATE

Under the crate at the center of the floor is a steep spiral stair leading down. From below one can hear the lament of a tormented man – or is it a beast? – and a soft consoling voice.

5. GEREK

A skinned, reeking corpse dressed in leather armor and armed with a crowbar and a short chain stands in the corner.

The undead is Alahara's first victim, a trapper named **Gerek**. Gerek's skin was found beside the second victim, Lenn. In death, Gerek's remains were reanimated by the mere presence of the king's skull and he guards the warehouse as ordered by the wraith king Hurian. The creature will not attack Alahara or Gorak.

6. ALAHARA'S BED

Up on one of the stacks is a simple sleeping lair with a blanket covered in breadcrumbs. In addition, a spellbook lies there. It contains only two spells, *blood shrouding* and *dispel magic*.

Gerek

Medium undead

Armor Class 14 (studded leather)
Hit Points 30 (4d8 + 12)
Speed 20 ft

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	5 (–3)

Saving Throws Wis +2
Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, poisoned
Senses darkvision 60 feet, passive Perception 10
Languages understands the languages it knew in life but can't speak
Challenge 1/2 (100 XP, proficiency bonus +2)
Manner clicks teeth
Shadow deeply black (thoroughly corrupt)
Equipment none

Undead Fortitude. If damage reduces Gerek to 0 hit points, he can make a Constitution saving throw with a DC of 5 + the damage taken, unless the damage is radiant or from a critical hit. On a success, he drops to 1 hit point instead.

ACTIONS

Crowbar. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* (1d4 + 2) bludgeoning damage.

Chain. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* the target is grappled (escape DC 12) and restrained. The target must make a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw or become prone.

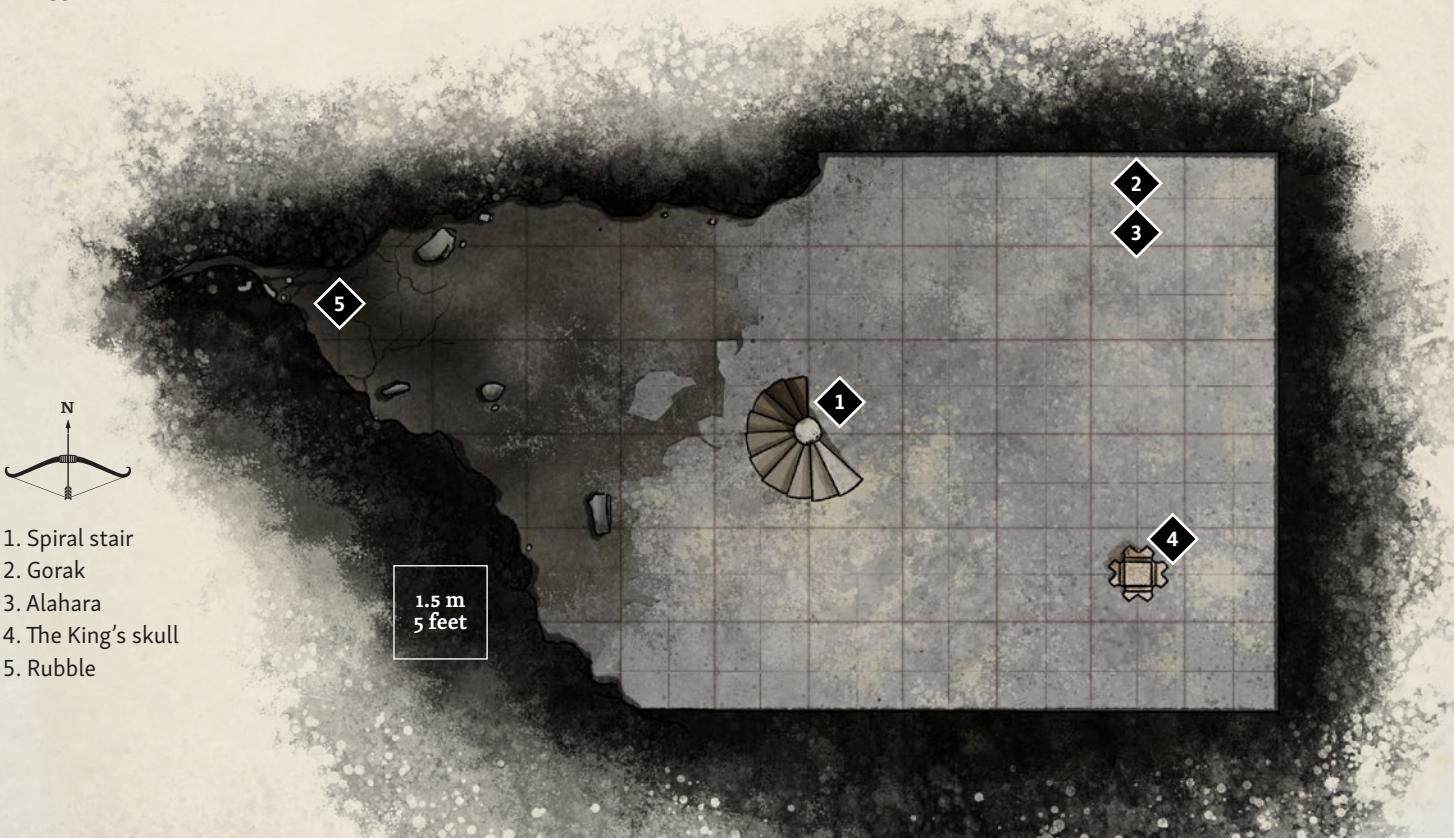
REACTIONS

Chain Attack. When a creature comes into reach, Gerek can make an attack with his chain.

The Sunken Watch Tower

A SYMBARIAN WATCH tower once stood on the location now shaded by Thistle Hold's palisade, close to the Toad's Square. The tower was razed hundreds of years ago, but not before its ground floor had sunken into the muddy soil to create a hidden chamber underground.

The Blue Moon trading house used to store shady goods smuggled from the depths of Davokar in the chamber, but nowadays the underground vault has an even more sinister function: as the prison of the severely blight-stricken Gorak and as the storage location of the sought-after and abominable cranium of King Hurian. In other words, the final confrontation between the player characters and the slaves of the king's skull will take place in the moldy dark of the vault!



1. Spiral stair
2. Gorak
3. Alahara
4. The King's skull
5. Rubble

THE BROKEN HEART

An ancient staircase winds downwards. Upon reaching the bottom one can see a huge blight-marked man tied to the far wall with thick ropes. In front of him stands Master Vernam (in truth, **Alahara**), dabbing the monster's forehead with a piece of cloth. On the other side of the vault is a broken pillar, now serving as a pedestal for a mummified skull wearing a verdigris-covered copper crown. At its base is a used spell scroll. (Alahara has already attempted *dispel magic*, but the power of the skull proved to be too much and it failed.)

The changeling tears off his borrowed clothes and skin and stands before the characters covered in nothing but blood. The fight is on!

Tactics: Alahara uses his change self feature when attacking the characters; to him Gorak's survival is all that matters. When Gorak finally transforms, Alahara stops fighting and walks weeping into certain death at the claws of his lost love.

Gorak is bound to the wall, his body twitching from corruption sickness. Two rounds into the fight he dies as something claws itself out of his skin: a towering creature with bare muscles, with fingers transformed into knives of bone, and with outgrowths from the cranium, as if it wore a pointy bone crown. This is a **blight-born human** (page 122 of the *Bestiary*).

When the abomination dies it transforms into a bloody heap that rapidly begins to rot. All that remains is the deformed cranium.

THE KING'S SKULL

On a pedestal in the dark lies a mummified cranium with a verdigris-covered crown merged to the bone. Player characters with Shadow-sight or any mystical features may make a **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check** to hear a low, grinding voice through the sounds of battle. The words are unintelligible but stir the fire in the blood.

If someone who hears the voice passes a **DC 13 Intelligence (Arcana) check**, they know that the voice speaks in ancient Symbarian and repeats the same phrase: *"Give me the blood, give me the victim, prove yourself worthy to serve."* When the fight is over the skull goes silent.

THE WITCH HUNTER'S DEMAND

If the characters failed to shake off Baumelo, he now enters the scene. Should he already be in their company he will do anything to acquire the skull. If the battle is tough, he will help the characters; Odako has nothing to gain from them dying too quickly, leaving him to fight Gorak alone.

After the battle he will demand the skull, for *"safekeeping"* – he is after all a Black Cloak and a witch hunter. If that trick does not work, he and his henchmen will try to claim it by force. For Baumelo use the given statblock (page 29), and the **thug** statblock for his henchmen (*Bestiary*, page 187).

Alahara

Medium changeling

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 60 (8d8 + 24)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	15 (+2)

Skills Deception +4, Perception +2, Stealth +4
Senses passive Perception 12
Languages Ambrian
Challenge 3 (700 XP, proficiency bonus +2)
Manner speaks with clenched teeth
Shadow black with scattered lights, like a cold and clear night sky (Corruption: 3/8)
Equipment 7 thaler

Change Self (1/day). Alahara can change his appearance, up to appearing to be of a different origin. His overall appearance (as a bipedal humanoid) remains the same.

Dedicated Focus (Necromancy). Alahara has made a special study of necromantic spells.

The Power of Corruption. Alahara can cast 3 spell levels worth without gaining Corruption.

Spellcasting. Alahara is a Sorcerer (spell attack +4, save DC 12) that knows the following spells:

Cantrips: *chill touch* (0), *dancing lights* (0), *fire bolt* (0), *message* (0), *minor illusion* (0), *ray of frost* (0)
1st-level spells: *black bolt* (1d4), *false life* (1d4 + 1), *shield* (1)
2nd-level spells: *inherit wounds* (1d4 + 2), *invisibility* (2), *suggestion* (1d4 + 2)
3rd-level spells: *larvae boil* (3), *vampiric touch* (1d4 + 3)
4th-level spells: *blight* (1d4 + 4)
Rituals: *blood shrouding*, *comprehend languages*, *spirit walk*

ACTIONS

Handaxe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) slashing damage.

Handaxe (off-hand). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d6) slashing damage.

The Skull of a King

IT IS PROBABLE that the player characters will end up with the king's skull (if Baumelo/Odako does not seize it), and if so they have a precarious question to answer: what to do with it? Hopefully they have come to realize that it is a really bad idea to touch the cranium so they handle it with care. There are lots of people who can agree to safeguard the artifact, and other options are to destroy it or to keep it for themselves – both being very risky choices.

In the following a number of alternatives are described, along with what they entail.

DESTROYING THE SKULL

To destroy the cranium is not very hard – it can be crushed, burnt or corroded just like any other skull. However, it is not quite safe to do so, even if no one actually touches the bone. The spirit of King Hurian Lo-Apak is thirsty for life and has not spent eternity in a tomb just to be vanquished in such a simple manner.

Luckily, this can be realized in a number of ways:

- Shadow-sight and a **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check** to realize the danger
- A **DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check**
- Spells like *divination, commune,* or *legend lore*.

The player characters may ask for help if they are incapable of figuring this out themselves, but at the cost of revealing the skull to one or more new individuals. In any case, if they destroy the cranium the King will try to possess them. The possession attempt is performed on one character at a time until there is no one left, and the rules of the attempt are as follows:

- The character with the highest Strength score is attacked first (King Hurian wants a stately and powerful vessel, worthy of becoming a Symbarian ruler). The victim has to make a **DC 15 Wisdom saving throw** to avoid being possessed by the king.
- If successful, the desperate spirit strikes out against the next person (the second strongest of the assembled), and so on. Should every possession attempt fail and the spirit runs out of bodies to attack it is finally destroyed for good.

KEEPING THE SKULL

Keeping the skull is relatively safe, to begin with, as long as no one touches it directly. After a week in the presence of the cranium, the characters start having strange dreams that grow worse until they become a very real danger.

Should they try to hide it away the same thing happens, but it takes a while longer – the dreams start after about a month and escalate to dangerous levels after approximately four months. The final stage of the dreamlike attacks is an attempt by the skull to possess the characters, as if they had destroyed it.

DREAMS OF THE KING

Time (Skull Close/Skull Far Away)	Dream Content	Effect
1 week/1 month	Visions of the King on his throne	None
2 weeks/2 months	Same vision with barely audible grumblings	None
3 weeks/3 months	Same vision but grumblings are louder	DC 13 Wisdom (Insight) check to realize possession attempt is near
4 weeks/4 months	Actual speech is loud and clear.	Possession attempt (see above)

THE BLACK CLOAKS' OFFER

That the Twilight Friars study abominations and collect corrupt artifacts is a well-known secret, and they would gladly accept a request to keep the king's skull safe.

If the characters have encountered Lestra during *The Promised Land*, it is her they meet in the monastery of the Black Cloaks. She does not like the idea of paying for the skull but will consider taking it from the characters for a small sum – 50 thaler, or 100 thaler if they succeed with a **DC 10 Charisma (Persuasion) check**.

Once the Black Cloaks know that the player characters have the skull and understand what it is, they will not let them leave with it. Any negotiation soon reaches a point where Lestra exclaims: *"This is what you'll get – and I would strongly advise you to accept it!"*

If the player characters refuse to give in, a group of Templars enters the room and takes the skull, offering nothing for it but the characters' lives; the champions of Prios are much more interested in learning about abominations and the corruption of the wilds than they are in being well-liked by adventurers.

Possessed by a King

As the effects of the possession begin to show, the GM can take the player of the possessed character to the side and explain what has happened. King Hurian's goal, which then becomes a part of the characters goal, is to return to his tomb, take a seat on the throne and regain his long lost glory. This can be a nice complication when it is time for the company to experience the next adventure in this compendium, Tomb of Dying Dreams. The possessed character can be played as usual but has a burning desire to reach the grave in Davokar. And once they get there, nothing else matters besides reaching the throne room...

Concluding Mood Pieces

When the dust settles it might be fitting to provide the players with a sense of what future they have created. Also, depending on where the skull ends up, opportunities for continued playing will emerge – for example if they decided to hide it somewhere, give it to the Black Cloaks or to more or less willingly hand it over to the false witch hunter. Two of the mood pieces below can be used to round off the ***Mark of the Beast*** and also to set the tone for what is to come.

Furthermore, if someone carries and is bound to the ring of the Iron Pact (found at the first murder scene), that character will come to receive dreams sent by other members of the pact, dreams exemplified in the third mood piece.

Odako and the King's Skull

THERE IS A great risk that the cult leader Odako leaves Thistle Hold with the King's skull, in which case the following can be narrated:

Night falls over the village, Davokar's silhouette merges with the dark of the skies. The man puts his witch hunter's coat down and picks up the skull of the King. He touches the tips of the copper crown with a finger, pulls the hand back as one of them pierces his skin, still sharp after centuries in the grave.

Sucking his fingertip he stares into the empty eye-sockets. Two faint lights dance inside, like distant stars. The lights mesmerize, enthrall, and inspire. A grinding voice whispers. The false witch hunter stands paralyzed, listening. Then he twitches, and falls to his knees, the skull held high before him. He clears his throat and says with voice trembling: "Thy will be done, my King, my Liege."

The Hidden King's Skull

IF THE SKULL is allowed to endure, hidden by the characters or in the possession of someone else (Black Cloaks or others), the spirit of King Hurian will continue fighting for his rebirth. If so, the following mood piece may be suitable:

The skull lays hidden in the dark, safe from prying eyes and fingertips; the silence is as solid as the walls surrounding the hiding place. Suddenly there is a sparkle in the darkness as two faint lights are lit in the empty eye-sockets of the skull, glowing like far away stars. Soon the sound of iron against rock can be heard. The rhythmic clanks grow louder and louder and finally the pickaxe breaches the wall. The light from outside is screened off by a pale face looking in; whose gaze meets that of the long dead king. "So this is where you've been captive, my King, my Liege ..." *Greedy hands grip the skull, to free it from captivity. The cranium smiles its dead smile as it emerges from darkness, out into the light of the lantern.*

Dreams of the Iron Pact

A CHARACTER WHO wears Vernam's ring will be contacted by the Iron Pact. The agents of the pact soon realize that the tutor is dead and use dreams to invite the new owner of the ring to a meeting:

The clearing is silent; the surrounding trees sway softly in a barely noticeable breeze. A lone shape sits on the moss-covered ground, meditating. On its right hand is a simple ring of iron. Rust marks and a deep incision from some earlier cut give the ring a crude, almost cruel appearance, not mirrored by the dream as a whole. The cloaked figure looks up and its elven eyes meet yours in a gentle but firm gaze. He speaks to you, though not with words spilling from his mouth; he calls for you, begs you to hurry. And remarkably enough, you instantly know where to find the clearing where the elf is waiting.

The events related to the pact ring can be further developed, depending on the player's reaction. A character with sympathies for the cause of the pact will probably become allied to its members; someone who wants to use the ring for his own purposes will likely gain himself a number of very potent enemies.

The Iron Pact will do their best to win over the characters to their side, but they are by no means hesitant to pry the ring from their dead, cold fingers if it comes to that. Either way, they will not allow a non-member to carry one of the few, true pact rings that still exist.



N THE SHADOWY HALLS of Davokar grandiose treasures lay side-by-side with items that should not be touched. Unfortunately, it can be hard to tell one from the other without touching, and by then it is often too late. Can that simple truth explain why master Cornelio, Ordo Magica's Chapter Master in Thistle Hold, has looked so grim lately? Is his troubled state of mind somehow connected to the reputed Tomb of Dreams, where his disciples have uncovered a tomb from the early days of Symbaroum?

Rumors are circling among fortune hunters and free explorers. Some attribute the Chapter Master's grim face to troubles regarding how to transport the treasure from the remote burial mound; others say that he worries about the Mayor's claims on transparency and tolls. But the older and more experienced suspect that there may be other explanations for Cornelio's dark gaze. And if they are correct, many more than Thistle Hold's wizards have reasons to fear what is to come...



Tomb of Dying Dreams

FOR LEVELS 3-4

Introduction

This is the third part of a loosely cohesive trilogy, meant to introduce players and Gamemasters to the *Ruins of Symbaroum* rule set and game world. The first part (*The Promised Land*) mainly focused on the core mechanics and the thematic conflicts characterizing the setting, while part two (*The Mark of the Beast*) touched on more advanced methods for problem-solving and gave the player characters a chance to visit the town of Thistle Hold.

In this episode, the Gamemaster is introduced to an example of how an adventure landscape can be arranged and the players finally get a chance to head out into the forest of Davokar. It will most certainly be a journey to remember.

THIS ADVENTURE IS divided into two chapters. The first accounts for the adventure's background and central figures, and also provides some suggestions on how the player characters may get involved in the story. Chapter 2 describes the adventure landscape, consisting of Ordo Magica's outpost and the ruins being explored. Listings for magical artifacts and special rules are included in the appendix.

The Gamemaster's Preface

RUINS FROM THE lost empire of Symbaroum can be found everywhere in Davokar. One such site has gained the attention of Ordo Magica, and the excavation and subsequent investigation are facilitated by the river Malgomor which runs right past the site. The ruins are spread across a vast area, but hardworking wizards have mapped and explored most of it. Only the mausoleum remains – the area's centerpiece and its greatest challenge. A whole group of explorers has vanished into the tomb, including the leader of the expedition, Magister Senia.

However, the deathblow to Ordo Magica's presence on the scene was something altogether different – a creeping darkness swept through the headquarters, leaving it empty of life. All that remains is a small outpost by the river, where a couple of terrified novices are trying to get in touch with civilization.

Central to the adventure is an artifact that can be found in the mausoleum, the Vile Water. This potent power source of almost pure corruption has awakened the hunger of three mighty monstrosities: the already mentioned Creeping Darkness, the ancient Thorn Queen Fangafa down in the tomb and the white spider Xanathâ. The player characters will have to tread carefully to avoid combat with these, or at least not with more than one of them, since they are very powerful opponents.

Luckily, it is possible to forge alliances instead, for instance with Xanathâ who is more cunning and reasonable than the others. A pact can also be made with the group of cultists that has found the place, led by the charismatic leader Odako (or Landela if Odako died when your group played *The Mark of the Beast*). In short: this adventure is a landscape, consisting of a perilous setting where several different agents are on the hunt for the Vile Water. It is the players and their characters who are meant to determine how to tackle the many challenges of the ruins, not some outside force or pre-determined chain of events. As GM you should review the *Gamemaster's Guide* on adventure landscapes (page 108), and try your best to subtly guide the players through *Tomb of Dying Dreams*.

Connection to Previous Adventures

Tomb of Dying Dreams is an independent sequel to the adventures *The Promised Land* and *The Mark of the Beast*. It should be fully enjoyable for those who have not played the earlier adventures, but playing all three as a continuous campaign will undoubtedly add to the experience.

The Players' Preface

AS IT IS written, the adventure assumes that the player characters are recruited by Ordo Magica for a rescue operation, since communication between the chapter in Thistle Hold and the expedition has been lost. The characters may, however, have other reasons for journeying to the location, depending on previous adventures or what type of incentives suit them best. The following suggestions may function as a point of departure:

TREASURE HUNT

Rumors about the Tomb of Dreams are circulating in Thistle Hold. The player characters are approached by a nervous novice of Ordo Magica, who is either offering to sell them information about the tomb's location or trying to persuade them to accompany her there (to share in any treasures). The novice says nothing of what has happened to the order's expedition; if asked she claims they have left the tomb to "re-organize and re-supply".

A WORRIED SIBLING

A relative (or friend) of a member of Ordo Magica's expedition has sold everything he owns to fund a secret rescue operation headed for the tomb. The sibling only knows that the chapter has lost contact with the expedition but has a feeling that something bad has happened.

Regarding the location, he says that he "forced a novice of the order to disclose it." If the GM wishes, the town watch may find the novice dead the next morning, meaning that a squad of Queen's Rangers will come after the characters, accusing them of being involved...

A CHANCE ENCOUNTER

The player characters may happen upon the location on their way to or from other adventures. For example, they can be traveling on or along Malgomor when they unexpectedly are hailed by the desperate novices in the outpost. Another option is to have them encounter a survivor on the route between Thistle Hold and Karvosti. The stranger dies in their arms slurring something vague about *"creeping darkness"*, *"ancient treasures"* and *"follow the river west..."*

THE PREVIOUS ADVENTURES

Player characters who have played *The Promised Land* and/or *The Mark of the Beast* are already acquainted with the *Tomb of Dreams* – they know it as the resting place of the now headless King Hurian Lo-Apak. Depending on what happened during those adventures, not least on how *The Mark of the Beast* ended, the player characters can have lots of different reasons for wanting to find the tomb.

If they are in possession of the King's Skull they may want to return it, because of the horrific dreams tormenting them all. And should the cranium have ended up in the hands of the Black Cloaks, the monks may want to hire the player

Adventure Timeline

About 10 months ago

An expedition led by the treasure hunter Gorak stumbles upon the tomb. The plunderers successfully salvage some of its treasures, including the mummified cranium of a King, before they are chased away by the wardens of the tomb.

Between 8–5 months ago

The members of the expedition start to transform into raving abominations that run amok until they are slain, the final two by the elves of the Iron Pact high up in the Titans (see the adventure *The Promised Land*).

About 4 months ago

Fangafa comes crawling towards the tomb, enticed by the irresistible Vile Water.

Little more than 2 months ago

The changeling Alahara, Gorak's partner, starts killing people in Thistle Hold, hunting for glands which might stop Gorak from becoming Blight Born (see the adventure *The Mark of the Beast*)

Less than 2 months ago

By interviewing a friend of Alahara, Ordo Magica manages to find the tomb from which the King's skull was taken.

6 weeks ago

Ordo Magica establishes an outpost on the Malgomor's shore and starts mapping the area.

24 days ago

Xanathâ arrives and makes herself at home in the sinkhole.

20 days ago

The cultists find their way to the area, by following a boat headed from Kurun to the outpost with extra supplies.

16 days ago

Magister Senia enters the tomb along with her entourage.

14 days ago

The creeping darkness overruns the headquarters of Ordo Magica and Xanathâ corrupts its Magic Circle – contact between the expedition and Thistle Hold is lost.

10 days ago

The tribe Urrbukktur comes fleeing up through the sinkhole and takes over the headquarters, after a bloody meeting with Xanathâ.


BAIAGA
The Ruin City of Odaban
Serands pyramid
Sun Temple
The Columns of Haganor
The ruins
Earth Towers of the Black Leech Rift
Karvosti
VOLGOMA
MALGOMOR
KAROHAR
N
0 50 km
0 30 miles
Jakaar
Melima
ODAIOVA
EANOR
Thistle Hold
NEW BERENDORIA
EBLIS
Kurun
NARUGOR
Templewall
PRIOS' DOMAIN
KASANDRIEN
Agrella
DOUDRAM
EBEL
YNDARIEN
Redina
VELOMA

characters to head out into the forest and find the rest of the mummy. Finally, it is also possible that the skull ended up with the cultist Odako, and in that case it is highly likely that someone (maybe Lasifor Nightpitch himself) is prepared to promise the characters a sizable reward to hunt down the cult and reclaim the artifact.

Journey to the Outpost

IT IS HARD to predict exactly how the player characters will choose to travel to the area surrounding the tomb, which is why the Gamemaster must be prepared to improvise or gently guide them in a direction of their choice. From Thistle Hold it will take them about ten days to hike through the forest – five days through the Bright outskirts and four or five more through the darker and wilder parts. Another option is to ride for Kurun and seek passage on a river boat.

Irrespective of what means of transportation they choose, the journey is a perilous one. In addition to the following suggestions, the Gamemaster should take a look at page 70 in the *Gamemaster's Guide* for further inspiration.

TINY BUT LETHAL

Because of their intense curiosity, the spring elf Renn and his friends (total of half again as many characters, e.g. four characters face six **blight-born fairies**) have become outcasts and, during recent expeditions, deeply corrupted by the darkness of Davokar. Now, the blight-born fairies have the player characters in their sights.

Initially they act with caution, trying to determine the strength of their prey – lurking around the campsite at night, peering with shiny black eyes from behind twigs and shrubberies. Later on, they will try their best to make the characters split up so they can be attacked one by one. And they will not give up until they have managed to drain at least one of the intended victims of life and blood.

Gamemaster's Note

Your copy of the *Bestiary* might list blight-born fairies as challenge rating 3. This is a typo, they are challenge rating 1/2.

THE HUNTERS AND THE REBEL

A squad of Queen's Rangers (see page 190 in the *Bestiary*) are moving through the woods or riding a boat along the river. In the latter case the encounter is unavoidable, and the rangers will board the characters' vessel and ask to see their licenses. If the encounter takes place in the forest, the characters will be discovered if the group fails a **DC 15 Dexterity (Stealth) check** – in that case the rangers prepare an ambush. If successful, the players make a **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check**. A success here means that the characters detect the rangers from afar, so they can avoid them or sneak up to them and listen to their conversation.

The leader of the squad, Edran, is not out to hurt the player characters but will request to see their treasure-hunting licenses. If everything is in order, he will invite them to share a campfire for the night and later tell them about the squad's mission – to hunt down an armed and rebellious group of Odavs who disapprove of the chieftain's friendship with Ambria.

The rebel leader (tentatively a young witch) may very well cross paths with the characters later on, as a potential adversary or future friend and contact among the barbarians.

HOMEWARD BOUND

The characters bump into a group of **fortune hunters** (same number as the characters) and one **plunderer** headed back towards Thistle Hold. One of them is badly injured and must be carried by the others, who in turn are famished, ragged and exhausted. The leader of the group says that they managed to break into an unexplored chamber in the western earth tower of the Black Leech Rift. He will not talk about what was in there but claims they had to return empty-handed since one of them was severely hurt by an ancient trap.

If the player characters invite the group to sleep at their campsite two things will happen. First, the guests decide to expand their meager catch by attacking the characters; second, once the fight is on the next guest arrives at the camp: the **necromage** Omalkun (for stats, see page 158 in the *Bestiary*) who wants to reclaim his stolen sickle, now hidden in the backpack of one of the fortune hunters. Omalkun attacks the fortune hunters and they focus their attention on the undead, while the characters are free to choose sides. The necromage will leave as soon as the thieves are dead and he has retrieved the artifact.

See page 185–186 in the *Bestiary* for stats on Fortune-hunters and Plunderers, then reduce each of their hit points by 4d6.

Gamemaster's Note

This can be a very challenging encounter, though it may be possible to complete if the players immediately and exclusively focus on the necromage. Beware of using this for a group that holds grudges or tends to be haphazard in their combat tactics.

The Adventure Landscape

When the player characters have made it to the adventure landscape, the chain of future events should be governed by their decisions, based on what goals they have as individuals and as a group. Of course, the Gamemaster can make use of other agents in the landscape if the players have a hard time taking the initiative, and in some cases it is intended that they should be contacted by persons and creatures offering alliances or asking for help.

Overview

The field of ruins the characters arrive at stretches from the river for a mile south. Thanks to the Malgomor river the area is extra vibrant. The vegetation is dense and lush, dominated by tall hardwood trees with extensive canopies that do not let much sunlight through to the shimmering, moist ground-level air.

The ruins are in most cases totally crumbled and overgrown with moss and vines, but here and there broken stone walls rise from the undergrowth. Further in the distance, half an arch can be seen struggling against winding plants and a few empty towers challenge the surrounding trees as to who is the tallest.

The biggest ruin in the area is the old palace located on the northernmost part of the peninsula created by the Malgomor's U-shaped bend. The once magnificent stone building is completely demolished. All that remain are a handful of monolithic structures and a ruined stairwell. Especially curious is that the area closest to the palace lacks any kind of vegetation and that the dead streaks which otherwise run criss-cross through the region cannot be seen in the vicinity of the palace.

If the Gamemaster wishes, the grand structure can be used to expand the adventure and provide the players with further opportunities for exploration. If not, a quick survey will show that the ruin has already been visited by plunderers, most likely on numerous occasions. In this case the palace ruin is nothing more than a sad reminder of the lost splendor of the once great Symbarian civilization.

The disposition of this chapter is based on a number of locations or creatures that the characters are likely to meet. First, the outpost on the shore of the Malgomor is described, followed by the ruin that until two weeks ago was Ordo Magica's headquarters. After that you will find some sections describing plausible allies and/or antagonists, along with the places where these can be found.

The chapter ends with a description of King Hurian-Lo Apak's mausoleum. Aside from the headless mummy king, the tomb contains the Vile Water, some glimpses of Symbaroum's early days and a whole lot of treasure. Unfortunately, there are also several difficult challenges to be overcome for the one who wishes to get in and out of the mausoleum alive...

The Outpost of Ordo Magica

ON THE SHORE of the Malgomor is a walled-in outpost with a pier jutting out into the stream. This was the point of departure from which Ordo Magica sent an expedition deeper into the woods. Now it is like a prison for the two terrified novices who have locked themselves in the main building, hoping to be safe from the pack of mare cats lurking outside.

The outpost is intended to be the characters' first stop when reaching the area; a stop which preferably takes place after nightfall and in pouring rain. If they arrive by boat this is more or less a given, but even if they travel by foot the Gamemaster is advised to guide them to the outpost. For instance, it is likely that they (or their guide) have the river as a first waypoint; upon reaching the Malgomor they then have to follow it up or down stream to make contact with what is left of the expedition.

Whichever way the characters close in on the outpost, they will have to deal with the mare cats before getting a chance to hear the novices' tale about what awaits them in the landscape.



The Value of Overwhelming Opposition

Some of the creatures featured in this adventure (Xanathâ, the Creeping Darkness and the Thorn Queen Fangafa) are extremely powerful, likely too mighty to function as adversaries for the characters. This is fully intentional, in the hope of triggering dramatic roleplaying scenes with negotiations and awkward alliances, or at any rate forcing the players to try other strategies besides combat. There is no event in this adventure where combat against any of these is required, at least not without a possible escape. In other words, it is expected that the players will feel small in the landscape, as if they have walked right into an older and grander world, a world which once was and which threatens to rise again.

As Gamemaster you should try to describe how massive, dark-minded and powerful the creatures are. Also, a successful **DC (5 + the creature's challenge rating) Intelligence (Nature) check** can inform a character about the creature (a general sense of hit point total, number of attacks, rumors of special powers, etc.). Once the Gamemaster has done their best to portray the danger it is up to the players to make their choice, whether that means running away, trying to negotiate or engaging the enemy bravely (foolishly?) in combat.



ORDO MAGICA'S OUTPOST
1. Pier and Boat
2. Palisade and Gateway
3. Main Building
4. Warehouse

1. PIER AND BOAT

A small river boat is tied to the pier. Onboard are dry rations (enough to feed five characters for a week).

2. PALISADE AND GATEWAY

A pack of tenacious **mare cats** has caught the scent of the novices and is sniffing around inside the enclosure. The famished beasts (twice as many as the characters) form the overly eager welcoming party for arriving player characters. For a description and the stats of the mare cats, see page 143 in the *Bestiary*.

3. MAIN BUILDING

The novices Marla and Plendel have been locked inside the house for a little less than a week and cannot provide much information besides what is detailed below:

- They are happy to come along to the headquarters if they are invited. If not, they will remain in the outpost, hoping that the rescue operation will be successful. See page 180 of the *Bestiary* for their stats.
- The novices know the location of the headquarters and that it contains a magic circle: if the expedition cannot be contacted from the Hold, something bad must have happened...
- The main focus of the expedition was a mausoleum. Last they heard, a group of explorers led by Magister Senia was about to enter the tomb. That was about two weeks ago and what has transpired since then they do not know.
- They have no map of the area (that can be found at the HQ), but they can make a sketch and pin-point the approximate position of the headquarters, the sinkhole and the tomb.

4. WAREHOUSE

A building consisting of a single large room, filled with tools (equivalent to three sets of tools of the GM's choice) and some weapons: two swords, an axe, a spear, two bows with 20 arrows and a crossbow with 20 bolts. There are also three suits of studded leather armor and one suit of scale mail armor in the shed.

The novices do not mind if the player characters help themselves to the stash; they have their own survival to worry about. If someone actively searches the building for hidden valuables and succeeds on a **DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check** they will find a buried wooden box containing the expedition's emergency funds: 12 thaler, 61 shillings and 14 ortegs.

The Dead Woods

AS SOON AS the player characters leave the outpost, likely headed for Ordo Magica's headquarters, they will come across broad streaks of gray death running through the rich undergrowth. The region of dead vegetation is spread out like a web over the area, with streaks between fifty and a hundred paces wide – literally everything touched by the web is lifeless and shriveled. The trees are dead but with all leaves still attached, the moss on the ground has turned a blackish gray and the spiders hang dead in their own webs, not unlike their prey. The only exception is a small flower, a purple Lily of the Valley, which can be seen sprouting here and there – apparently resistant to whatever has caused the devastation.

The player characters will pass four of these streaks on their way through the landscape, caused by the Creeping Darkness (see page 65).

The Headquarters of the Lost Expedition

ORDO MAGICA ESTABLISHED their headquarters in one of the area's best preserved buildings and fortified it with a palisade. The old stone keep lays at the edge of a dead streak and the building's facade is covered in blackened ivy and gray moss. Everything is dead inside the keep too, aside from in the chamber where the clerk Tonsel sits on the ground (see below).

Ordo Magica is no longer the ruler of this castle. The largest part of the expedition vanished down the tomb and never came back, and as the remaining members were planning a rescue attempt the Creeping Darkness swept right through the headquarters. What little survived that encounter was later found by Urrbukktur, a goblin tribe on the run from an abysmal enemy in the Underworld. The tribe reached the surface through the sinkhole where they met the white spider Xanathâ who decimated the tribe even more.

Now Urrbukktur are the owners of the keep, at least until the Creeping Darkness returns. All that remains of Ordo Magica's expedition are seven freeze dried corpses and Tonsel, the crazy clerk. The goblins have not listened very closely to the madness-stricken scholar (whom they find amusing) and they cannot read the journal found in the broken circle (which they are afraid of) – the exception being the shaman Njegg, who senses a warning in the ravings of the crazed human.

1. PALISADE AND GATEHOUSE

The palisade surrounding the shed, the keep's entrance and extensions is made from rough logs that do not go very deep into the ground and is held together by nothing more than twined leather cords. It is about the height of a sturdy human and will not deter Davokar's larger beasts; it does however function as protection against packs of smaller predators and may also convince plunderers to think twice.

The twin-gates are three paces wide and can be bolted from inside with two sturdy beams.

2. KEEP

The upper levels of the nowadays four stories high keep have long since caved in and been replaced by a flat roof made from the same type of logs as the palisade. The overgrown facade is weathered and the mortar keeping the stones in place is in many places so deteriorated that holes show between the blocks.

The only element up to standard is the newly built, iron-framed hardwood door covering the entrance. It is bolted from inside and strong enough to stop most anything. To wreck it or kick it open the characters have to inflict a total of 20 damage upon it (DC 10, only two persons may deal damage each turn) and in the meantime two bow-equipped goblin warriors can attack them through the windows in the Antechamber. The easiest way to get in is probably to convince the tribe to open the gate or to move in with speed when they open it for other reasons. With the help of various features and mystical powers, other options are possible too; let the players be creative and reward any good ideas.

2a. The Antechamber

Past the door is a guard room, about two fathoms high, six paces wide and three paces deep. Two patrols totaling four goblin warriors (page 189 of the *Bestiary*) take turns watching through the tall, narrow windows and resting their legs on the two rough log benches in the room.

2b. The Hall

The floors inside the keep were made of wood and are long since gone. Ordo Magica restored parts of the first two stories, to serve as sleeping quarters and workspaces. But aside from that, the keep consists of only one tall hall, open all the way up to the log roof more than six fathoms up.

2c. Side Chamber

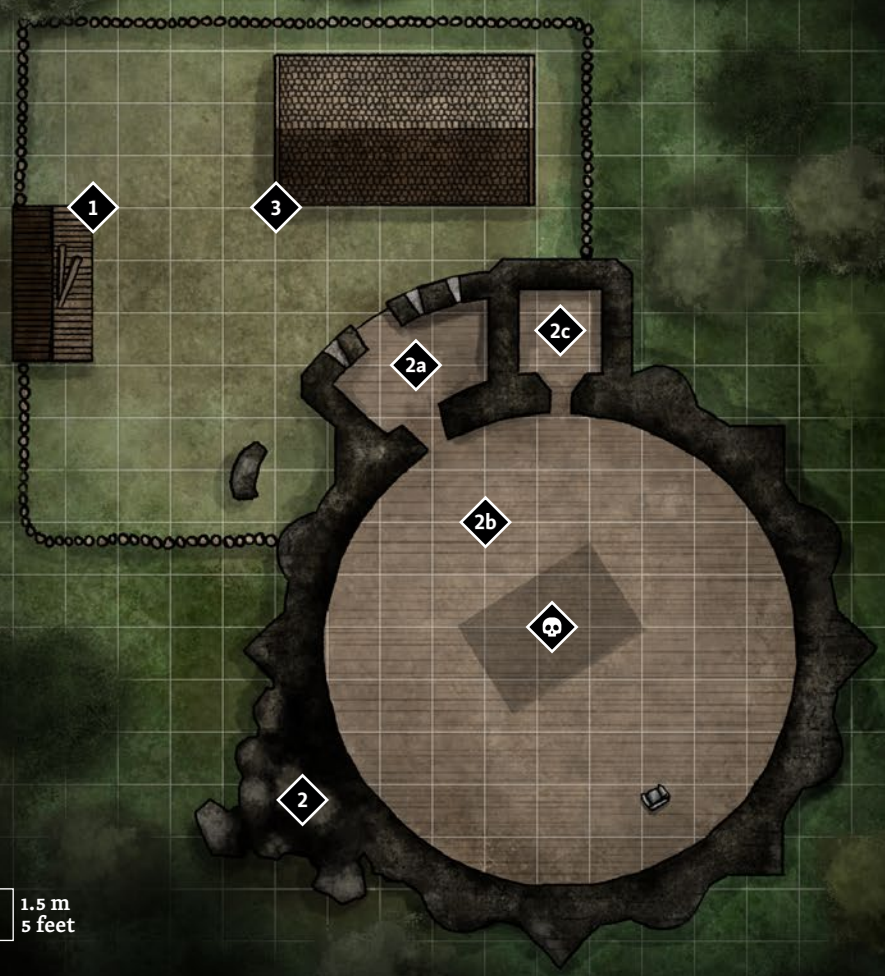
A single room, about three paces wide and deep, and with a ceiling height equivalent to the one in the guard room. In days long past the chamber was used to store weapons and equipment, but Ordo Magica made it the place for their *magic circle*. The large opening high up on the eastern wall (one meter high and more than that in width, caused by natural erosion) is provisionally covered by a curtain made from thick hides.

This room is the only one in the keep that has living vegetation, in the form of moss and vines on the floor and walls. It seems like the grayish black streak of death for some reason never touched the *magic circle*.

3. THE SHED

By the keep stands a newly constructed house, built by Ordo Magica and filled with spoiled goods. Everything organic – bread, meat, fish and fruits– looks gray and freeze dried.

But to the right inside the door the characters can find a lot of usable items. Even if much was lost in the tomb there is a great deal of exploration equipment lying on the shelves. There are several bundles of rope, a handful of lanterns and lots of lamp oil. Furthermore, the characters can get their hands on three grappling hooks, two pickaxes and four shovels.





THE HEADQUARTERS

1. Palissade and Gatehouse
2. Keep
   a. The Antechamber
   b. The Hall
   c. Side Chamber
3. The Shed

☠ The Troll Trap



NEGOTIATING WITH THE GOBLIN TRIBE

Characters who wish to negotiate and demonstrate peaceful intentions can be successful. The Chief, Gabba Bigpaw, knows that "tallings" (humans) can be very dangerous, and the shaman Njegg would welcome the chance to speak to humans and learn more about what has happened in the keep.

In a negotiation Gabba will consider giving the player characters access to the Side Chamber in exchange for tools and/or weapons of a total value of at least 10 thaler (he is not interested in coin or jewelry). In other words, parts of the equipment found in the storage area at Ordo Magic's outpost will suffice as payment.

Gabba Bigpaw, Goblin Chieftain

"You are welcome, to Bigpaw's kingdom."

Gabba is not large or strong for being a goblin, but very sly – therein lays his greatness. He led his tribe up from the Underworld, away from the trolls that terrorized them. Doing that, he earned the trust of the tribe, even if he has a hard time feeling comfortable in his role as a ruler; sure, he has always dreamed of becoming chief of the tribe but the responsibilities that come with the position are nothing he cares for. Use **goblin chieftain** on page 188 of the *Bestiary*.

Tactics: Gabba will try to learn as much as he can about the opposition before taking any risks. If the player characters are hostile he will try to lure them to stand on the troll trap in front of his throne, and then activate it. After that he will send his bodyguards to attack while adopting a defensive stance himself.

Njegg, Goblin Shaman

"In a dream sight I saw our salvation; was that you in the mist?"

Njegg is Gabba's psychic sister and fiercely loyal to her brother. However, they have different views on the situation at hand. Gabba believes he has found the tribe's future in ruins, while Njegg is worried about the muttering human in the Side Chamber. What little she understands of his mumblings, together with the freeze dried bodies inside the keep, gives her the creeps – that which sucked the life out of the previous owners may yet return.

Njegg wants to know more and is prepared to encourage her brother to trust the characters, provided that they do not storm in with weapons in hand. She is a **goblin shaman**, page 189 of the *Bestiary*.

THE TROLL TRAP

In the floor of the hall there is a hatch, leading to what was once a basement pantry. Now the hatch has been converted into a trapdoor and the pantry is housing a famished rage troll. The trap is triggered from Gabba's throne; hostile player characters are at risk of falling towards a tough fight if they are not careful.

When the characters enter the main hall, compare their **passive Perception to DC 13**. A success means that they hear muffled grunting and rooting sounds from somewhere below, deep under the wooden floor. Additionally, if they succeed by 5 or more, they notice that the chief is fingering a detail on the throne's armrest. Provided that the characters close in on the throne to talk or negotiate (rather than with weapons drawn), the chief and his sister engage in a whispered conversation. With the Loremaster feature and a successful **DC 13 Intelligence check** a character can make out the words:

Gabba: *"Straight down the hatch, right?"*
Njegg: *"You sure? They may know about the Creeping Horror, stuff we need to know."*
Gabba: *"You're afraid of the dark, I'm scared of their weapons."*
Njegg: *"You know best, brother Bigpaw."*

If the trap is sprung, characters standing in front of the throne must make a **DC 13 Dexterity saving throw** or fall into the basement. If a character is aware that something may be about to happen, they have advantage on the saving throw.

The fall to the cellar floor is 20 feet (2d6 falling damage), then the rage troll attacks. The player characters who remain upstairs in the great hall will have to fight the **goblin bodyguards** and **goblin warriors** (see below). The monster in the basement is a **famished rage troll**, page 211 in the *Bestiary*.

Speaking with the Goblins

The Urrbukktur tribe has never been in contact with humans and cannot speak either Ambrian or the barbarian tongue. Conversations with the goblins must be held in the rough speech that they share with the trolls, with sign language, or magical means.

There is, however, one exception: the shaman Njegg who has done some trading with barbarians, enough to communicate reasonably well in that tongue.

It should also be noted that having had no contact with humans, the members of the tribe show no sign of striving to adapt to human behavior. The goblins of Urrbukktur are beastly in their ways and share the pack mentality and shyness of other small predators, as well as their tendency to act fearlessly aggressive when cornered.

ATTACKING THE GOBLINS

It is fully possible to attack the keep but it may prove to be a grave mistake. If possible, all members of the tribe will amass in defense of their newly found home, and together they may prove a challenge even for experienced characters.

If the characters choose to storm the ruin, Gabba will do his best to lure them to make a halt in the Hall. When they get there, Gabba sits on the throne with raised hands while his bodyguards fall to their knees and put their weapons on the ground. Of course, the chief's hope is that the characters will abort the attack and end up on the trapdoor. If that happens, Chief Bigpaw will spring the trap and order his subjects to slay the intruders.

If the player characters are not fooled and continue their attack, Gabba will spring the trap on his initiative. In that case, the characters who have stated that they are running towards the bodyguards, the Chief or the shaman will be affected by the trap.

There are twice as many **goblin warriors** (page 189 of the *Bestiary*) as there are characters, one **goblin bodyguard** for each character, and dozens of ordinary goblins.

Goblin Bodyguards

"To die is to serve."

These unusually capable goblins (as many as the characters) are Chief Gabba's personal guard and they never leave his side. They are fiercely loyal and will fight to the death in order to keep Gabba and Njegg alive.

Tactics: The bodyguards fight in a half-circle between the enemy and their chieftain, and they will fight till they drop.

Goblin Bodyguard

Small humanoid (goblin)

Armor Class 15 (Studded Leather)
Hit Points 26 (4d6 + 12)
Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	16 (+3)	17 (+3)	10 (+0)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)

Skills Stealth +5, Survival +4
Senses darkvision 60 feet, passive Perception 12
Languages Ambrian, Goblin
Challenge 1/4 (50 XP, proficiency bonus +2)
Manner stands at attention, only the eyes move
Shadow moss-green and dark brown, like an overgrown tree stump (Corruption: 2/4)
Equipment none

Dueling Style. The goblin bodyguard adds +2 to its damage rolls, included below.

Survival Instinct. The goblin bodyguard can take the Dash, Dodge or Disengage action as a bonus action.

ACTIONS

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d6 + 5) piercing damage.

Multiattack. The goblin bodyguard makes two attacks with its short sword.

REACTIONS

Riposte. When a melee weapon attack hits the goblin, it makes a shortsword attack against the attacker if it is in range.

The Chamber of the Magic Circle

THIS SMALL CHAMBER (3 × 3 paces wide and two fathoms high) is completely bare, save the hides covering the hole near the ceiling and a hacked circle in the moss-covered stone floor, filled with silvery dust. Well, there is also the pile of neatly stacked human bodies close to one of the walls and the insane clerk Tonsel who all but never leaves his place in the middle of the circle.

The circle is now corrupted by Xanathâ, the white spider in the sinkhole. If anyone besides Tonsel stands inside the circle for more than a few heartbeats, the spider will contact him or her telepathically. And provided that the intended interlocutor does not run away screaming, Xanathâ has a proposition... (for more information see "The Sinkhole" on page 60).

The seven corpses stashed in a corner are in five cases robed in Ordo Magica's cloaks, in two cases dressed like your average fortune hunter. The bodies are the remains of people who happened to be inside the headquarters when the Creeping Darkness passed through. Three of the cloaks can be salvaged; the rest are ruined.

A successful **DC 13 Wisdom (Medicine or Perception) check** reveals that the bodies are intact but dehydrated. Freeze marks can also be detected, almost as if the bodies have been there a long time, year after year in excruciatingly cold conditions.

A character with the Medicus feature who succeeds with a **DC 13 Wisdom (Medicine) check** comes to the conclusion that some life-draining force has killed the members of the expedition and left the remains almost completely dry.

A character that succeeds at a **DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) check** recalls having heard vague stories about similar afflictions, witnessed by explorers and treasure hunters in Davokar. The renowned explorer Lukresia has mentioned a case where *"the darkness of Davokar came alive and crawled into a barbarian settlement, leaving a mass of dead bodies behind, freeze dried and crumpled like crowberries after a winter in the Titans."*

Tonsel, Clerk

The crazed clerk Tonsel is the sole member of Ordo Magica's expedition to survive the Creeping Darkness as it moved through the keep. The clerk was saved at the last minute by the white spider Xanathâ who squeezed through the hole in the chamber's wall, hoping that Tonsel could assist her in the hunt for the Vile Water.

Unfortunately, the clerk's psyche did not survive the encounter with the darkness. He rambles on about his *"shining protector"* and how she *"climbed down from the heavens on shimmering threads to save me with her holy bite."*

As an expression of his eternal appreciation and devotion, he performs various obscure rites of gratitude to the protector and Prios' glory, painting the sun of Prios as something which looks very much like a spider...

If Tonsel is taunted into attacking, he will launch at what he perceives as the biggest villain and punch, punch, punch until he goes down himself. Should he then be healed and regain consciousness he will start over again: the villain must be punished. Us the **magistrate's** stats (page 178 of the *Bestiary*), however Tonsel does not have a staff.

Tonsel is terrified of the dark and stays in or very close to the softly glowing Magic Circle. He is proud to flaunt the bite mark at the back of his neck, where "the Goddess gave me her blessing." Moreover, he hands out self-made spider/sun symbols to whoever wants one. He regards spiders as holy and considers every aggression against the eight-legged creatures in the keep as blasphemous – sending him into a murderous frenzy.

Finally, the leather bound journal of the expedition is in the chamber, usually lying beside Tonsel inside the circle. The book contains a sketchy map of the area and accounts of the time from the arrival of the expedition up to Tonsel's encounter with the Creeping Darkness and Xanathâ. If one finds the right buyer, the small notebook could be worth quite a lot. Ordo Magica in Thistle Hold is willing to pay 30 thaler for it; other collectors of curiosities can pay about half that sum.

Some excerpts from the journal can be found below and as handouts at the back of the book. The rest of the text consists of less dramatic observations of life in the headquarters and long lists of inventory and equipment. Meticulousness was a virtue that the notary Tonsel truly embodied.

"Just like the scouts foretold, we found the overgrown ruin satisfactory and established our base camp there. During the hike from the outpost we had to be ever diligent, hacking a path through the dense greenery which rules the area. Everyone took to the knife to help clear out the ruined keep. Outside we left everything untouched, hoping to mask our presence – who knows what famished creatures lurk hereabout?"

(To the GM: Note that the clerk does not mention any gray streaks of death, since the Creeping Darkness was yet to arrive in the area.)

"At the morning assembly, Magister Senia told us that she has established a circle here at the keep and completed a first report to Thistle Hold. I notice that others besides me find this reassuring, even if all of us know that the feeling of security was an illusion: we are a long way from safety and the circle will not save us if threats arise. But we can get advice, and that is a very precious thing in an exposed situation like ours. The investigation of the ruins has afforded both joy and some exasperation. Our scouts have located the tomb from which the plunderer Gorak stole his tainted artifact. The ancient writings on the mausoleum indicate that it contains the remains of a person of stature, likely one of the local kings who ruled the area during Symbaroum's early days. That the tomb has already been breached is evident, but hopefully the robbers did not manage to empty it or destroy it completely."

(To the GM: The "plunderer Gorak" is of course the blight stricken treasure hunter featured in the adventure *The Mark of the Beast*).

"After mapping the whole area, Magister Senia found the tomb most promising. She also warned us about the sinkhole. This is hardly necessary since we all know that two patrols have vanished in its vicinity, but it demonstrates the greatness of her heart and her care for all members of the expedition. The mutterings and curses of the scouts and servants are evidently misdirected: Magister Senia is far from a 'coldhearted slave driver' *and the ruins much more than some* 'overgrown meat-grinder'*! On another note, the scouts have reported seeing streaks of grayish, black death spreading throughout the area, radiating out from the sinkhole if the reports are correct. What this is and if it will affect our work is hard to know but very easy to have nightmares about. Magister Senia has ordered the whole expedition to start preparing for entering the mausoleum, and she has deciphered the text on the entry vault, hunting for clues as to what awaits us inside. If the streaks of dead nature keep spreading, our time here may soon come to its end, so we have every reason to hurry."*

(To the GM: One of the scout patrols fell victim to the spider Xanathâ, the other deserted and ran off to search for treasures elsewhere.)

"The ground quivers in pain, screams echo through the ruin. I dare not go outside. A deeper kind of darkness roams the night. I am nearly paralyzed, the cold eats at my soul. By Prios, the darkness is bleeding through the walls! ... From the heavens a light, like a descending sun of shimmering limbs, she embraces me. The savior is here, Prios be praised."

(To the GM: Here the clerk Tonsel recounts what happened when the Creeping Darkness passed through the keep, and his salvation in the form of the white spider Xanathâ.)



The excerpts from Ordo Magica's journal, as well as Tonsel's map of the area can be found on pages 205–207.

The Sinkhole

THE SINKHOLE CAN be found about a thousand paces southwest of the ruined keep. It came about less than a year ago, namely in conjunction with Gorak and Alahara entering the tomb, thereby disturbing its long slumber. At the surface, the hole has an irregular circumference of about 100 paces and it reaches straight down into the Underworld. The sinkhole is connected to King Hurian-Lo Apak's tomb through a series of cracks (see *The Monument Chamber*, page 70).

1. TOP OF THE SINKHOLE

The sinkhole is about a hundred paces across and slightly more than that in depth. The walls plunge steeply into darkness and very little vegetation has gained a hold on the newly exposed rock. The bottom is filled with sharp-edged boulders and near the walls it slopes in a way which makes the ground unstable.

Those that climb down the slopes must make a **DC 15 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check**. Having ropes and other climbing equipment provides advantage on this check. Failure means the character slides down the remainder of the steep slope, taking 2d6 bludgeoning damage.

2. PATHWAY

A character that spends some time studying the walls of the sinkhole can make a **DC 13 Wisdom (Survival) check** to identify a natural path down into the dark. Moving slowly and carefully up or down the path takes about five minutes; if rushing you can make it in one minute but that requires a **DC 13 Dexterity saving throw**. A failure means that the character slips or stumbles and falls approximately 10 feet, taking 1d6 bludgeoning damage. The pathway passes in front of Xanathâ's cavern.

3. CLIMBING ROUTE

A character that finds the pathway also notices an excellent climbing route that allows direct descent into the bottom of the sinkhole. Using it requires a **DC 15 Dexterity check**, a failure means a mishap causing 4d6 falling damage.

The climbing route does not pass in front of the spider's cave.

4. THE SPIDER'S CAVE

The opening to Xanathâ's cavern cannot be seen from the surface or from the bottom of the sinkhole. The white spider rests behind a dense web woven over a hollow in the rock. The threads sway from her movements where they are not weighed down by cocooned bodies.

If the characters get a chance to examine the victims they find both members of one of Ordo Magica's lost patrols and also half a dozen goblins of the Urrbukktur tribe.

5. TUNNEL TO THE UNDERWORLD

A meandering path leads down into the Underworld where dark adventures await. For more information, see *Through the Underworld* below.

AN ODD ALLY

The white spider Xanathâ wants to gain access to the tomb of the beheaded king, in the hunt for the dark and primal power she has dreamed is hidden within – and can smell all the way to her cavern. To reach her goal she needs the assistance of creatures with hands who can read cuneiform writing: she has been inside the tomb but could not pass the King's Gate. On the other path through the tomb Fangafa lies in wait, the deadly phenomenon who is Xanathâ's rival in the hunt for the artifact.

Xanathâ will try to contact the player characters, preferably through the Magic Circle in the keep's side chamber, otherwise

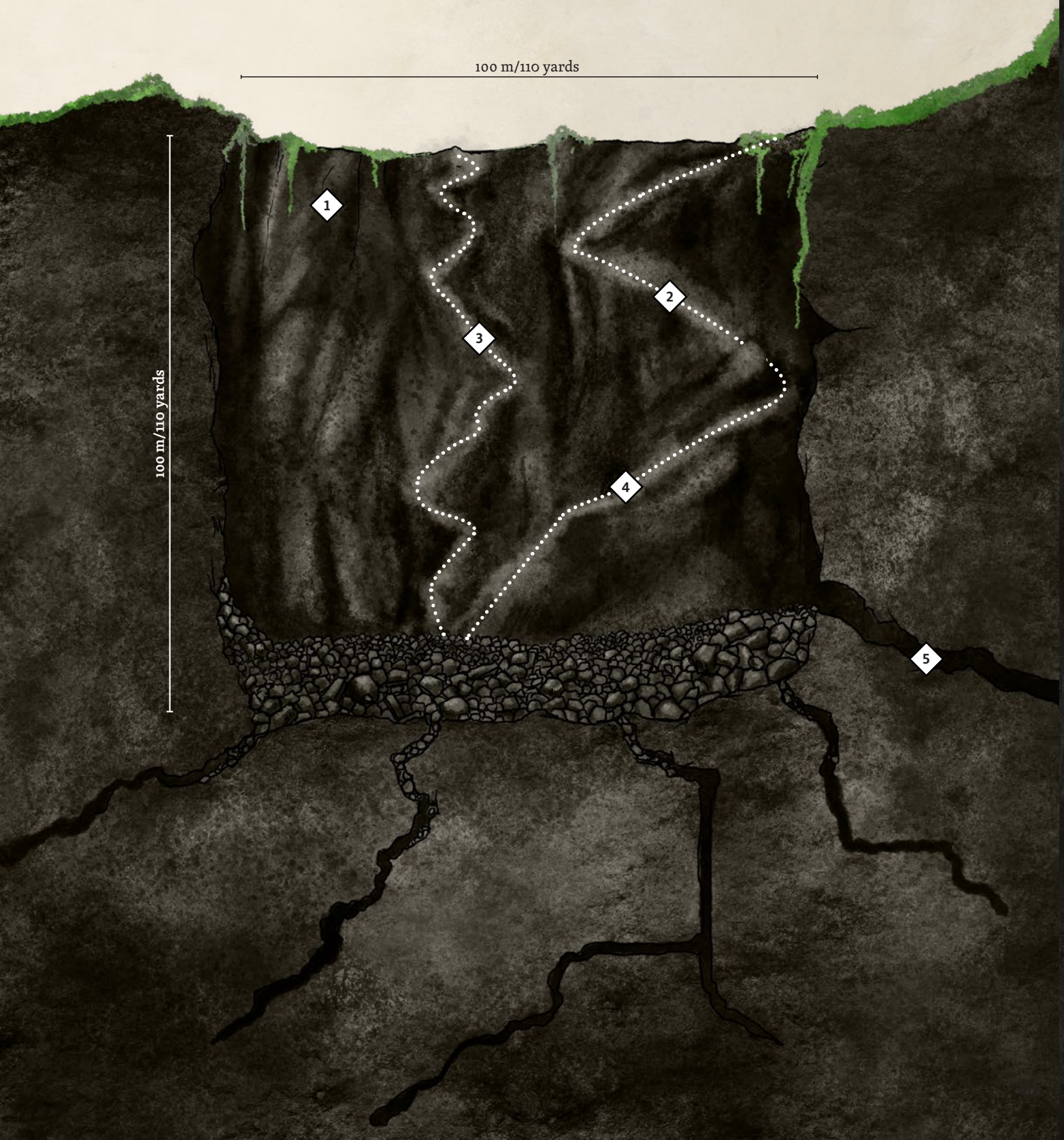
Through the Underworld

The Underworld, among barbarians also known as Underhill or the Abyss, is a dark realm which spreads out below Davokar. Contrary to Ambrian belief it is not totally black down there; in many places fluorescent fungi and algae give off a soft glow to guide the creatures living and hunting in the deep: trolls of course, but also even more abominable creatures than that. Learn more about the Underworld starting on page 48 of the *Gamemaster's Guide*.

The part of the Underworld directly below the sinkhole is not very corrupted but dangerous nonetheless. If the players get the urge to explore the deep, the Gamemaster can either stop them with the help of ravines and collapsed tunnels, or prepare for the detour. In the latter case the characters may journey through shimmering crystal caves, navigate a network of underground lakes, get lost in a forest of massive roots and possibly stumble upon a sunken Symbarian castle – all the while forced to face the creatures of the Abyss (trolls, predators, maleficent spirits and spider beasts). If they travel far enough, they soon end up below Davokar's darker parts, where primal blight beasts crawl out of puddles boiling with corruption and acidified magic.

THE SINKHOLE

1. The Sinkhole
2. Pathway
3. Climbing Route
4. The Spider's Cave
5. Tunnel to the Underworld



by searching them out in the wilderness or waiting for them to climb down into the sinkhole. Her offer is plain and simple:

The characters get her help and can keep everything they find in the tomb, save the Vile Water. To aid them, she can describe the outer chambers of the tomb (rooms #2, #3 and #4) and the two entryways: the westernmost leading to the King's Gate and the other leading to the Monument Chamber and the rift in the bedrock – possible to cross if it was not for the deeply corrupted creature Fangafa.

The spider recommends that the characters take the path through the King's Gate or to close in on Fangafa through the tunnels leading from the sinkhole – that way they can gain an advantage by surprising the abomination. Xanathâ herself would prefer not to fight, which is why she stresses that the westernmost path through the tomb is preferable, especially since she has an idea on how to get the King's Gate open: she saw Magister Senia study the text by the tomb's outer entrance and heard her speak of it as *"a key to unlock the path to the burial chamber."*

Aside from that, Xanathâ offers to bite the player characters, thereby granting them protection against the Creeping Darkness – just like she did with the clerk Tonsel. Characters who agree take no damage and will forthwith be immune to the Darkness' passive, gnawing power (the monstrous trait Gravely Cold). On the other hand, with the bite Xanathâ has established a mystic link to the character. If this link is broken (for instance by *dispel magic*), the protective power of the bite also disappears.

The White Spider Xanathâ

"The threads of fate tremble as I weave the future."

When Symbaroum was young Xanathâ was already old and the venerable spider beast found herself hunted for sport by Symbar's powerful princes. She fled down into the Underworld but not even there was she left in peace, which is why she used mystical powers to cross over into the Spirit World where she remained until recently.

Most things in the Davokar region are new to her. The forest is much larger and denser than she remembers and the Ambrians are of course a new acquaintance. But much has remained the same and her webs tremble from large-scale events which she means to control.

Xanathâ has a playful character and loves to speak in riddles to confuse and amuse. Regarding herself she is secretive but says (true or false) that she is the daughter of the spider god Oroke and mother to the infamous Spider King.

In appearance, she is a bone-pale spider with a body as large as an ogre, covered in even paler scars from countless battles. Normally, her compound eyes are positioned about a meter above ground, but her long legs make it possible to lift the body so high that she can look down on even the tallest adventurer. She speaks telepathically, in images, meaning that she disregards any language barriers. She can also express herself verbally, but only in the form of piercing hisses and at best in a long forgotten barbarian dialect.

Tactics: Xanathâ is sly and plans many steps ahead. Her goal is to claim the Vile Water. If she has to fight, she uses her almost living webs to catch her enemies and then she attacks them with poisonous spit. If that is not enough she will fall back and alter her strategy. She only uses her bite as a last resort, if she gets backed into a corner.

Xanathâ

Huge beast

Armor Class 20 (natural armor)
Hit Points 225 (18d12 + 108)
Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
25 (+7)	23 (+6)	22 (+6)	19 (+4)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Dex +11, Con +11, Wis +8, Cha +5
Skills Perception +8, Stealth +11
Damage Resistances poison; bludgeoning, piercing and slashing from nonmagical weapons
Senses darkvision 120 feet, passive Perception 18
Languages telepathy (120 ft, see below, ancient barbarian tongue, spider-tongue)
Challenge 15 (13,000 XP, proficiency bonus +5)
Manner hisses, stands absolutely still
Shadow radiant, with blinding light (0/10)
Equipment —

Frightful Presence. Each creature of Xanathâ's choice that is within 120 feet of the spider and aware of it must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a creature's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the creature is immune to the spider's Frightful Presence for the next 24 hours.

Legendary Resistance (2/day). If Xanathâ fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Living Webs. Xanathâ can use her bonus action to cause a segment of web up to 30 feet long to move 10 feet towards a creature. Creatures that touch the web are caught in it, see below.

Spider Climb. Xanathâ can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

Telepathic broadcast (1/day). Xanathâ can make a concentrated effort to send out a telepathic message to a range of 1 mile.

Web Sense. While in contact with a web, Xanathâ knows the exact location of any other creature in contact with the same web.

Web Walker. Xanathâ ignores movement restrictions caused by webbing.



ACTIONS

Multiattack. Xanathâ makes two bite or two poison spit attacks.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +12 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 18 (2d10 + 7) piercing damage and the creature must make a DC 20 Constitution saving throw or become paralyzed for 1 minute. A paralyzed creature takes 11 (2d10) acid damage at the start of its turn and can repeat the saving throw at the end of its turn, ending the effects on a success.

Poison Spit. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, range 40/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 25 (4d8 + 7) poison damage and the creature must make a DC 17 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned for 1 minute. A paralyzed creature takes 5 (1d10) poison damage at the start of its turn and can repeat the saving throw at the end of its turn, ending the effects on a success.

Web (Recharge 5–6). *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, range 40/80 ft., one Large or smaller creature. *Hit:* The creature is restrained by webbing. As an action, the restrained creature can make a DC 15 Strength check, escaping from the webbing on a success. The effect also ends if the webbing is destroyed. The webbing has AC 15, 40 hit points, vulnerability to fire damage, and immunity to bludgeoning, poison, and psychic damage.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

Xanathâ can take 2 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Xanathâ regains spent legendary actions at the start of her turn.

Recharge (Costs 2 Actions). Xanathâ regains the use of her web feature.

Spit. Xanathâ can make a spit attack against a creature in range.

Web. Xanathâ causes one of her web segments to move, as living webs above.

THROUGH THE UNDERWORLD

The bottom of the sinkhole is covered in rubble that completely buries the cave which once was there. If one wants to gain access to the tunnels that previously led in and out of the cave, one would have to spend several hard-working days moving boulders and shoveling dirt – given that you actually have an idea of where the openings were located. It is not likely that the player characters will take on such an endeavor, especially since there is already one passable way into the depths.

The quake that created the sinkhole also gave rise to lots of cracks in the bedrock of the area. One of these connects the sinkhole to the Monument Chamber in the tomb (room #4). Following the crack from the sinkhole to the tomb or the other way around is not difficult, even if the ground and walls are rough and the path is dark. However, it is not free from risk.

In a couple of places the crack runs through or intersects with tunnels and caves belonging to the ancient Underworld. It was through such openings that Gabba and his subjects came fleeing and that Fangafa closed in on the muffled heartbeats of the Vile Water.

Whether the characters are traveling to or from the mausoleum, the Gamemaster can use the following suggestions to spice up the experience:

1. The Hunting Party

The crack runs straight through a natural tunnel. As the characters reach the intersection, two goblins stand as if paralyzed at the edge of the light from their lantern. They are holding a handful of throwing spears each and are carrying a dead beast (**DC 13 Intelligence (Nature) check**: Jakaar, see *The Promised Land*) between them. One of them flings a spear towards the characters before they turn and flee into the darkness. If the characters chase after them, the tunnel soon forks and there are no traces indicating which way the goblins went. Should the players persist, the Gamemaster decides what happens.

2. The Underground Lake

For some time, the characters must travel along a very narrow ledge between the wall and an underground lake whose scale is impossible to determine. However, what is evident in the glow of their torches or lanterns is that something huge is moving in the water – all that can be seen is a bony spine and the surface bulging where the shape moves.

To traverse the ledge requires a **DC 13 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check**. A character can choose to rush, which requires a second **DC 13 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check**. As a suggestion nothing dramatic happens if anyone fails the check and falls into the water, besides the character becoming wet and their heart leaping up in their throats.

3. The Mare Cat Cave

The crack leads into a vast underground hall, with the ground covered in stalagmites and a ceiling so distant it cannot be seen. The characters must find the place where the crack hopefully continues, on the other side of the cave. They walk through complete darkness, sliding in-between stalagmites up to three fathoms high. There is also a pack of mare cats in the cave, numbering twice as many as the characters. The beasts have recently killed a huge reptile and are not on the hunt. They will, however, defend their quarry if the characters for some (ill-advised) reason decide to disturb their feast.

The Cult Hideout

IN AN OVERGROWN and partly submerged ruin is the hideout of the cultists who trailed Ordo Magica to the area, hoping to obtain the tomb's treasures. They were just about ready to follow Magister Senia into the mausoleum when the Creeping Darkness passed through the headquarters. Now they are hoping for another chance to follow someone into the tomb, and maybe the player characters are what they have waited for.

Besides the leader, who is described below, the cult is made up of a number of cultists equal to the number of player characters. For the cultists, use **cult followers** (page 183 in the *Bestiary*).

Depending on what the characters have and have not done before they arrive at the outpost (see the text box *The Cultists and Previous Adventures* on the next page) the cult members can have a hostile, neutral or even friendly attitude towards them. If the attitude is neutral or friendly (for instance if the characters decided to hand over the King's Skull to Odako during the adventure *The Mark of the Beast*) a temporary alliance between the groups is fully achievable – it is even plausible that the leader of the cult recognizes the player characters from afar and seeks them out with such a proposal. But even if there is cause for hostility (maybe the player characters killed Odako and stole Mal-Rogan's amulet) a coalition may be possible to achieve. After all, the cultists and the characters have a common goal and know that the road before them is riddled with powerful competitors. Maybe the cultists initially ambush the characters, but call off the attack when they find that the enemies can defend themselves – after which a tense negotiation about joining their forces can commence.

No matter how a potential alliance is achieved, with or without complications, it is suggested that the cultists never intend to honor the agreement. As soon as the treasures are harvested and the danger has passed they will turn their swords on the player characters, demanding that they hand over everything taken from the tomb, along with all other valuables they may possess.

The Cultists and Previous Adventures

If the gaming group has played *The Promised Land* and/or *The Mark of the Beast*, the Gamemaster can use the cultists to tie the adventures together. We recommend that the false witch hunter Odako from *The Mark of the Beast* reappears as the cult leader. And if the undead robber baron Mal-Rogan has survived from *The Promised Land*, he will also resurface as an ally of Odako. Mal-Rogan can for example be after the Sun Stone (if the characters have it) or his amulet (if the characters took it). Or maybe the cultists and the robber baron simply have teamed up in the hunt for Davokar's treasures and artifacts?

If Odako was killed during *The Mark of the Beast*, or if the Gamemaster prefers to have someone else in charge, he is replaced by his apprentice and heir, the ruthless Landela.

And should Mal-Rogan have met his demise, or the Gamemaster wishes to see him replaced, he is swapped for the undead Tanfalls, Odako's master, now killed by Odako and in his former pupil's service.

Odako/Landela

"Why fear the dark? It is power!"

Odako spearheads a group of cultists from the village Glimmervann on the threshold of Davokar. In The Mark of the Beast he came to Thistle Hold disguised as the Black Cloak Baumelo, hunting the ancient cranium that Gorak and Alahara boasted about. Depending on what happened during the adventure, Odako can have different reasons for traveling to the area (see the text box *The Cultists and Previous Adventures* above).

If the characters have not played *The Mark of the Beast* or if Odako died, the suggestion is that Odako/ Landela has heard gossip about Ordo Magica's expedition and connected them to rumors about the King's Skull. In that case they are in the area hoping to lay their hands on other dark treasures from within the tomb.

You can use the statblock on page 29 for Odako/Landela.

Mal-Rogan/Tanfalls

"Try dying – it's larger than life!"

The Queen's Pansar Rogan Gorinder died in battle during The Great War. He got his arm chopped off in combat, the wound started to rot and the healers were powerless against the black infection spreading through his body. But instead of dying Rogan woke up as undead, with an arm stump dripping pus and blackened veins fanning across his throat and temples.

The nobleman has turned into a true robber baron. Previously he ran a band of brigands in the Titans but has now headed north – possibly hunting the Sun Stone or his macabre talisman, or in the hope of finding more worthy companions.

If Mal-Rogan is out of the picture the former cult leader Tanfalls replaces him at Odako's/Landela's side – murdered by his apprentice and since then the servant of his murderer.

Use Mal-Rogan's statblock on page 14.

THE CULTISTS IN THE TOMB

If an alliance is out of the question – or if the Gamemaster would rather use them as pure opponents – the cultists will try to sneak into the tomb behind the player characters. In that case, their strategy is to attack as soon as the characters have opened the King's Gate.

If that fails, the cultists will try the path over the rift, leading to a very unpleasant encounter with Fangafa. It is recommended that half of the remaining cultists survive that encounter and that the leaders (Odako/Landela and Mal-Rogan/ Tanfalls) make it back out alive.

After meeting Fangafa, the cultists position themselves outside the tomb, waiting for a new chance to attack. But maybe they have not met their final abomination for the day? If the characters manage to break the seal of the treasure chamber, the tomb's protective powers disperse and the Creeping Darkness can get in. If so, the Darkness will make its deadly approach over the place where the cult is hiding, with the effect that none other than Odako/Landela and Mal-Rogan/ Tanfalls survive.

The duo will still try to usurp the player characters' treasures. If they are vastly outnumbered they will not attack them right away; instead they turn into importunate archenemies that the characters will have to deal with again and again – directly as well as in the form of hired thugs or sellswords, poisoning attempts, the spreading of malicious rumors and so on.

The Creeping Darkness

THE DARKNESS HAS been lured to the area by the Vile Water and all it wants is to unite with the pure corruption of the artifact. Unfortunately the runes on the tomb prevent spirits from entering – at least for now. Until an opportunity arises (for instance if the characters, willingly or not, disarm the runes) it roams the area, consuming the life force from nature and creatures. In contrast to Xanathâ, the Darkness cannot be communicated or reasoned with; it does what it does according to the laws of its black world.

The Gamemaster can use the Creeping Darkness in a number of ways – as anything from an evocative effect to a very real enemy.

Creeping Darkness

Huge phenomenon

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)
Hit Points 175 (14d12 + 84)
Speed 20 ft

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	20 (+5)	22 (+6)	11 (+0)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Dex +9, Con +10, Wis +6
Condition Immunities exhaustion, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, unconscious
Damage Resistances fire, poison, psychic; bludgeoning, piercing and slashing from nonmagical weapons
Senses blindsight 120 feet, passive Perception 12
Languages telepathy (120 ft.)
Challenge 9 (3,900 XP, proficiency bonus +4)
Manner terrifying
Shadow black against the blackness of the world (thoroughly corrupt)
Equipment —

Gravely Cold. Each creature that starts its turn within 120 feet of the creeping darkness must pass a DC 18 Constitution saving throw or take 9 (1d6 + 6) cold damage and lose 10 feet of its movement speed until the end of its turn.

Darkness. The creeping darkness projects magical darkness in all directions for 60 feet.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The creeping darkness makes two blight wave attacks.

Blight Wave. The creeping darkness makes an attack with its wave of blight power. This is either in the shape of a 30-foot cone or a 60-foot line. Each creature in the area of effect must make a DC 18 Constitution saving throw, taking 21 (2d12 + 8) cold damage on a failure or half that amount on a success.

Black Spikes. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d8 + 5) piercing damage and 1d4 temporary Corruption.

REACTIONS

Deadly Energies. When the creeping darkness is struck by a spell, it can convert that power into life-draining energy. The creeping darkness is immune to the effects of the spell. Each creature within 30 feet of it must make a DC 18 Constitution saving throw, taking cold damage equal to their total Corruption on a failure or half that amount on a success.

THE DARKNESS AS A THREAT

The tracks and presence of the Creeping Darkness are dramatic tools to use if the Gamemaster wishes to, for instance, force the characters into motion or action. It is also an ominous threat that can inspire cooperation and alliances that would otherwise be inconceivable – with the goblins of Urrbukktur, the cultists and/or the white spider Xanathâ.

Tomb of Dying Dreams is a challenging adventure even if the characters do not have to fight the Darkness, and for some groups the mere knowledge of its existence is enough to instill a sense of urgency.

THE DARKNESS AS AN ADVERSARY

If the Gamemaster wishes to use the Darkness as a very real threat, we suggest that it be done in the way described on page 75, in short:

If, or when, the player characters break the protective runes in the tomb, the Darkness will be able to pass through the walls and head for the Vile Water. What follows then is closely detailed under the header The Treasure Chamber (see page 74).

The Creeping Darkness

A silent darkness in motion accompanied by a bone-freezing cold.

The Creeping Darkness is a living entity, made manifest as a moving field of darkness. It is abysmally cold and thirsty for life – as witnessed by what remains of Ordo Magica's headquarters. When the Darkness moves forth, a fifty pace wide streak of death appears in its wake, as if everything just died. And since even the smallest microbe perishes, the streaks do not start to decompose until new spores and bacteria arrive, for example with the winds or carried by wandering animals.

Note that if the characters have been bitten by Xanathâ, they are protected from the Gravelly Cold of the Darkness, but not from its active attacks.

The Tomb of the Beheaded King

THE TOMB OF the Symbarian king Hurian-Lo Apak is the primary locus of the landscape. This is where the Vile Water can be found and where the agents in the area are striving toward. Down in the tomb Fangafa, the Thorn Queen, is frustratingly tearing at the rock to reach the artifact. And in the burial chamber sits the beheaded king himself, dead since long years past and dreaming grandiose dreams of revenge.

The mausoleum itself lies inside a nowadays asymmetrical mound and has sunken somewhat compared to the surrounding ground surface. The mound is covered in trees, bushes and undergrowth, as if it is a natural element of the terrain. The only exception is the wall around the tomb's gated entrance, which Gorak and his expedition exposed when searching for clues on how to deal with the traps inside.

There are two main entrances/exits in the tomb, one of them being the Main Gate. If the player characters enter that way the cultists will see it, which can cause some serious

problems if the characters have not met them and either sent them running or agreed to a partnership.

The other entryway is through the cracks leading from the sinkhole to the Monument Chamber, a path most likely involving an encounter with the Thorn Queen Fangafa.

1. THE MAIN GATE

The twin-gate to the mausoleum is ajar. Actually, it is impossible to close after the seismic event that also created the sinkhole and the rift in the Monument Chamber, caused by Gorak's expedition entering the Burial Chamber and thereby activating the ancient protective runes of the tomb.

Even if the outer defenses of the tomb are penetrated, its mystic protection is intact and bound to the runes on the door to the Treasure Chamber. The runes have the power to keep spirits (including the Creeping Darkness) out and also make the tomb impossible to perceive from outside with the help of rituals (Clairvoyance), even if one has been inside at an earlier point.

Around the main gate are cuneiform symbols, as old as the tomb itself. A character who has the feature Loremaster realizes that they form ancient Symbaric words, and with a **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check** the text is fully readable:

- The symbols speak of the greatness and wisdom of King Hurian-Lo Apak, of how he earned his throne after having outsmarted the Spider Goddess Oroke and bested the Toad Drott Arraka. From Oroke the King claimed the source of his power, a chalice filled with divine nectar. Aided by the powerful essence he became immortal, conquered all land between the corners of the world (here follows a long list of other local, Symbarian rulers that Hurian-Lo Apak dethroned and forced to kneel before him) to finally govern his realm with equal amounts of force and fairness. If one is to believe the writings, that is...
- The grandiose language and epic deeds are typical for accounts from Symbaroum's early days, when numerous local kings fought each other in endless battles. This period is assumed to have taken place between 2000 and 1500 years ago, long before Symbar was built and a more cohesive empire was founded. In short: much of the statements are probably baseless boasting, the rest exaggerations.
- The Spider Goddess Oroke is still worshiped among several barbarian tribes and is in some aspects similar to the old Ambrian deity the Executioner.
- Toad Drott is an unknown, likely amphibian, monster, possibly related to the skeleton exhibited at the Toad's Square in Thistle Hold.
- The "divine nectar" mentioned in the text recurs in many myths of both Ambrian and barbarian origin. Most likely it does not refer to one and the same item, but is a narrative simplification referring to different kinds of potent artifacts and elixirs.

If the character succeeds with another **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check**, they can decipher the very weather-beaten symbols that seem to provide clues about how to open the King's Gate, further into the tomb (see *The Supplicant Chamber*, page 68). The symbols roughly translate to:

"When the steadfast at the gate of the King signs a prayer for salvation and bends his knee in adoration the illumined path is opened to tear-filled pleasure and joy."

Signs in the Dark

When the player characters arrive at the entrance of the tomb two groups have already been there – first Gorak and his followers, then Magister Senia with her colleagues.

Gorak and Alahara's visit took place about eight months ago. It was they who unearthed the outer façade and who managed to pry open the main gate. At the King's Gate two of their companions died before they succeeded in disarming the trap. They forced the gate open and stopped it from slamming shut with a sword stuck in the gap. They emptied the Forechamber of all valuables before proceeding into the Burial Chamber. Just as Gorak laid eyes on the crown of the mummified king, the Glowing Guards came to life and the rocky ground was hit by a powerful tremor. All other expedition members fled and since Gorak did not want to be left alone against an overwhelming opposition he cut the head off the mummy and bolted towards the exit. Only one of the expedition's members was slain by the swords of the Glowing Guards (see room #2, *The Entry Hall*).

The Ordo Magica expedition entered the tomb sixteen days prior to the start of this adventure. Early on, Magister Senia made the unfortunate decision to take the path over the rift, through the Monument Chamber and the Hall of the Glowing Guards. A temporary bridge was put in place, but as soon as the first two explorers were halfway across Fangafa made her entrance. She smashed the bridge from below, sent one novice tumbling down the rift and squeezed the life out of the other. Senia retreated and returned to study the cuneiform writings outside, trying to find another way in. Finally she solved the riddle of the King's Gate, and she could press onwards with her two remaining companions. When the Glowing Guards were activated, one companion fled towards the exit where he bested one of the guards before getting killed. The other companion ran the wrong way and fell down the rift to his death. Senia never made it out of the Forechamber, slain by five guards and only able to fire off one scorching ray before entering the eternal sleep.

Lacking a Loremaster

If none of the characters have the Loremaster feature, they will have trouble deciphering the writings on the façade. If so, the Gamemaster can let the dead novice carry a notebook in his knapsack. There the mosaics in the Supplicant Chamber are depicted along with texts describing the novice's interpretation of both motifs and writings.

It is also possible that the notebook contains a translation of the verses needed to open the King's Gate, but the suggestion is to leave that detail out – in essence, players with the Loremaster feature should be rewarded by getting an easier journey through the tomb!

2. THE ENTRY HALL

Inside the gate is a chamber with openings left and right. Aside from the crack which runs through the mosaic on the northern wall, the room itself is insignificant. The only things of real interest are the three shapes on the floor:

A newly dead novice of Ordo Magica. A successful **DC 13 Wisdom (Medicine) check** reveals that she was killed by multiple thrusts with a short sword.

An empty, archaic and scorched suit of metal armor. There is no body to wear it but two short swords, dark with dried blood, lay next to it. A successful **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check** reveals that the armor is primarily scorched on the inside. A successful **DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check** discloses that the carvings on the breastplate are incantations, similar to that of the ritual *flaming servant* but much older and presumably more powerful.

A long since decomposed corpse, probably a grave plunderer if their equipment is any indication. With a successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine) check** one can conclude that the robber died more than half a year ago, from a dozen stabs made with short swords from many directions – the robber must have been totally surrounded by enemies. Aside from the bodies, the character who succeeds with a **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check** notices a faint draft and hears scraping sounds from the right, while all is still and quiet in the tunnel to the left. Using the feature Shadow-sight gives rise to a vision of a black heart beating deeper inside the tomb; with each pulse it sends black blood flowing out over the region. If a character uses an appropriate divination spell, the following vision is received: along the streaks of black blood abominations and monsters close in on the tomb – a roaring blight beast claws a path from the Underworld, a shining spider descends along glittering threads and a shapeless darkness closes in from all directions.

3. THE SUPPLICANT CHAMBER

The mosaic walls of the Supplicant Chamber are in surprisingly good condition. The road ahead is blocked by a low copper gate, green from verdigris and bordered by archaic runes. Human remains lay scattered over the floor, heavily decayed after having been cut apart many months ago. Among the body parts are two short swords, a dagger, 1d10 shillings and a leaflet promising the carrier two free tankards of the beer type Stut at the Salons of Symbaroum in Thistle Hold. A successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine) check** reveals that the parts belonged to two bodies, cut lengthwise and crosswise by mighty slashes. If the character succeeds by 5 or more, they may also conclude that the parts were scattered from a place in front of the copper door, as if they were hit there and then thrown against the walls. And should a character succeed at a **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check** another revelation is made: there are almost invisible notches in the stone floor and ceiling near the gate (see below).

The Mosaics

There are two noteworthy mosaic motifs in the chamber. The character who succeeds with a **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check** realizes that the image on the right wall shows a stylized map of the area around the tomb – apparently there were scarcely any trees in the region when it was made. A Loremaster can add to the interpretation: the map depicts the location as it looked during the early days of Symbaroum, before it became a unified empire. According to legends, Davokar was planted by the elves of the Iron Pact after the fall of Symbar, as a protective layer against the tainted grounds. The mosaic on the left wall describes a macabre scene, shown against a blood-red background. A shape in golden armor has impaled another being on a spear and hoisted it into the air, the latter dressed in black robes and carrying a black crown. To the right of the two is something resembling a freshwater well, and it seems like the golden one is about to heave his enemy therein. Further to the right, the artist has depicted a monstrous, toad-like creature as if it was rushing towards the humanoid beings. A successful **DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check** reveals that there are small cuneiform writings on the mosaic, on the shaft of the spear and along the rim of the well. With the feature Loremaster, the text "Ramaran's bane" can be read on the spear. The text on the well consists of unintelligible character combinations, but a **DC 15 Intelligence (History) check** is enough to recognize the phrase – from the Bronze Well of Thistle Hold!

The King's Gate

The Loremaster feature lets a character see that the runes around the King's Gate are written in the same language as the markings outside the main entrance. Succeeding at a **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check** allows them to understand that the texts left and right of the gate list


8
7
N
1.5 m
5 feet
TOMB OF HURIAN-LO APAK
1. Main Gate
2. Entry Hall
3. Supplicant Chamber
4. Monument Chamber
5. The Forechamber
6. The Hall of the Glowing Guards
7. Burial Chamber
8. Treasure Chamber
5
3
6
4
2
1

Hurian-Lo Apak's foremost vassals and that the phrase over it is a prayer for the King's help and protection.

If examined more closely, with a successful **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check**, the character also notices that the runes over the gate are strangely free from dust (as if someone has cleaned them with a finger), while the texts on the sides are filled with dirt. The thing is, the King's Gate is fitted with a vicious, magic trap which will hit anyone trying to push the door open without first a) dragging a finger through the prayer over the gate, and b) kneeling directly after. If one does that, the door opens by itself with a scraping sound.

If the trap is sprung the one responsible must make a **DC 20 Dexterity saving throw**. There are four blades; on a failure, compare the die result to the DC. Each failure by 5 represents a successful blade attack; any remaining failure also represents a successful attack. For example: if your roll result was 8, your character is struck by three blades (20 – 8 = 12 and 12 = 5 + 5 + 2). Each blade deals 4 (1d8) slashing damage.

If a character detects the trap with a **DC 18 Wisdom (Perception) check**, they can disable the trap with either a **DC 20 Dexterity (Thieves' Tools) check** or by using the weapons laying on the floor and a **DC 17 Intelligence check**. If the trap is disarmed then the door must be forced open:

- A maximum of six individuals can join together and try to pry open the gate.
- To triumph, they must pass a **DC 13 Strength (Athletics) group check**.
- At the end of each turn there is a risk that the disarming of the trap comes to naught, a risk that increases for each failed attempt.
- If the group fails their first Strength check, roll a d10. On a 1–2, the trap is sprung. If the trap is not sprung, they can make another attempt. This time the trap springs on a 1–4.
- On the fifth failure the trap is sprung.
- When the gate has been passed it will close by itself and cannot be opened from the inside. Player characters who do not think to put a wedge in place will have to take the other path out, past the rift where Fangafa impatiently waits. Note that it takes a sturdy material to keep the door ajar – a sword or a log will do; a wooden spear shaft or a thinner branch will not.

4. THE MONUMENT CHAMBER AND THE RIFT

When the mausoleum was built this chamber was filled with sculptures and statues, made to emphasize King Hurian's many feats. All but one lie smashed at the bottom of the rift that now runs through the chamber, caused by Gorak and Alahara entering the Burial Chamber.

The rift is nearly seven paces wide and the bottom cannot be seen. A soft breeze is felt when standing next to it, like the breathing of some enormous creature down in the dark. Five sturdy, newly cut logs lay scattered around the gap – three on the northern side, two on the southern – as if a provisional bridge had been in place but was demolished, most likely from a forceful thrust from underneath.

Below one of the logs on the south side is the corpse of a wizard; at first glance he appears to have been crushed to death. However, a successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine) check** reveals that the cause of death is something else. The skin on the young man's arms, chest and back is perforated from something like a knife tip or robust thorns. Also, the damage suggests that he has been squeezed to death, possibly by a very strong serpent.

A **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check**, with attention directed towards the rift, leads to the conclusion that something is moving around down there – something giving off shuffling, rustling, clicking sounds.

The monument left standing is a statue in the northwestern corner and depicts King Hurian-Lo Apak fighting a toad

Avoiding Combat

In Davokar it is not uncommon to come across adversaries which are so powerful that even the most hardened Pansar would find it hard to handle. But in almost all such cases there are ways to avoid a bloody confrontation. In the case of Fangafa, the Gamemaster should keep the following in mind:

First, the Thorn Queen is after the Vile Water and nothing else – if she gets the artifact, the characters are quite safe. And should the players forget this in the heat of the moment, they could be reminded if one of them has the feature Loremaster or if someone succeeds with a **DC 10 Intelligence check**.

Secondly, Fangafa is slow. By using the Dash action, the characters can sprint past her. Of course, this may mean that she gets to make an opportunity attack on each of them, but after that they should have a good chance to get to safety.

Finally, the Gamemaster is encouraged to reward other possible solutions that the players may come up with. Maybe Fangafa can be lured to hunt one (quick) character down the rift, while the rest can cross the Monument Chamber without fear? It should be costly and/or difficult to avoid the old Thorn Queen, but it cannot be totally impossible!

monster as huge as a bull. Closer inspection reveals that the monster is mummified and that only the King driving his spear through the toad's crackling dry skull is made of stone.

The characters can reach this chamber from three different directions – from south (the Main Gate), west (the Hall of the Glowing Guards) or east (the sinkhole). However, no matter which way they enter, an encounter with Fangafa is difficult to avoid for those who find themselves in or crossing over the rift.

Fangafa, the Thorn Queen

The clicking and scraping of bone hard spikes on stone is all one hears as she approaches.

Fangafa is an ancient being that has lived most of her life in the dark of the Underworld. She has been dormant for long periods but lately she has been kept awake by the corruption that seeps out of Symbaroum's ruins at an ever increasing pace. The Corruption has also poisoned her and transformed her previous hunger for flesh into a deeper and deeper thirst for power.

When she heard the distant beating of a black heart (the Vile Water) she was lured toward it. The solid bedrock stopped her from reaching the heart, but it does not hinder her from trying to claw her way in while waiting for some smaller creature to bring it out.

Fangafa looks like a bare, enormous thorn bush with slithering, branch-like outgrowths attached to a lumpy root-body the size of an ox. Eight of the outgrowths are much sturdier than the rest, like the arms of an octopus but bark-covered and with thorny spikes where the suction cups would have been. At the far end of these longer arms are narrow cracks that, if opened, reveal huge cat-like eyeballs. And close to each of these eyes is a small, dark and malicious brain.

Not even Fangafa herself knows who she is and where she comes from. But since cultural beings tend to attach names and origins to all evil they encounter, the Thorn Queen has inspired numerous legends over the years. Some say she was given consciousness, soul and hunger as a reaction to the corrupt, magical waste one of Symbaroum's arch mages deposited in his own backyard. At other times, it has been said that she was created by mistake, by the same morphantics who gave life to the colossi. Other sources have called her a demented nature god, a thoroughly corrupt arch troll and a black tumor on Davokar's soul.

Fangafa herself does not care; she only lives to still the thirst for power that now screams in her eight minds. Nothing else matters.

She does not eat anymore; if she kills she does so out of frustration or on instinct, not to satisfy some craving. All she desires is power and if she is not allowed to consume the Vile Water she will ultimately starve to death, leaving nothing behind but a fermenting and rotting carcass – truly a sad monument to the once free and mighty Thorn Queen who was revered by the troll kings, feared by the princes of Symbaroum and considered holy by each and every winter elf.

Fangafa

Huge phenomenon

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)
Hit Points 243 (18d12 + 126)
Speed 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	8 (-1)	25 (+7)	10 (+0)	13 (+1)	2 (-4)

Saving Throws Str +9, Con +11, Wis +5
Senses passive Perception 11
Languages None
Challenge 12 (8,400 XP, proficiency bonus +4)
Manner swaying, emits clicking sounds
Shadow purple, so deep in nuance that it just as well could be pitch black Corruption: (thoroughly corrupt)
Equipment none

Eight Eyes. Fangafa can see all around itself and cannot be surprised.

Regeneration. Fangafa recovers 11 hit points at the start of its turn, unless it has taken radiant damage since its last turn.

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, Fangafa has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Fangafa can make up to eight attacks with its tendrils but it usually uses four tendrils to support itself and four tendrils to attack.

Tendrils. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (1d12 + 5) bludgeoning damage and if the target is a Large or smaller creature it is grappled (escape DC 16) and restrained.

5. THE FORECHAMBER

The Forechamber was where the relatives and friends left their personal gifts, for the deceased to bring along on his final voyage. The tapestries and other fabrics that once decorated the walls are long since destroyed. And the four stone tables that were covered by urns, vases, small chests and similar objects are empty. All that remains after the visit by Gorak's expedition are shards and splinters of the smashed vessels.

The only things left after Ordo Magica's explorers are Magister Senia's body and the black scorching on the wall where her final Brimstone Cascade hit. The character who succeeds with a **DC 13 Wisdom (Medicine) check** realizes: just like the corpse in the Entry Hall, Senia has been cut

numerous times with short swords – if someone bothers to count, there are twenty-three individual wounds.

On the floor close to the corpse lies the Magister's equipment in a knapsack. No notebook is found, because all notes were taken by her assistant, but the characters can find a rolled up paper describing the recipe for making Purple Sap along with two small vials containing medium strong doses of the elixir (see page 181 of the *Player's Guide*). Aside from that, the knapsack contains a leather case filled with first class exploration tools. Anyone who uses Senia's brushes, wire brushes, chisels, magnifying glass, etc. has advantage on any Investigation checks.

In the northern wall there is a wide, arched opening that leads through a short corridor into the Burial Chamber. There is no door but the red stone tablet placed above the archway can hardly be misread. Carved into the tablet are cuneiform symbols flanked by armored warriors with swords raised. The text can be read by someone with the Loremaster trait: *"You who enter here, will be cut to pieces."*

The smaller opening to the south leads to the Hall of the Glowing Guards. A successful **DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check** makes a character aware of a warm breeze coming from the chamber, a breeze carrying a faint scent of soot.

6. THE GLOWING GUARDS

The characters can enter this soot-smelling chamber from the Forechamber or through the narrow passage found in the west wall of the Monument's Chamber. The room is completely bare except for twelve empty, full suits of plate armor, with two short swords attached to the steel gloves. They stand in a formation indicating that there once were thirteen of them.

Passing through the chamber is possible, but if the player characters so much as touch the suits, the Glowing Guards will activate. 1d4–1 guards awaken each turn until eight have been activated. But even if no one initially touches the suits of armor they will most likely be activated, namely when the characters set foot in the short corridor between the Forechamber and the Burial Chamber. If they have not awoken before, they will then, in the manner described above: 1d4–1 per turn until a total of eight have been activated. The remaining four will come alive in a similar fashion when the characters start to interact with the runes on the gate to the Treasure Chamber (see page 59).

Glowing Guards

A muffled roaring is heard, as from a blazing fire in an iron stove. The guards are waiting to serve their King. They do not react to movements around them – only to someone entering the corridor to the Burial Chamber, tampering with the gate to the Treasure Chamber or if touched. When they wake, the runes on their armor, the swords in their hands and the eyes behind the face guards start to glow. The short swords become red hot, dealing +2 fire damage (only if wielded by the Glowing Guards).

Glowing Guard

Medium construct

Armor Class 15 (breastplate)
Hit Points 42 (5d8 + 20)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	12 (+1)	18 (+4)	10 (+0)	13 (+1)	10 +0

Senses passive Perception 11
Languages None
Challenge 1 (200 XP, proficiency bonus +2)
Manner grimly dutiful
Shadow shining gray, like brushed steel (0/4)
Equipment none

ACTIONS

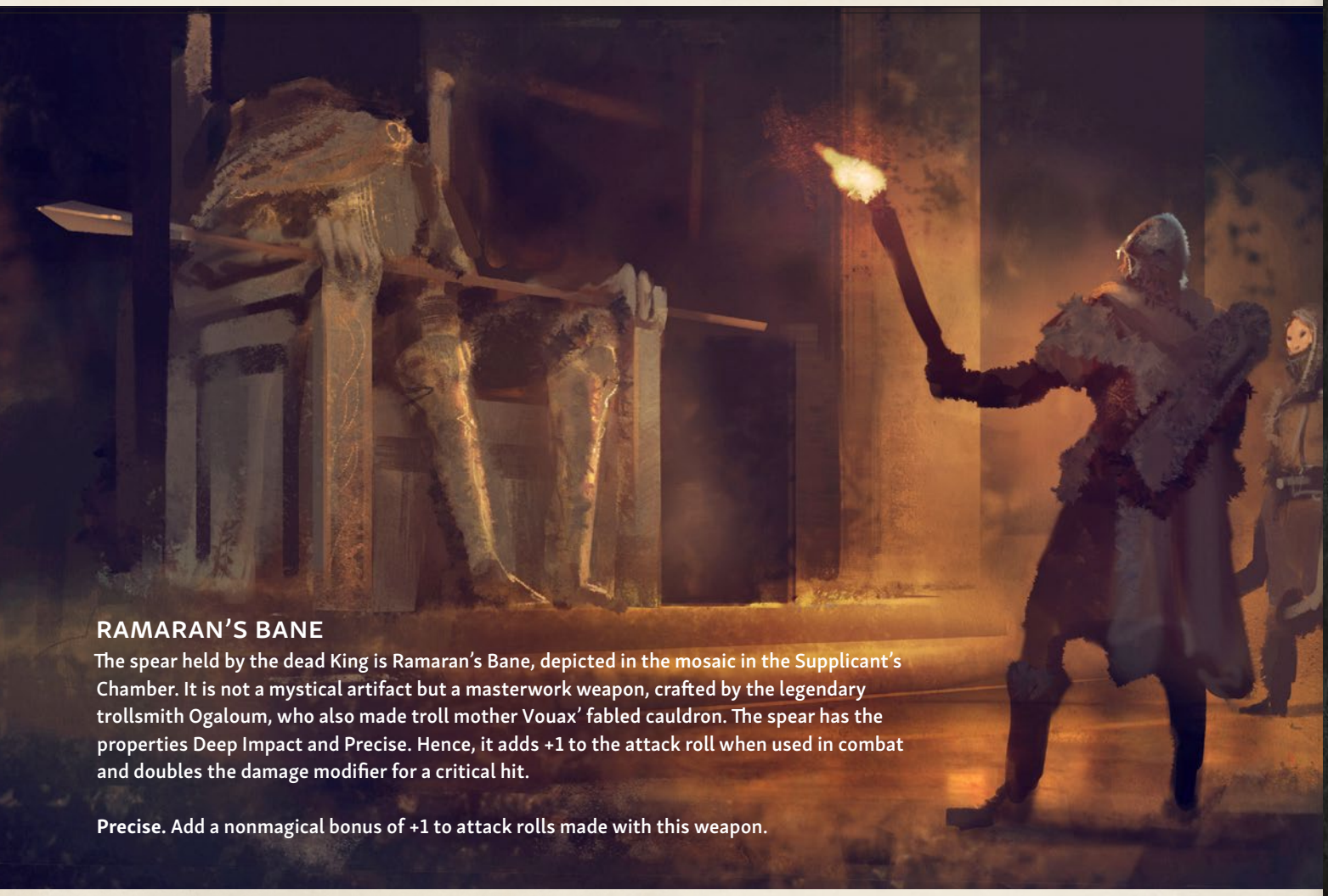
Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage and 2 points of fire damage.

The Rune Covered Breast Plates

A ritualist who manages to get away with the breast plate from one of the Glowing Guards can study it and learn an older version of the ritual Flaming Servant. This type of Flaming Servant has the values described on page 202 in the *Player's Guide* but has a Constitution score of 18 and thus 4 times the caster's proficiency bonus in additional hit points. If one tries to sell a rune plate, it is worth about 100 thaler to other ritualists, or 50 thaler to an antique dealer.

Dawdling Energies

The mystical power infused in the suits of armor has not lost any of its potency. However, it is afflicted by a phenomenon also observed at other locations in Davokar – it seems as if the power has become unpredictable, some might even say indolent or lazy. In short: if someone would have entered the burial chamber shortly after the Glowing Guards were posted there, they would have reacted immediately and moved to attack. Now, over a thousand years later, they are not as quick to respond to trespassers.



RAMARAN'S BANE

The spear held by the dead King is Ramaran's Bane, depicted in the mosaic in the Supplicant's Chamber. It is not a mystical artifact but a masterwork weapon, crafted by the legendary trollsmith Ogaloum, who also made troll mother Vouax' fabled cauldron. The spear has the properties Deep Impact and Precise. Hence, it adds +1 to the attack roll when used in combat and doubles the damage modifier for a critical hit.

Precise. Add a nonmagical bonus of +1 to attack rolls made with this weapon.

7. THE BURIAL CHAMBER

The corridor opens into a short colonnade that leads up to a podium, three feet high. On a partly crumbled throne of stone, once beautifully sculpted, sits the beheaded remains of King Hurian-Lo Apak with his hands on a spear lying over the throne's armrests (see the text box *Ramaran's Bane*, above). And on a pedestal next to the throne is a small carafe made from translucent, volcanic glass, containing something that literally radiates blackness.

Exactly what happens when the player characters meet the King partly depends on if they have played the adventure *The Mark of the Beast* and, if so, what transpired during its course (see the text box *The King's Skull in the Tomb* on page 74). But past events aside, it is clear that King Hurian-Lo Apak will initiate his attempt to possess one of them as soon as they enter his chamber.

The spirit's possession attempts will be made on one player character at a time. He starts with whoever has the highest Strength ability score, and that player must roll a **DC 15 Constitution saving throw**. If the saving throw fails, the King displaces the victim's own spirit and assumes control over the body; if successful, the spirit makes a move on the second strongest character, and so on.

If the King does not succeed in possessing any of the characters his spirit returns to the mummy, waiting for new trespassers to ensnare. In that case, the characters can move freely through the chamber and secure the Vile Water. But should any of the attempts succeed, things take a turn for the worse.

As a suggestion, the Gamemaster takes the possessed character's player aside, telling him or her that it is time to portray the ancient King, *"speechless"* since Hurian-Lo cannot communicate in either Ambrian or the barbarian tongue. The King's goal is to drink the Vile Water, thereby strengthening his new body with its powers. Now, that may sound like a simple task, if it were not for the narrow neck of the carafe and the viscous, slow-running liquid within. What happens depends on how many drops fall down the possessed character's throat before the other characters can come to the rescue. But it should be noted that when the Vile Water comes in contact with a body possessed by the King, it has grimmer consequences than if it is consumed by a normal human being, as follows:

Starting with the turn in which the victim grabs the carafe, he or she can consume a maximum of one drop per turn, and the effect becomes stronger for each drop swallowed,

according to the table on the right. The victim has a chance to avoid the drops and can also be assisted by up to four people trying to make sure the drops land elsewhere than down their throat, or alternatively trying to pry the flask from their grip. This is handled as follows:

- The spirit of the victim is displaced but not destroyed. The character may roll a **DC 15 Wisdom saving throw** once each turn. If successful, they manage to turn their head enough to avoid swallowing the drop which always falls at the very end of the turn.
- Up to four other people can try to help the victim avoid the black drops, which is done with a contested **Strength (Athletics) check**. It is enough that one of the companions succeeds with their check for the Vile Water to end up somewhere else than in the victim's mouth.
- The attempt to pry the flask from the victim's hand may only be performed by one person per turn. To succeed someone must pass the contested **Strength (Athletics) check** as described above, and succeed at a **DC 15 Wisdom saving throw** to triumph over the King's desperate resolve.
- If the victim loses its grip on the carafe or if it is emptied of Vile Water (10 drops), the King's spirit gives up and flees back to its mummified body. If the body is burnt, King Hurian-Lo Apak is finally annihilated. But it is highly questionable if the characters come to think of that before they have opened the gate to the Treasure Chamber, thereby earning themselves a new set of problems to handle... (see below). In any case, if the Vile Water Table does not state differently, the victim will soon come around and be ready to press onwards.

The King's Skull in the Tomb

It is possible that player characters who have played The Mark of the Beast arrive at the tomb carrying the skull of Hurian-Lo Apak – or even that one of them is already possessed by the vengeful King's spirit. In that case, the events will unfold in roughly the same way as described in this section, with the possible exception that someone is already possessed, or that the possession attempt sequence starts when the character carrying the King's Skull enters the Burial Chamber.

If the cranium was destroyed earlier, it is revealed that this did not mean the end of King Hurian's spirit. Instead of perishing, the spirit returned to the beheaded mummy, and has been waiting there for a new chance to possess a living body.

EFFECTS OF THE VILE WATER

Number of Drops	Additional Cumulative Effect
1	+1 permanent Corruption
2	+1 permanent Corruption, +1 to Strength ability score, –1 to Intelligence score (a character may exceed a Strength of 20 by this process).
3	The character is unconscious for a week, while they develop a permanent mark of Corruption (roll 1d12 + 2 on the Marks of Corruption table on page 39 of the *Player's Guide*).
4	+1 permanent Corruption, +1 to Strength ability score, –1 to Intelligence score (a character may exceed a Strength of 20 by this process).
5	The character is unconscious for a month, while they develop a permanent mark of Corruption (roll 1d12 + 2 on the Marks of Corruption table on page 39 of the *Player's Guide*).
6	+1 permanent Corruption, +1 to Strength ability score, –1 to Intelligence score (a character may exceed a Strength of 20 by this process).
7	The victim dies and the King's spirit passes on to its eternal rest.

8. THE TREASURE CHAMBER

The gate blocking the way to the Treasure Chamber is protected by powerful runes that must be neutralized if one wishes to enter. Note that when the energy of the runes is dispersed, the runic protection disappears and the Creeping Darkness starts bleeding through the walls. When that happens, the situation quickly grows critical and the characters will have very little time to handle an almost unmanageable situation. The challenge is dealt with in three steps:

Step 1: The Gate is Opened

The sturdy bronze door is opened by destroying the runes keeping it shut. This can be done in three main ways: a) by casting *dispel magic* which ends the magical effect of the runes; b) by casting *disintegrate* which permanently destroys the runes; or c) by simply using sharp tools to destroy the physical representation of the runes on the bronze door. It should be noted that the last option takes about one hour to finish and must be done while the company is attacked by the remaining Glowing Guards.

Step 2: Entering the Treasury

As soon as the gate slides open, the character who succeeds with a **DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check** or who has the feature Shadow-sight can sense an increasing cold falling

from the ceiling. It also seems as if all sources of light grow dim, or as if the darkness grows deeper.

Those with Shadow-sight receive a sudden vision: a living darkness comes bleeding into the mound, seeps downwards through the tomb, towards the carafe of the Vile Water.

And as the vision fades away, it starts to come true. The Creeping Darkness descends into the Burial Chamber, like streaks of black smoke that flow right through ceiling and walls – the characters must decide if they should run their legs off or make a foolhardy stand!

The rough room behind the bronze gate contains a lot of cloth, skin and wooden items that probably had a sentimental value to the King but which with time have been destroyed beyond recognition. However, left among the debris are eight treasures/artifacts of real interest (see below). The characters have one turn to decide if they will try to grab one of the alluring objects; a turn later the chamber is ruled by darkness.

THE TREASURES

Description	Name/Details	Page Number
A warhammer covered in verdigris	Souleater	195
A carved wooden box with a bowing statue of a dwarf on the lid	Fullangra	192
A handaxe with a glowing, oozing head	Burnreaper	192
A hypnotic green-glittering cape	The Haganor Skin	193
A buckler, engraved with a troll cross	The Troll Cross of Ella	196
A spell codex	Contains *dispel magic* and *dominate beast*	—
A silver chest with Symbarian gold coins	Worth 700 thaler	—
A field laboratory, well-supplied and equipped	Provides advantage on next check involving alchemical supplies	—

Step 3: The Creeping Darkness becomes Manifest

The Creeping Darkness comes from above, pouring into the Treasure Chamber. The next turn it also rules the Burial Chamber, and one turn later it envelopes the Forechamber. From the fourth turn (five turns after the rune gate was opened) the whole tomb is shrouded in darkness, except that it does not descend down the rift to the Underworld.

All characters who at the start of a turn are in a room ruled by darkness will be affected. Those who have not been bitten by Xanathâ are affected by its Gravelly Cold. Secondly, the maleficent abomination will approach one of the characters each turn and strike at them with its spike attacks – most likely against whomever is carrying the Vile Water, if anyone. The character who is attacked can of course choose between retaliating or using their action to Dash, in the hope of getting away from danger.

Now, if the characters realize that the Darkness is out to get the Vile Water, they can use this to escape. One way is to hurl the carafe down into the rift and let the Creeping Darkness battle it out with the Thorn Queen over who gets to consume the remaining drops in the flask. In that case there is still the risk that some characters are affected by Gravelly Cold when the Dark creeps past them, but the abomination will not attack them in any other way.

The characters' chance to get away with the Vile Water is slim but exists. Both Fangafa and the Creeping Darkness are slow and might be outrun, while the white spider Xanathâ is hesitant to attack the player characters if they come off as dangerous prey. But it should also be mentioned, that as long as the Vile Water exists, these three creatures will continue their hunt for it and all of them can track the artifact by sensing its power. Sure, Fangafa has a hard time reaching locations not connected to the Underworld, but both the spider and the Creeping Darkness can enter any place not protected by magical means. And while the white spider is cautious about taking risks, the Darkness can appear just about anywhere, even if the characters get the idea to hide the artifact in populated areas like Thistle Hold or Yndaros!

Panic in the Treasure Chamber!

To keep the tension high and give the players a chance to make their choice, it is suggested that the Treasure Chamber is handled as follows:

1. Describe the situation, the Darkness seeping in, the evil amassing. The chamber is full of debris but a few attractive items can be seen.
2. Give a quick description of the items standing out as interesting.
3. Then ask the players to, without coordinating, write down on a piece of paper what item their character tries to grab.
4. If two or more characters go for the same item, it falls to the one who has the highest Dexterity score. If Dexterity is not decisive, move on to the value in Strength and if that is also a tie, let a simple dice roll decide (highest on a d20 wins).

Farewell to the Adventure Landscape

SINCE *TOMB OF Dying Dreams* is an adventure landscape it is hard to know exactly what will happen as the characters deal with its challenges, and also what the outcome will be. There is, however, one question of great importance to which one can foresee a limited number of answers: who or what will be in possession of the Vile Water? In this section you will find the most likely answers to this question described, along with a few hints on what that can mean for the future.

THE PLAYER CHARACTERS

What the characters do with the highly corrupted artifact is up to them. Will they use it to their own benefit, at the cost of attracting corruption? Will they take it to Ordo Magica or the monastery of the Black Cloaks? Or will they make use of their contacts within the Iron Pact to have the elves deal with the evil? No matter what they choose, it is no doubt an adventure in itself. They will be hunted from the get go, by the creatures and persons who survived this adventure. And should all of them have perished, you can be sure that other monstrosities and dark-minded cultists will feel drawn to the black might of the Vile Water.

THE CULTISTS

If the cultists end up with the artifact they will bring it back to civilized areas, trying to hide it behind skillfully crafted magical veils (for instance the ritual Sanctum). Protected from the watchful senses of player characters, other cult followers and hunting abominations they will use the might of the Vile Water to gain power and influence. It is not unlikely that their doings will become known to the characters, and in that case they are probably in for a whole series of adventures trying to bring them down.

THE SPIDER XANATHÂ

If Xanathâ ends up as the one in possession of the Vile Water it may take a while before the effects start to show. Initially, she disappears into the depths of Davokar, and from there she makes the leap to the Spirit World. Whether she takes this action to protect the world from the artifact or in the hope of being able to use it herself the Gamemaster has to decide, but the latter option should appear appealing: the thought of a black-striped Xanathâ who has fused with the Vile Water in the hope of gaining strength enough to fight the evil of Davokar but has become blight born in the process. That certainly has a both tragic and epic ring to it.

THE CREEPING DARKNESS

If the Creeping Darkness consumes the Vile Water it almost instantly grows from spanning about fifty paces to ten times as much. The Dark sets root in the tomb and starts to infect the entire area, soon known as the Nightmire. In time, the Nightmire will expand over and beyond the Malgomor, meaning that all transportation on or along the river becomes next to impossible. Maybe it will take an unholy alliance of witches, theurgs and even sorcerers to deal with the situation? In that case, who would be more suited to arrange and lead such a motley crew of agents than the player characters?

THE THORN QUEEN FANGAFA

If Fangafa merges with the artifact, the outcome will be similar to what happens with the Creeping Darkness as the winner. The abomination is filled by the corruptive powers and starts to pull the mausoleum and its surroundings down into the dark of the Underworld. At the bottom of this expanding cavity she makes herself a nest worthy of the Queen of the Abyss. She and her offspring will reach out into the river, making it very risky to travel the waters. And it does not take long for the stories to reach civilization – stories about creatures looking like slithering thorn bushes that attack boats on the Malgomor, pulling them down to the bottom.





THE MUDDY HILL stands in desolate majesty amidst the woodlands of Davokar. At its foot some hundred treasure hunters are crammed behind a simple palisade, seeking shelter from the dangers of the forest; wild animals, elves, and worse. You are met by muddy daythalers staggering towards their shacks for some sleep, while a few prospectors celebrate their findings on "the Main Street" – a couple of jerry-built houses with ostentatious exteriors in the middle of the camp.

Suddenly, the bellow of a wounded beast echoes through the woods. "Did the sow frighten you?" A rugged woman in a leather apron approaches, holding a repeating crossbow in her arms. Half her face is covered by a mask of blackened silver. "You better get used to it; the old lady refuses to die and keeps bothering us with her wailings." She adjusts her mask and continues: "They call me Silvercheek. I am the one to see, if you are to purchase a claim. Come, this way."

On the path to her office you pass a wooden pole sticking up from the clay, dressed in withered flowers. "There lays Salindra, hoping," grins Silvercheek. Prayers have been carved into the rough wood, and the ground below is strewn with copper coins; meager offerings to appease the ancient forces of the forest, untamed and hungry...



Fever of the Hunt

FOR LEVELS 4-5

Introduction

Deep inside Davokar, prospectors are digging for treasure in a hill of clay. Hoping to fulfill their dreams, they challenge the region's barbarian clan, Karohar, for whom the place is taboo. The player characters arrive as treasure hunters – or under the guise of being treasure hunters. Soon they realize that these dreamers cannot all be right about the area; the objects of their desires are too diverse to be found in the clay of a single hill, but they are seemingly blind to this obvious fact.

GREAT FORCES ARE in motion. The real threat to all of their lives comes from two directions. In the depth of the hill hides an ancient and bloodthirsty hunter, on the run from a past prey, an Elder Sow circling the hill, waiting to finish what she started. To both of them, the prospectors are mere tools in their age-long fight for supremacy over the region; a fight which after centuries of attacking and retreating now approaches its climax. The prelude to the final battle begins, as it often does, with a murder.

Fever of the Hunt is designed as a combination of an adventure landscape and a classic adventure. In the spirit of the landscape, we present a setting (Salindra's Hope), some non-player characters with their own ambitions (a few driven people in the treasure hunter's camp and, in the background, the two ancient forest gods), and a dramatic event (Handelo's murder) that sets the ball rolling. From there on, the players may do as they please.

There is also an aspect of classic adventure to *Fever of the Hunt*, as it follows a set chain of events. This event chain describes what happens if the player characters do *not* act to change its course. Sure, even with the players' involvement some outcomes are more likely than others (see *Possible Endings*, page 97), but it is important that the players feel that their actions have consequences, making their adventure unique.

Player Characters

THE ADVENTURE MAY be played using any characters with reason to travel to a perilous and remote place like Salindra's Hope, together as a group or on their own.

There can be several reasons for the characters to head for the digging site; and when they have arrived there are many ways to start the adventure (for suggestions, see *Other Reasons for Visit Salindra's Hope*, next page).

AGENTS OF THE IRON PACT

The Iron Pact has placed an infiltrator in Salindra's Hope, to keep a watchful eye on the place and promptly learn if the situation grows into a threat against the surrounding area. The player characters can be sent as backup, since the infiltrator Semel hardly is a man of action.

If so, their mission is to make sure that the situation is not aggravated, that is, to maintain the status quo. The mission is worth 200 thaler; 250 with a successful **DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check**. Half of the money is paid up front, the rest upon the player characters' return.

The leader of the group gains an additional 50 thaler for the road by the secretive employer in Thistle Hold; the veiled woman does not hide the fact that she is Ironsworn and that the player characters are acting on the Pact's behalf. She is, however, unwilling to reveal her identity.

To make sure that the player characters receive the rest of the payment, the employer allows them to choose one person in Thistle Hold to keep the money for them until the mission is completed. The leader also receives an iron ring, beautifully engraved, to show Semel in Salindra's Hope. The woman is Lysindra Goldengrasp, a former treasure hunter who has had a change of heart and realized what man's ventures into Davokar will cost them, even more than it already has.



OTHER REASONS FOR VISITING SALINDRA'S HOPE

Here are a few alternative reasons for the player characters' presence. They might suit the players better than working for the Iron Pact. If the group is indeed hired by the Iron Pact, one or a few player characters could have additional motives for going to Salindra's Hope. Should that be the case this may complicate the main mission in interesting ways, without compromising the quest as a whole.

Consultants

Rumors of the place's eerie ability to influence one's senses have attracted the curiosity of some organizations (most likely the Sun Church or Ordo Magica). Thus, they send reliable consultants to study the phenomenon, but with no expressed orders to intervene in any way. Each player character receives 20 thaler in travel funds, for personal expenses, bribes, and so on.

Dreamers

Player characters with obsessive tendencies or personal goals of a kind that in theory might be hidden within a hill in the woods, could themselves be dreaming of the place and think it worth investigating.

Rescue Mission

The meek and passionate dreamer Gidjabolgo has influential parents. His mother Felega is married to a wealthy merchant in Thistle Hold, and would pay fine silver to have her son brought back – with or without his approval. The last time she heard from him, he told her about a breakthrough in his treasure hunt and claimed Salindra's Hope to be the next stop on his journey.

Felega initially offers a reward of 200 thaler, and will raise it another 100 if the player character succeeds with a **DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check** during the negotiation. Haggling aside, the travel funds will be 50 thaler, for bribes and other expenses.

Sorcerer wanted

Player characters who are Black Cloaks, witch hunters or Templars have, while interrogating cultists, heard of a skilled sorcerer residing in the prospectors' camp. Or maybe one of the player characters is a sorcerer themselves, and has heard the same rumors from their own network.

- If the player characters are witch hunters, they have heard about a Black Cloak named Neferena who went to Salindra's Hope and then vanished. Caution is advised!
- In the latter case, the characters either have a problem that, supposedly, only a sorcerer can solve, or one of them is in need of a dark master and rumors suggest that the sorcerer in the camp could prove to be just that.

Whatever their reason for seeking the sorcerer, the player characters know nothing about him, other than his supposed whereabouts and that the man called himself Vendal while in Thistle Hold (he no longer does, see *Khenad/Handelo/Vendal* among the Non-player Characters, page 86).

CAN THE CHARACTERS WIN?

The characters can finish the adventure in several different ways. The following are a number of possible endings favorable to the player characters.

- They prevent Sikander, a fallen Master of Ordo Magica, from reaching the Eternal Hunter. Although it merely delays the battle between the forest gods it is still a victory of sorts.
- They realize that the final battle would leave the Eternal Hunter corrupted by darkness, and convince him to lay down arms.
- They realize that Gylta is about to get her own herd killed, and make her see the danger in fighting. Then she will not interfere with the Eternal Hunter, as they go their separate ways. If – and in that case, where – the two will meet again, is another story.
- They defeat the Eternal Hunter inside the Serpent Temple below the hill, or during the final battle – the Dance of Death – on top of the hill.
- They defeat Gylta, protector of the aboars; a mighty task, as she is constantly surrounded by members of the herd.

The Legend of the Wild Hunt

THE LEGEND OF the Wild Hunt is significant to the adventure's backstory. The legend is widely known in Davokar, in broad strokes, but also has a very specific meaning to the area surrounding Salindra's Hope. The two levels of the legend, general and specific, are briefly presented below, along with what it takes for the player characters to know of them.

Where is Salindra's Hope?

In this scenario, the treasure hunter's outpost Salindra's Hope is located along the river Eanor, in the territory of clan Karohar. But the camp could be placed anywhere in Davokar, as long as it is reachable by water and surrounded by barbarians isolating the place with strict taboos.

LEGEND OF THE WILD HUNT (GENERAL):

Who: Player characters with the Loremaster feature or a character passing a **DC 13 Intelligence (History) check**.

The barbarians of Davokar tell different versions of the legend. It all centers on a hunter and his savage band of followers – sometimes a hunting god, other times a bloodthirsty winter elf or an undead Symbarian lord who even in death indulges in his favorite avocation: hunting. The hunter's prey is usually some other mythological creature, such as a lindworm, an aboar or another winter elf.

Perhaps the tale is but a thrilling way to explain the storms that sometimes shake Davokar, forcing barbarians to cower in their huts or seek refuge in the halls of their chieftains; perhaps it is an attempt to define the nameless horrors that run rampant through the nights? There is also a moral version of the story, where people are hunted for having broken the witches' taboo.

THE LEGEND OF THE WILD HUNT (SPECIFIC TO THE ADVENTURE):

Who: The witch Girind, and player characters with the Loremaster feature who successfully pass a **DC 13 Intelligence (History) check**.

In the region where the adventure takes place the myth actually has a historical basis. The witches of clan Karohar tell it as follows: the hunter is one of the ancient gods of Davokar, who has forsaken his duties as a shepherd for the more pleasurable activity of hunting. The local witches know him as the Eternal Hunter. His prey is the Elder Sow known as Gylta, the mighty protector of the region's aboars. Having tired of pursuing easy game, the Eternal Hunter decided to go after the Elder Sow.

About three centuries ago they fought in this very place. The Eternal Hunter slaughtered the aboars and their piglets, and in turn the sow stomped and gored his followers. It was a vicious battle, raging all over the region so that men,

beasts, and even elves were killed or forced to flee for their lives. Eventually, the hunting god and the sow faced each other upon a muddy hill among the ruins of an old temple. The hunter was all but killed by the sow's terrible tusks and fled deep into the hill. Mad with lingering rage, the Elder Sow has circled the hill ever since, grunting and snorting, killing indiscriminately. And within the hill the wounded hunter still licks his wounds. Both await an opportunity to finish the battle.

The witches declared the hill and its surroundings taboo, hoping that the two gods would keep each other at bay and that neither of them would gain the upper hand. Should that day come, it would be a bloody one for all living in the area – according to the prophecies spoken by the witches of Clan Karohar.

Treasure-hunting Player Characters

IT IS ENTIRELY possible for the player characters to purchase a claim for themselves and start digging, believing that there really are treasures hidden inside the hill. And there are indeed things to be found, if nothing that would secure their future.

Use the following guidelines for the player characters' activities in the claim.

- Setting up the claim and beginning to dig takes one day. The claim costs 20 thaler, plus 1 thaler per excavation day (maximum of 20 days). No dice need to be rolled and no treasures can be found.
- After the first day, every full day of digging grants a **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check**. A successful check grants one roll on the Claim Find table. If there are several player characters digging, they make separate rolls. If several characters dig for only part of the day, the Gamemaster lets them roll when the total time amounts to one day.
- If the Intelligence (Investigation) check produces a natural 1, some disaster occurs. Roll 1d4:
  1. **River of mud:** Muddy water bursts through the clay wall, hauling the digger along with it if they fail a **DC 13 Dexterity saving throw**. Failure causes 2d6 bludgeoning damage.
  2. **Collapse:** A **DC 13 Dexterity saving throw** is needed to avoid being buried. A digger drowning in the mud takes 1d4 bludgeoning damage each round, and it takes a **DC 13 Strength (Athletics) check** to rescue them (the victim and possible rescuers may roll once each turn).
  3. **Snakebite:** A kanaran slithers through the mud and attacks the player character, who is surprised. The serpent tries to constrict its victim and drag it further into the hill... For the serpent's stats, see page 142 in the *Bestiary*.
  4. **The ground gives way**, leading to the temple where the Eternal Hunter is waiting...

The Fever of the Hunt

The title of the adventure refers to the particular obsession linked to the clay hill and to the fierce battle between the two forest gods, the Elder Sow Gylta and the winter elf known as the Eternal Hunter.

The Fever of the Hunt is not a direct consequence of any ritual or power that these gods use. The obsession arose in the meeting between the powers and the limitless passion of the seekers, which on the slopes of the hill form a certain kind of alchemy. This is Davokar, and here one can experience curious, dreadful and wondrous things that seldom occur anywhere else. It is entirely up to the Gamemaster to make use of, or discard, this sort of effect in other places of the forests. In any case, upon the hill, under the special circumstances of the scenario, the Fever of the Hunt is very much a reality.

CLAIM FIND TABLE

1d20	Find
1–10	Nothing
11–14	Pieces of mosaic, black and white (worth 1d10 shillings to a collector)
15–17	A religious offering (worth 1d10 thaler to a collector), roll 1d4: **1.** Bronze censer **2.** Silver box of myrrh **3.** Obsidian serpent figurine **4.** Wooden box containing an embalmed finger, painted like a snake
18–19	A single Symbarian gold coin, valued at 10 thaler (15 to a collector)
20	Serpent jewelry, a jade snake in a chain of gold, once worn by the priests of the temple (20 thaler, worth double to a collector)

The Landscape

The scene of the adventure is a muddy, treeless hill in the middle of Davokar. Not far from there flows a river, giving passage to those who do not want, or dare, to challenge the barbarians along the forest paths. To clan Karohar the place is taboo; they will hunt down anyone traveling there or trying to leave. But the Karits will not enter the area itself.



Salindra's Hope

HERE IS AN overview of the adventure landscape.

1. Palisade and Gate
The palisade is little more than three meters high and sturdy enough to withstand even a raging aboar. The gate, roughly five meters wide, is the weakest point of the palisade.

2. Salindra's Tomb
A simple wooden pole in the mud, surrounded by modest offerings such as dried flowers, a wooden cup full of ale, and a dozen patinated ortegs.

3. The Gambling Den 5/2 (the sign depicts a pair of dice, a five and a two)
Silvercheek can be found here.

4. The Prospector's Friend
Here Semel sells equipment for twice the price listed in the *Player's Guide* (a **DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check** earns a 25% discount).

5. The Great Fire
The Great Fire burns every night, and continues to glow until the next one. Its embers constitute a meeting place for unemployed daythalers, who often roast river rats and other rodents while singing melancholy songs about their faraway homes.

Now a massive aboar piglet rotates over the fire, feeding many; a gift from Silvercheek to bolster morale in the camp. The treasure hunter Handelo made himself known to the camp's prospectors as he searched the piglet's entrails for 'alchemical substances,' which the daythalers love talking about as the news of Handelo's death arrives. (see *The Murder of Handelo*, page 93).

6. The Cluster of Daythaler Shacks
A crude array of shacks giving shelter to the many daythalers. When they are not resting here or toiling on the hill, they dawdle around the Great Fire.

7. The Hill and its Claims
7a. Sikander's excavation
7b. Gidjabolgo's claim
7c. Handelo's excavation
7d. Arkali's grave digging
7e. Neferena's search for saints

8. The Elder Sow's Tracks Around the Hill
The wide tracks of a great beast having paced the forest in circles, round and round, for ages. A **DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check** confirms that the tracks were made by an exceptionally huge aboar.

9. The Witch Girind's Lookout
A wooden platform up a tree on the hill, with a small camp of tents where Girind and her bodyguards reside.

The Serpent Temple
Made of adobe bricks, the temple is sunken into the hill. The crawlway walls are full of holes, where serpents once slithered across devotees crawling towards the center of the shrine. Most of them are long gone, as is their guardian, a sacred lindworm to whom disobedient believers were fed by the priests.

Its withered carcass can still be found at the heart of the temple.



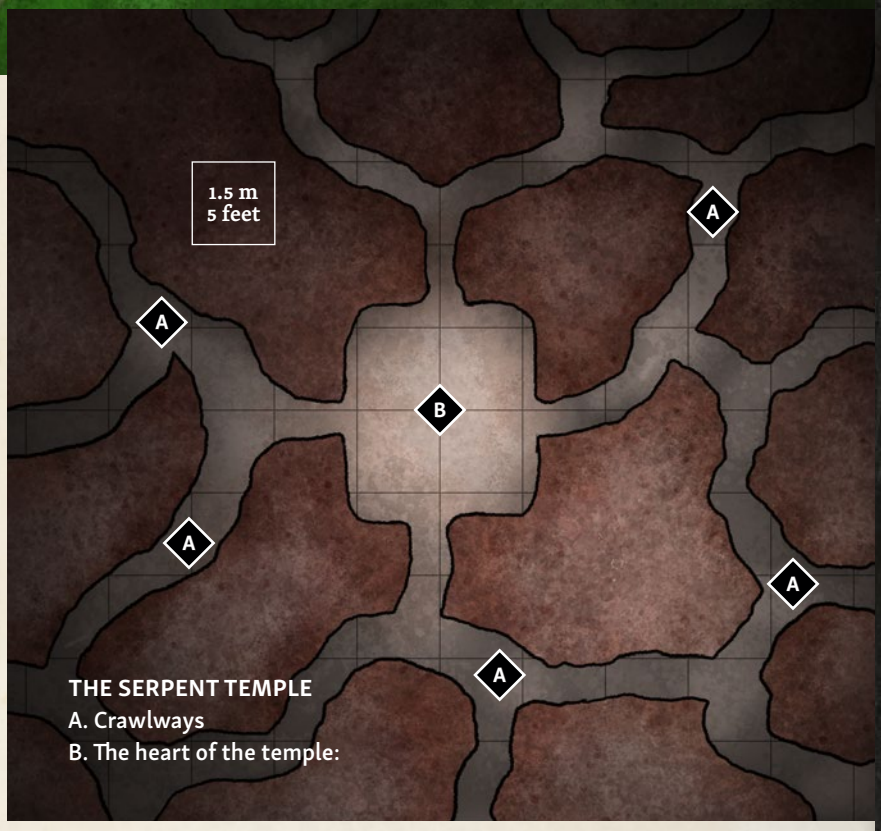
SALINDRA'S HOPE

1. Palisade and gate
2. Salindra's tomb
3. The gambling den 5/2
4. The Prospector's Friend
5. The Great Fire
6. The cluster of daythaler shacks
7. The hill and its claims
   a. Sikander's excavation
   b. Gidjabolgo's claim
   c. Handelo's excavation
   d. Arkali's grave digging
   e. Neferena's search for saints
8. The Elder Sow's tracks around the hill
9. The witch Girind's lookout

A. Crawlways: The Serpent Priests built their temples so that worshipers would have to crawl their way to that which was most holy. Some serpents still slither inside the temple walls, and those entering the crawlways have a one-in-six risk of encountering one. If so, it takes a successful **DC 10 Wisdom saving throw** not to be overcome by claustrophobia.

A terrified person may still continue, but has disadvantage on all ability checks inside the hill.

B. The heart of the temple: Half a dozen kanarans, along with the withered remains of the lindworm that was once both god and guardian of the temple, can be found here. Furthermore, there is the Eternal Hunter, resting on his back inside the lindworm's skeleton, staring at the ceiling, his eyes glowing red (see *The Eternal Hunter* on page 90).



THE SERPENT TEMPLE

A. Crawlways
B. The heart of the temple:

BACKGROUND

What is today a muddy hill divided into claims was once a Symbarian serpent temple, now buried deep in the mud. Throughout Symbaroum the Cult of the Serpent was held in high esteem before losing followers as the Symbarians went on to worship other, darker powers. The temple was abandoned and slowly began to sink into the muddy grounds. After the fall of Symbaroum, the elves planted the forest of Davokar over the land, but nothing would grow on the hill; it remained a pile of clay.

Much later, the desolate hill became the scene of a duel between two gods of the forest: the Elder Sow Gylta and the bloodthirsty winter elf known as the Eternal Hunter. The sow won the first round, sending the hunter fleeing down the crawlways of the serpent temple. These were too narrow for the sow's tusks to reach very far, so the mortally wounded winter elf could slumber at a safe distance from his enemy. With the passing centuries, the temple slowly sank deeper into the clay, and was in time completely hidden from the world. But Gylta did not forget.

The Elder Sow, grunting and rummaging as she circled the hill, obsessed with the thought of finishing what she started, posed a great threat to the region's barbarian clan, Karohar. This caused the witches to declare the hill taboo, along with its immediate surroundings.

PRESENT DAY

The clay hill has rapidly grown into a prospecting camp with simple entertainment establishments and a tired bailiff who, on orders from some of the local merchants, attempts to keep some degree of order among the many dreamers and fortune seekers attracted to the place. Of the almost two hundred people present, about twenty are qualified dreamers, smitten by the Fever of the Hunt. The rest are daythalers, toiling for those with the means to pay for their services.

Most of these daythalers are destitute barbarians who, desperate with hunger and against their better judgment, defy the taboos. It is hard work, but so is the work available in the south. Furthermore, tasks that would be worth an orteg on the plains can here earn you a shilling.

The river and the monthly stops made by a few river merchants are the lifeline of the camp. Traveling by land is dangerous, bordering on suicidal. In the forest surrounding the hill roams a grunting and bellowing she-beast, wounded by a hunter's spear and filled with hate for all things living. The sow leads a herd of aboars, who have not yet attacked the camp itself. But those heading out to collect firewood and hunt small game often end up disappearing; if they are ever found, it is a gruesome sight: the remains of dismembered bodies and gear stomped into a shallow pit, rummaged through the ground by raging tusks and mighty hooves.

The barbarians of the region, the Karits of Clan Karohar, will only enter the area under extreme duress, due to ancient taboos, but they constantly observe the camp from among the trees of a distant hill. For all who have broken the taboo, leaving the area by land is punishable by death – at least according to what is said among the inhabitants of the camp.

RUMORS IN SALINDRA'S HOPE

There are many fanciful and contradictory rumors floating around the camp regarding what lurks in the forest and what is really hiding inside the hill. Here are some samples for the Gamemaster to use as they see fit, either when the player characters ask around the camp or pass small groups of prospectors loudly discussing the matter.

Rumors regarding the hill:

- *"The hill is a giant maze of narrow crawlways, I have seen them!"*
- *"Several diggers have suffered nasty snake bites, many of them lethal."*
- *"Several diggers, at least a dozen, have disappeared inside the hill, not just in a collapse, but without a trace."*
- *"I heard the cry of children from within the hill, both of infants and older kids."*
- *"I saw an alluring light down there. It was green. Or blue-green. Spooky..."*
- *"I could feel the clay pulsing, as if a heart was beating in the dirt."*
- *"I got clay in my mouth yesterday, and I swear, it tasted like blood."*
- *"I tell you, I could hear someone humming from inside the hill!"*

Rumors regarding the creatures of the forest:

- *"An enormous abomination wanders the forest."*
- *"The elves butcher those venturing too far into the forest, leaving only shreds of flesh."*
- *"Someone downed a piglet earlier, and the sow was injured – she is still out there, wounded and vengeful."*
- *"The barbarians are watching us from the woods."*
- *"This place is taboo for the barbarians, but that does not stop the witches from sending their tamed aboars to kill us!"*

Non-player Characters

HERE FOLLOWS DESCRIPTIONS of the non-player characters relevant to the setting and the adventure.

Khenad/Handelo/Vendal, the Sorcerer

Khenad, or Handelo as he called himself in the prospectors' camp, is not just any sorcerer. He was once a disciple of the Dark Lords in the far south, and just barely escaped as they were defeated in The Great War. Since then he has lived in the shadows, cultivating the dark wisdom he acquired from his masters: that the end of the world is imminent, that the corruption cannot be stopped, but may well be utilized – and

that only the bravest of seekers will manage to escape this world before it is too late. Paradise was (as far as Khenad was concerned) a new world, innocent and free from corruption, to be exploited and depleted – and then abandoned, when it too had been consumed by the spreading darkness.

At the end of his life, Handelo was sure that a vital clue on how to escape the Eternal Night could be found within the hill. Handelo is murdered by another treasure hunter, the demented former Master of Ordo Magica, Sikander. He is killed, not because of his sorcery, but because Sikander believes him to be his most dangerous rival in the search for the hill's treasures.

Gidjabolgo, Treasure Hunter

The charming but simple-minded Gidjabolgo comes from a prominent family, yet chose at an early age a life of adventure and partying over managing his family's estates. Gidjabolgo is convinced that the hill is the tomb of "The Emperor of Symbaroum" and, as such, filled with gold and artifacts. Which emperor this would be, or how Gidjabolgo ever heard of his tomb, is unclear even to Gidjabolgo himself. But he certainly does not lack conviction.

With a more patient temperament and a skilled master, Gidjabolgo could probably have been a competent mystic; so profound are Gidjabolgo's convictions, that he spontaneously casts *minor illusion* on things he finds inside the hill; shards of clay turn into complete vases in his hands, pieces of metal become Symbarian gold coins. This occurs more or less without him realizing what he is doing, and he is most likely fooling himself more than anyone else.

Should Gidjabolgo's stats be needed, use **Fortune Hunter** (page 185 in the *Bestiary*) with *silent image* as a ritual spell and the Privileged feature (page 75 of the *Player's Guide*). Also, switch Wisdom and Charisma: Gidjabolgo has Perception +3 and passive Perception 13.

Sikander, Former Master of Ordo Magica

Sikander was once a Master of Ordo Magica in Agrella, one of the Order's brightest stars and, according to some, a possible successor to Grand Master Seldonio. This view was shared by Sikander himself, as he happily tells people after a few glasses of Urtal. But that was before he began studying the forgotten arts of artifact-crafting, and came across the legend of Oromal the Suppressor – and the lindworm skin he created; a skin that is said to provide hypnotic powers.

Having searched for a long time, Sikander found proof that Oromal had been laid to rest in what is today known as Salindra's Hope and that, if Sikander was correct, the mighty skin would still be buried with its maker. With the artifact in his possession, Sikander hopes to contribute to reestablishing the art of artifact-crafting within Ordo Magica. He has now lost himself completely to the Fever of the Hunt and will, in his obsession, mistake anything for hostility.

Sikander

Medium human (Ambrian)

Armor Class 13 (order cloak)
Hit Points 127 (15d8 + 60)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)	20 (+5)	11 (+0)	11 (+0)

Saving Throws Int +8, Wis +3
Skills Arcana +8, Investigation +8, Nature +8, Perception +3
Senses passive Perception 13
Languages Ambrian
Challenge 7 (2,900 XP, proficiency bonus +3)
Manner forced speech, quick to anger
Shadow blackened silver (Corruption: 5/16)
Equipment mystical focus, field library, 1d10 thaler

Combat Magic Expert. The master has 3 Combat dice (d6s). He can use a bonus action to add a Combat die to his spell attack roll or spell damage. He can use his reaction to add a Combat die to a saving throw to maintain concentration. He regains spent Combat dice when he takes a short or longer rest.

Spellcasting. The master (spell attack +8, save DC 16) knows the following spells:

Cantrips: *dancing lights* (0), *message* (0), *minor illusion* (0), *fire bolt* (0), *prestidigitation* (0), *ray of frost* (0)
1st-level spells: *detect magic* (1d4 + 1), *burning hands* (1d4 + 1), *shield* (1d4 + 1), *sleep* (1)
2nd-level spells: *invisibility* (1d4 + 2), *scorching ray* (2)
3rd-level spells: *clairvoyance* (1d4 + 3), *magic circle* (3)
4th-level spells: *polymorph* (1d4 + 4), *wall of fire* (4)
5th-level spells: *hold monster* (5), *teleportation circle* (1d4 + 5)
6th-level spells: *chain lightning* (1d4 + 6), *globe of invulnerability* (6)
Rituals: *alarm*, *flaming servant*, *tale of ashes*, *tiny hut*, *fire soul*

ACTIONS

Flame Dagger (+1 magic weapon). *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) magical piercing damage and 7 (2d6) fire damage.

At the start of the adventure, Sikander murders Handelo, as the paranoid former Master of the Order considers him to be his number one rival.

When Sikander finally reaches a brick wall inside the hill, he spends his last bit of money on hiring all available workers (see page 96). Then he stands by the entry to his claim, guarding it from those trying to prevent him from finding his coveted artifact. Should he succeed, the daythalers will extinguish the Eternal Hunter's thirst, in which case the *dance of death* will surely follow (see page 190).

Brand, Sikander's Flaming Servant

Brand is the flaming servant of the fallen wizard Sikander, and together they have endured many horrors and survived many dangers. Brand is never more than a few paces behind his master, and his full set of smoldering armor and glowing two-handed sword commands the respect that becomes the bodyguard of a Master of Ordo Magica.

Arkali, the Widower

Arkali is a treasure hunter from Thistle Hold, and a widower since a year ago, when his wife disappeared during an expedition in Davokar. The widower Arkali is on a quest to find his lost wife, Berelin, whom he absolutely and wholeheartedly believes is trapped inside the hill. The fact that she vanished in an emergent sinkhole is irrelevant to Arkali, as he strongly senses that Berelin is down there, calling for him through the clay.

He will first be saddened, then angry, if someone keeps pointing out the absurdity of his wife being trapped inside the hill.

If Arkali's stats are needed, use those of the **fortune hunter** (page 185 in the *Bestiary*).

Neferena, Black Cloak

The Black Cloak Neferena is certain that the lightbringer Agani, a legendary Templar from The Great War, lies buried inside the hill. Neferena grew up with heroic tales from the war, and developed an early fascination with the brave Agani, who with his inner light and burning hammer broke through the enemy lines and slayed the Dark Lord Malak. The Templar disappeared on a holy quest into Davokar almost a dozen years ago. Neferena came to Salindra's Hope to find and destroy a notorious Dark Lord, Vendal. But as she arrived, she realized that finding the saint was much more important, and has spent every waking moment digging into the clay of the hill ever since.

If Neferena's stats are needed, use those of the **Black Cloak** (page 168 in the *Bestiary*).

Roughneck, Bailiff, Ogre, and the Witch Girind's Ears in the Area

As the camp's bailiff, the ogre Roughneck is paid by Silvercheek and Semel to keep some degree of order in Salindra's Hope, a job she is well suited for, with her calm, imposing presence, and firm hand when the situation demands it. Roughneck is also a double agent working for the witch Girind. The witch and the ogre go back a long time, since the ogre was found by Girind's teacher, who left it to Girind to raise the ogre and teach it the language and customs of the barbarians. Since then, Roughneck and Girind have shared a series of adventures, both in Davokar and northern Ambria. The witch sent Roughneck downriver to Salindra's Hope to report on serious events. She has given the ogre a collection of fire dyes as a means of communication; when thrown into the Great Fire, the flames shift color and Girind receives simple messages regarding what happens on the hill.

As the situation deteriorates around the camp, Roughneck will pass the details on to Girind. Since the ogre cannot leave the camp without abandoning her post and raising suspicions, she will ask the player characters for help – if they have given the impression of being of conscientious persuasion.

When not on patrol, she sits in her little shack, spelling her way through a volume of Ambrian love poems written by Taubio, as a lesson from Girind in the ongoing effort of educating the ogre. Roughneck's stats are the same as those of a **plunderer** (page 186 in the *Bestiary*).

Flaming Servant

Medium elemental

Armor Class 17 (Scale Mail)
Hit Points 13 (3d8)
Speed 30 ft

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+1)	10 (+0)

Condition Immunities exhaustion, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, unconscious
Damage Immunities fire, poison, psychic
Senses passive Perception 10
Languages understands Ambrian
Challenge 1/2 (100 XP, proficiency bonus +2)
Manner always restless
Shadow Glowing, like fire reflected in a spotless copper mirror (corruption: 0/4)
Equipment none

ACTIONS

Sword of Flame. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) fire damage.

Silvercheek, Tavern Owner

Silvercheek is the closest thing there is to a central authority in Salindra's Hope. It is she alone who sells the prospecting claims (unofficially – or there will be accidents; see the gang of non-player characters called The Legbreakers below) and she also manages the gambling den 5/2, where most people spend their hard-earned ortegs and shillings.

Silvercheek is a middle-aged woman who often polishes the silver mask covering half her face, while holding her crossbow in the other hand. She never shows her disfigured

face to anyone, and if someone asks about what happened, she speaks evasively about a failed attempt to enter a tomb in Davokar, where the acid of booby-traps put an end to the expedition. The tone of her voice suggests that Silvercheek got off lightly, compared to the treasure hunters accompanying her.

Silvercheek has the stats of a **Self-Taught Witchhunter** (page 205 in the *Bestiary*).

The Legbreakers

The Legbreakers are a small gang of barbarian thugs led by the boisterous Dvarak. They do Silvercheek's dirty work, and the gang's loyalty to her is such that most people regard them as her goons. However, it happens that they act on their own accord and get into trouble with Bailiff Roughneck; something that bothers Silvercheek, as she is also paying the bailiff to maintain order. The number of Legbreakers is twice the number of characters, and they have the stats of a **robber**; their leader Dvarak has the stats of a **robber chief** (both on pages, 186–187 in the *Bestiary*).

Girind, the Region's Witch

Girind is a young witch, but as a close friend to the local chieftain Basuma she was asked to oversee the guarding of the hill and the taboo area. Girind is deeply worried by what is happening in the camp, knowing that there is truth behind the myth of the Wild Hunt. Since the witch herself cannot enter taboo grounds, she has – with some slight bending of the rules – sent "her" ogre Roughneck to the camp. This proved to be a smart move, as the spy also came to shoulder the role of bailiff, enabling her to meddle in most matters without raising suspicion. On the contrary, it is expected of Roughneck to investigate things.

Girind keeps watch from her treehouse on a hill situated along the outskirts of the area. She has a good view of the clay hill, but aside from a few rooftops over the edge of the palisade she does not see much of the camp below. She has provided her spy with fire dye, an alchemical salt that makes fire shift colors. Using it, Roughneck may send simple messages to Girind.

If you need Girind's statblock, use the **village witch** on page 194 of the *Bestiary*.

Girind's Bodyguards

Girind is accompanied by five Karitian village guards. However, they fight with Karitian battle claws instead of an axe, and have the feature Natural Warrior.

Karitian Warriors

If the player characters decide to escape the taboo area by land, they will be pursued by the clan warriors of Karohar.

They hunt and fight in groups made up of **village warriors** [*Bestiary* page 192, as many as the characters], led by a **bodyguard warrior** (same stats as Girind's bodyguard).

Semel, Vendor and Agent of the Iron Pact

Semel is a low-ranking ally of the Iron Pact, and has yet to become a real agent; this is part of his final test. Semel is painfully aware that his future depends on what he demonstrates in the camp, in terms of wisdom and loyalty. One thing is certain: there is nothing wrong with Semel's convictions, as he is convinced that the treasure hunters sooner or later will awaken the evil lurking within the hill.

He has sent a message to his employer in Thistle Hold, stating those exact words, and is deeply troubled by the fact that the Pact has not yet taken action. If the player characters arrive at Salindra's Hope on orders from the Iron Pact (they must show their engraved iron ring in order to convince him), he thanks them with a sigh of relief.

If Semel's stats are needed, use that of a **village warrior** (page 192 in the *Bestiary*).

Bodyguard

Medium human (Barbarian)

Armor Class 15 (wolf skin)
Hit Points 22 (4d8 + 4)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	16 (+3)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)

Skills Athletics +2, Perception +4, Survival +4
Senses passive Perception 14
Languages Ambrian, Barbarian
Challenge 1 (200 XP, proficiency bonus +2)
Manner grim determination
Shadow blooming green (Corruption: 0/4)
Equipment 1d10 ortegs

Natural Warrior. The bodyguard adds +2 to the damage it does with its battle claws.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The bodyguard makes two attacks with its battle claws.

Battle Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d4 + 5) slashing damage.

The Value of Overwhelming Opposition

The two forest gods looming in the background of this adventure (the Eternal Hunter and the Elder Sow Gylta) are powerful adversaries. In other words, it is probably not reasonable for the player characters to fight them.* See the similarly named textbox on page 53 for how to handle this.

* If the adventure is played using highly experienced player characters (at least level 9), who also have access to one or more artifacts, it is possible to defeat both the Eternal Hunter and Gylta in battle, albeit with difficulty.

The Eternal Hunter, Bloodthirsty Winter Elf

The Eternal Hunter was once a master huntsman who fought for the Iron Pact against the growing darkness of Symbaroum. He watched Symbaroum fall, and saw the elves plant the first seeds of Davokar. When the trees were still young he entered the winter of his life, and emerged from it as the Eternal Hunter. But something went horribly wrong.

Maybe there was once a higher purpose to the hunt, to clear the way for new life to rise. Or perhaps the lingering darkness was already taking root at the start of his winter, and the hunt had a purpose in itself: killing for sport and pleasure. His stay in the Serpent Temple has not alleviated matters, and what hope there once was for the hunter to find harmony is now gone.

The hunt is all that remains. The first step is to heal his wounds. Step two is to arrange a new Wild Hunt using any creature he can ensnare with the entrancing *dance of death* (new spell, see page 190). With the Elder Sow Gylta put down, Davokar will experience a new hunt, wilder and darker than ever before.

The Eternal Hunter

Medium humanoid (elf)

Armor Class 14 (woven silk)
Hit Points 142 (15d8 + 75)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	14 (+2)	20 (+5)	20 (+5)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Con +9, Wis +7, Cha +4
Skills Acrobatics +10, Arcana +13, History +13, Perception +7, Survival +7
Damage Resistances cold, fire; bludgeoning, piercing and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Damage Immunities poison, psychic
Senses passive Perception 17
Languages Ambrian, Barbarian, Elvish
Challenge 10 (5,900 XP, proficiency bonus +4)
Manner careless and playful even in the midst of carnage
Shadow greyish yellow like winter leaves, with broad streaks of black threatening to become dominant (Corruption: 8/8)
Equipment None

Ancient Magic. The eternal hunter can cast *accurate strike*, *eldritch blast*, *mage hand* and *prestidigitation* without gaining Corruption.

Blood Frenzy. The eternal hunter has advantage on melee attack rolls against any creature that doesn't have all its hit points.

Regeneration. The eternal hunter recovers 9 hit points at the start of its turn, as long as it has done melee damage since its last turn.

Ritualist. The eternal hunter can cast the *alarm*, *dance of death*, *tale of ashes* and *tiny hut* spells as rituals without gaining Corruption.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The eternal hunter makes three attacks with its longbow.

Blood-drinking. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d4 + 6) piercing damage and the eternal hunter regains hit points equal to half the damage done.

Mesmerize. The eternal hunter focuses his gaze on a single creature, who must make a DC 19 Wisdom saving throw or become charmed and stunned until the end of its next turn. At the end of its turn, the creature can repeat the saving throw, ending the effects and becoming immune to this feature for 24 hours.

Longbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 150/600, one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage.

The Corruption of the Eternal Hunter

The corruption of the Eternal Hunter is imminent, and if the dance of death were to take place at the end of the adventure, this would ultimately push the Winter Elf into everlasting darkness. Such an event would be disastrous to the surrounding area; eventually, maybe even to the entire region. It would bring about the birth of a dark prince, a lord of horror leading his growing number of death dancers through the woods, laying waste to barbarian villages and burning Ambrian colonies.

Use the **blight-born template** on page 120 of the *Bestiary* when or if the Eternal Hunter becomes corrupted. Feel free to add several features to the Eternal Hunter in order to increase his threat in an appropriate fashion.

What would happen if the blight-born hunter were to reach Thistle Hold or some other town and invite its people to dance, is almost too terrible to imagine...

Tactics: The Eternal Hunter moves among the death dancers, shooting single arrows for encouragement. When a worthy opponent emerges, the hunter begins his own, personal hunt. He alternates between firing deadly arrows and trying to mesmerize the creature and drink warm, delightful blood from the victim, saturated with the sublime taste of desperation and fear. As soon as Gylta's herd becomes occupied with fighting the death dancers he takes the opportunity to commence his fight against the forest goddess.

Death Dancing Daythalers (about 100)

If the Eternal Hunter manages to get loose and initiate his *dance of death*, the majority of the daythalers working on the clay hill will be consumed by the intoxication of the dance, and form the hunter's own little army.

The daythalers are represented by up to 10 swarms of daythalers, each gripped by the power of the spell and beyond saving now.

Daythaler Swarm

Huge swarm of Small and Medium humanoids

Armor Class 11
Hit Points 45 (10d8)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	8 (–1)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, slashing
Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, prone, restrained, stunned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10
Languages —
Challenge 2 (450 XP, proficiency bonus +2)
Manner glossy-eyed, with weapons raised
Shadow a smear of gray (Corruption: 0/4)
Equipment —

Swarm. The swarm can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the swarm can move through any opening large enough for a Small humanoid. The swarm can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points.

ACTIONS

Tools. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature in the swarm's space. *Hit:* 17 (5d6) bludgeoning damage or 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage if the swarm has half of its hit points or fewer.

REACTIONS

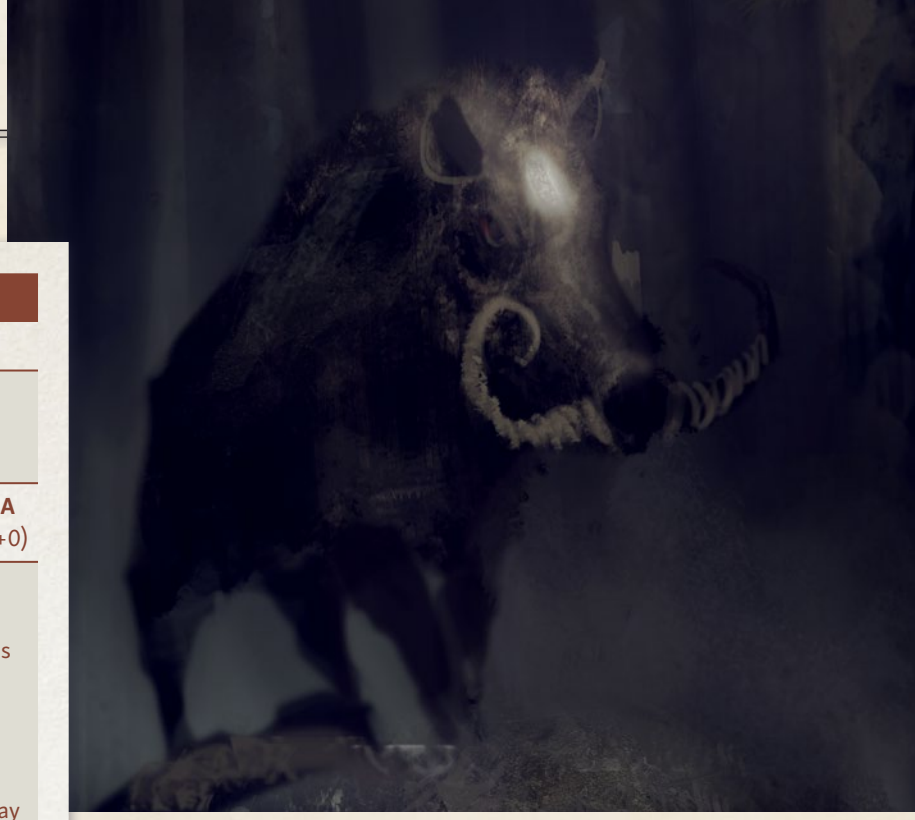
Shift. If a creature comes within 10 feet of the swarm, they can abandon their current target and swarm that creature instead.

Sudden Strike. When another creature comes within reach of the swarm, it can make a melee attack.

Gylta, the Elder Sow

Gylta is the holy protector of her people, an ancient force that has willingly relinquished the circle of life of being born, giving life, and dying. She will never bear piglets, but compensates that grief with the pride of leading and protecting her kind from danger. Her greatest challenge yet was facing the Wild Hunt and its leader, the Eternal Hunter. She still keeps the hunter's broken spear (artifact, see page 192) stuck in her side as a painful reminder of the battle, and now spends her time brooding on vengeance; in her eyes, the Eternal Hunter is a grave threat to her people and, in her obsession, she has forsaken them to such a degree that all that remains of the once proud tribe is a weak and dwindling herd, gathered around Gylta herself. The Eternal Hunter is a potential threat, but right now Gylta is a greater one. The one who makes her see this will receive her help – assuming that he or she also agrees to wipe the Eternal Hunter from existence.

If someone promises Gylta that they will put an end to the Eternal Hunter, she will turn her wounded side to the person and ask for the spear to be extracted.



Gylta

Huge Beast

Armor Class 20 (natural armor)
Hit Points 126 (11d12 + 55)
Speed 40 ft

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
25 (+7)	12 (+1)	20 (+5)	8 (–1)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws, Con +9, Wis +6
Damage Resistances cold, psychic; bludgeoning, piercing and slashing from nonmagical weapons
Senses darkvision 60, passive Perception 12
Languages telepathy
Challenge 12 (8,400 XP, proficiency bonus +4)
Manner sad, full of suppressed anger
Shadow deep red, with roses of rust and ashen gray (Corruption: 5/8)
Equipment —

Charge. If Gylta moves at least 20 ft. straight toward a target and then hits it with a tusk attack on the same turn, the target takes an extra 14 (4d6) slashing damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 19 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Legendary Resistance (2/day). If Gylta fails a saving throw she can choose to pass it instead.

Relentless (Recharge 5–6). If Gylta takes damage that would reduce her to 0 hit points, she is reduced to 1 hit point instead.

ACTIONS

Challenge. Gylta paws the ground and stares down one creature within 40 feet. That creature must make a DC 19 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened of Gylta. The creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of its turn, ending the effect on a success.

Tusk. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 21 (4d6 + 7) slashing damage.

Hoof. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (1d6 + 7) bludgeoning damage.

REACTION

Stomp. If Gylta passes by a creature within 5 feet of her, she can make an attack with her hoof.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

Gylta can take 2 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Gylta regains spent legendary actions at the start of her turn.

Recharge (costs 2 actions). Gylta can recharge her Relentless feature.

Scare. Gylta can perform her Challenge action now.

Tusks. Gylta can move up to half her speed and make a Tusk attack.

Gylta's Herd of Aboars

Gylta's herd consists of twelve **aboars**, plus some thirty younger or smaller wild boars. The herd is all that remains of Gylta's once proud tribe, the largest aboar tribe in all of Davokar. Now the beasts are few, weakened and scraggy from Gylta's lack of care. If she does not let go of her obsession with the Eternal Hunter, the entire herd will soon perish, and Gylta will linger on as the lone guardian and indirect killer of her dead kin.

Note that the Elder Sow will only take half-a-dozen fully grown aboars with her into the battle with the Eternal Hunter, should it come to that. For the stats of the aboars, see page 136 in the *Bestiary*.

Persuading Gylta

Persuading Gylta of the danger she poses to her own herd is a social challenge (page 36 in the *Player's Guide*), where few or no rolls are recommended; dice rolls may be needed to recognize the deterioration of the herd and conclude that it follows from Gylta's obsession, or that the spear stuck in her side belonged to the power of the hill and could be an essential weapon in the fight.

In other words, the GM is advised to turn the negotiations with Gylta into a dense roleplaying scene with a minimum of dice rolls and success tests.

Gylta communicates telepathically with the player characters, which she is able to do as long as she maintains eye contact.

Events

If the player characters do not change its course through their actions, the adventure follows a series of predetermined events. It begins with the murder of Handelo on the day of the player characters' arrival, and concludes a few days later with the two forest gods facing each other in furious battle, a battle that evokes a burning bloodlust within most creatures present, causing panic and mass slaughter. However, the player characters have every opportunity to change the course of events – to a certain extent, and not without taking risks.

Developments

A SERIES OF events transpire following the characters' arrival at Salindra's Hope. They are all connected to the backstory of the two forest gods, though it may very well take the players a while to figure that out.

The initial, and most obvious, incident is a murder (see *The Murder of Handelo*, below). Less obvious, but of even greater importance, is a disappearance (see *Arkali's disappearance*, page 95). Both of these take place on the hill.

MEETING SILVERCHEEK/ PURCHASING A CLAIM

The player characters are greeted by Silvercheek, who is always on the look-out for new customers; the claims are her main source of income. She actively seeks out the player characters, and a little later on she sends the Legbreakers after some freelance treasure hunters who "forgot" to pay her for the right to dig into the hill – just to demonstrate what happens if the characters decide to do the same.

Claim. Claims are purchased from Silvercheek who keeps a ledger with the names of all treasure hunters in the camp. The price is 20 thaler, plus 1 thaler for each day of digging activity, which with a **DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check** may be reduced to 15 thaler as a base charge.

Spying. During the conversation with Silvercheek, the wizard Sikander will be spying on 5/2, paranoid as he is when it comes to newcomers. The Shadow-sight feature and a **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check**, allows a character to spot the spell's sensor and realize that some mystic is monitoring the location.

Silvercheek believes there may be three Mystics in Salindra's Hope: the Black Cloak Neferena (Silvercheek calls her "the fanatic"), the former Master of Ordo Magica Sikander (whom Silvercheek, with ill-concealed fear in her voice, refers to as "the fire worshiper"), and Handelo (whom Silvercheek calls "the alchemist", because of his search for salt inside the aboar piglet above the Great Fire). She also speaks of "the witch spying from the hill" (Silvercheek does not know her name). Silvercheek can point out the hill where the witch has her camp.

GIDJABOLGO'S FAKE COINS

While in the characters' presence, Gidjabolgo pays Silvercheek a gold coin. He buys food, a jar of fine blackbrew, and uses the rest as credit for future purchases.

A successful **DC 17 Wisdom (Perception) check** allows a character to see that the coin is a Symbarian gold coin.

If a character has truesight, Shadow-sight, or another way to penetrate a visual illusion, they notice that the coin is a piece of metal (a rusty hinge) surrounded by the illusion of a gold coin.

THE MURDER OF HANDELO

There is an ongoing conflict between two prospectors who believe each other to be rivals in the search for the hill's treasures. On the day of the player characters' arrival at the camp, Handelo is murdered, which can be used as a trigger to start off the adventure.

Handelo is found inside his claim by a daythaler supposed to deliver food to the alchemist. He screams about what has happened while running aimlessly through the camp.

The Voice of the Fire

Roughneck casts a fire dye into the Great Fire when she thinks no one will notice, and its flames rise in blazing crimson – signaling that a murder has taken place. A player character with a 15 or higher in passive Perception can notice Roughneck's action. An active **DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check** allows them to notice that she is leaving the tavern alone.

Confronting the Ogre

If the player characters confront Roughneck about the fire dye, two things can happen:

If they are being inquisitive but diplomatic, then a character can make a **DC 14 Charisma (Persuasion) check** to make the ogre admit that she is communicating with someone outside the camp. She confesses that it is the witch on the hill, Girind, and has a suggestion. Roughneck can only pass on simple messages, as more complex ones demand direct contact. Perhaps the characters could go to the witch and give her the details regarding the camp?

If they behave threateningly, Roughneck acts the same: the Persuasion check is at disadvantage. If the ogre realizes that the characters mean well, for example by how they handle Handelo's murder, she will tell them about Girind and ask the characters to seek her out and give the witch her regards.

THE SCENE OF THE MURDER

Handelo's shack contains a bunk bed, an alchemy table, and a gaping pit in the clay leading down into the hill, all hidden behind a leaky wooden door.

The Body

The body has a warm (once glowing hot) knife between its shoulder blades. Characters with Alchemy knowledge can make a **DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check** to know the knife was smeared with a burning elemental essence. A character with the Medicus feature can make a **DC 13 Wisdom (Medicine) check** to realize he was stabbed a dozen times in the neck and chest. There are no defensive wounds on the arms, but there are bruises on the upper arms, as if someone was holding the man down as he was being stabbed. (Sikander did the stabbing while his flaming servant, Brand, held Handelo).

The Shaft

The shaft of Handelo's claim is about 20 feet deep; its bottom can be reached by a rickety wooden ladder. There are spades in various sizes lying around, as well as half a dozen buckets. A single bucket dangles from a hoist above the pit. The bottom is submerged under three feet of dirty water.

The Alchemy Equipment

A number of alchemical tools and ingredients are found on the table. Anyone with Alchemy knowledge recognizes it as a portable laboratory (value: 10 thaler).

On the table is a crumbly rock that any alchemist would recognize as a bezoar, an extremely potent ingredient of antidotes. The bezoar rock comes from the belly of the aboar piglet now roasting over the Great Fire. It is a mixture of salts, fats and vegetable fibers accumulated within the piglet, and can be used to craft powerful antidotes. Adding bezoar makes antidotes count as one tier higher than normal: weak antidotes become moderate, and moderate ones become strong. Strong antidotes are unaffected, but a master alchemist may of course create more doses of a moderate antidote and turn them into strong ones using the bezoar.

The sleeping quarters

Handelo's sleeping place consists of a camp bed with a wooden crate for a bedside table, on which stands a kerosene lamp and a tome, "So Sayeth Almegaster", an apocryphal text from before the recognition of Prios as "the One and Most Exalted". The tome claims that Prios was actually a knight and theurg named Priosander who, having found his light, expelled a plague from the long since fallen empire beyond the Ravens in the east. Priosander preached mercy, love and forgiveness. The author, Almegaster, was burned in Alberetor for his heretical beliefs, and those seen carrying the tome in Ambria risk suffering the same fate. To a collector of forbidden tomes, however, it is worth 100 + 1d100 thaler.

A successful **DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check** reveals what might be more interesting: a wrinkled letter chipped into the laths of the bed, addressed to an "Agathara" and signed "Khenad". The envelope is not sealed, and aside from the letter there is a single smooth, gray rock inside.

The letter reads:

"Agathara, sister of the night, hearing that you are alive brings me hope, here in the shadows of the new world. It pains me that you must struggle to get by; you who possessed such insight into the twilight. Oh, what did we all not leave behind in the ashes of our beloved Lyastra; what did we not sacrifice for our dreams of a better world?

Earlier, Demereka crossed my path, informing me that Kheltran hides in Thistle Hold among the wizards of Ordo Magica. And I know that Flavus was slain by the dwarves of Yndaros over a gambling debt. I think no one ever realized what dark wisdom was lost with him. There are few of us left, and if the enemy finds out that we are alive, we shall be fewer still. If you still dare to dream, as I do, hold the rock in your hand and think of me.

Disciple Khenad"

Conclusions drawn from the letter:

A **DC 15 Intelligence (History) check** allows the character to recall that the rank "Disciple" was the lowest among the now extinct – or at least vanished – Dark Lords of the south. It is equivalent to Ordo Magica's "Novice".

A **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check** allows a character to compare "Khenad's" writing to Handelo's claim

signature in Silvercheek's ledger and realize they are the same people.

A **DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check** suggests that, with the phrase "sister of the night," the letter suggests that this Agathara carries the same rank as the letter's author; in other words, that she too was a low-ranking Dark Lord.

The rock inside the letter:
The letter also holds a clue regarding the rock that came with it – *"Hold the rock in your hand and think of me."* The Loremaster feature and a **DC 13 Intelligence (Arcana) check** allows the character to know that the rock is a lesser artifact called a Meeting Stone. It was made with a specific person in mind, and when that person touches it, the recipient immediately knows where the sender will be at a certain point in time. As the rock was made for Agathara, it will not show the player characters where or when Handelo wished to meet with her. One guess is that he wanted her to come to Salindra's Hope, something a clever use of spells such as *commune, contact other plane,* or *divination* can reveal.

SILVERCHEEK SHOOTS GIDJABOLGO

The characters witness how Silvercheek shoots Gidjabolgo in the leg with her crossbow – the gold coin has faded into a rusty piece of metal! Gidjabolgo seems to be genuinely upset, claiming that he has done nothing more than pay with what he believed to be a gold coin he had found in his claim.

BLOODY VISIONS (REQUIRES SHADOW-SIGHT)

As a consequence of Arkali bursting through the wall of the Temple (see the event *Arkali's Disappearance*), the Eternal Hunter rips off the dreamer's head and drinks his blood. Powers are then released, transmitting a vision to sensitive minds in the area.

A successful **DC 10 Wisdom (Insight) check** for a character with Shadow-sight: The player character receives the following vision – *"Blood gushes from the claims of the hill and streamlets of blood reach the camp by its foot. In the forest, a great, wounded beast raises its head, roaring furiously at the heavens."*

COMPLAINING DAYTHALERS

A group of muddy diggers is complaining loudly about not having been paid by Arkali, and his now being gone – a bit too convenient, the diggers think, since the old man spoke gleefully about how close he was to a breakthrough and that all laborers would soon be paid for their trouble. Suddenly he was gone, and the claim abandoned. The loudest of the diggers are convinced that the man has struck gold and then left without paying them. Others are not as convinced. Some mutter audibly: *"Where would the old man go with all that gold, as crooked and frail as he is?"* Someone else bluntly says: *"I think the hill took him, we will probably not see him him or any form of payment."*

The Return of the Dark Lords?

As indicated by the letter, Handelo was a sorcerer schooled by the Dark Lords; the nefarious foes from The Great War, who even in defeat managed to drive the Ambrians north. Evidence of the Dark Lords – or at least their disciples – being alive and operating in Ambria, is worth a lot to many organizations. The Queen's legates, as well as Ordo Magica and the Church of Prios, would be anxiously grateful and offer a reward of 100 thaler, should the owner of the letter demand compensation (100 + 1d100 with a successful Persuasion check).

This insight has no immediate consequences, but in secret the hunt for the Dark Lords commences with renewed intensity. Should the player characters spread the news far and wide, there will soon be wild rumors floating around regarding "the return of the Dark Lords", followed by a brief increase in pitchfork-wielding mobs and people being burned at the stake.

The Voice of the Fire
Roughneck casts white fire dye into the Great Fire when she thinks no one notices, and its flames rise like a whirling blizzard – signaling that someone has gone missing. A player character with a 15 or higher in passive Perception can notice Roughneck's action. An active **DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check** allows them to notice that she is leaving the tavern alone.

ARKALI'S DISAPPEARANCE

Breaking down a stone wall at his claim, the digger Arkali reaches the crawlways near the heart of the Serpent Temple. As the clay collapses behind him, he is forced to dive into the nearest of them.

After a bit of crawling, he encounters the Eternal Hunter. Arkali approaches the slumbering elf, thereby becoming the Eternal Hunter's first victim in a long time. The hunter awakes, but he is frail. From now on he has but one goal: to quench his thirst and grow strong enough to gather his allies before the battle against Gylta.

Arkali's claim
The claim of Arkali consists of a tiny palisade raised around a pit in the ground. Next to the pit is a canvas set up above a rickety camp bed and a small stove. By the gaping pit there is also a small pile of bricks.

A character with the Loremaster feature may comment on the presence of the bricks: They are made from adobe, reinforced with reed or horsehair, which were often used in ancient Symbaroum. Back then, bricks were used even in minor constructions, as wood was less common before the expansion of Davokar.

The pit has collapsed about fifteen feet into the hill, and one can see a boot sticking out from the clay, as well as a spade and a pickaxe. It would take five days to dig back in; three if there were two people digging. There is not enough room for more than two people, but if pairing up and working in shifts one would reach the wall in a day, and find a hole through which to enter the Serpent Temple. (see *The Serpent Temple*, page 84).

SIKANDER HIRES ALL AVAILABLE WORKERS

With the help of the many diggers, Sikander will soon break into the heart of the Temple where the Eternal Hunter awaits in its weakened state. The Hunter kills Sikander and quenches his thirst with the blood of both him and the diggers who fail to escape.

What Happens if/when the Player Characters Stop Sikander?

It is likely that the player characters will go after, and stop, Sikander. If so, the Eternal Hunter's freedom is postponed – until other dreamers break through. To prevent the hunter from ever being set free, one must stop Sikander and make sure that no one else digs any further. With Sikander stopped, Gidjabolgo will be the first to break through if left unchallenged. Next in line to find a way into the Serpent Temple, where the Eternal Hunter is waiting, is Neferena.

DREAMS OF BLOOD (EVERYONE)

Sikander's diggers break through the brick wall inside the hill and reach the heart of the Serpent Temple, where the Eternal Hunter quenches his thirst and casts the spell *dance of death* (see page 190). This incident releases a vision perceived by all who succeed at a **DC 10 Wisdom (Insight) check**:

"Blood gushes from the claims of the hill, like fountains of blood. A wave of blood reaches the camp at the foot of the hill, knocking over people and buildings alike. In the forest roams an army of beasts, led by a massive aboar sow. She raises her head and bellows furiously at the top of the hill."

GIRIND HAS BARBARIAN WARRIORS FORM A RING OF IRON AROUND THE TABOO AREA

Girind is also haunted by the dream of blood, and acts on it by summoning her kin to the area.

About three hundred **village warriors** and **village guards** (see page 192 in the *Bestiary*) from Clan Karohar, led by some fifty clan warriors (use the **bodyguard** stats from page 89), form a guard around the borders of the taboo area. The witch Girind and chieftain Basuma stand on the hill with their bodyguards. Also, there are three other witches present. The ogre Roughneck joins them, if she can, and takes her place by Girind's side. They do not interfere in the area, but will act forcefully to keep what happens there isolated.

THE ETERNAL HUNTER INITIATES THE DANCE OF DEATH

The Eternal Hunter emerges on the hill, accompanied by a dozen death dancers (Sikander's former employees). The dance rapidly spreads among the other daythalers. Half of them are affected and gather around the hunter at the top of the hill; the rest seek shelter in the camp, but dare not flee into the woods.

The Voice of the Fire

Roughneck casts black fire dye into the Great Fire when she thinks no one notices, and its flames rise in ominous purple-black – signaling that the hunter is awake. A player character with a 15 or higher in passive Perception can notice Roughneck's action. An active **DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check** allows them to notice that she is leaving the tavern alone.

THE ELDER SOW GYLTA ATTACKS THE CAMP

The Elder Sow appears at the edge of the forest, and as she bellows, more aboars gather by her side. Stomping the ground, they storm the camp. Gylta blows open one of the gates, trampling her way through daythalers and others, closely followed by a dozen grown aboars. Left at the forest edge are some thirty young animals and piglets, looking scared and confused.

Gylta is not looking to fight anyone other than the Eternal Hunter and his howling death dancers, but people located outside when the assault commences must make a successful **DC 10 Dexterity saving throw** to escape.

THE CARNAGE ON THE HILL

Up on the hill the armies collide, one aboar against some ten death dancers each. Gylta reaches the Eternal Hunter and their final duel begins. During this time, player characters located on the hill will face either an aboar or a swarm of ten death dancers. Once they have handled 1d4 + 1 encounters, the duel between Elder Sow and the Hunter is over.

Note that if the player characters are within 100 feet of the Eternal Hunter they risk being affected by the *dance of death* (see the new spell on page 190). Gylta and her aboars count as direct enemies of the Eternal Hunter; the same is probably true about the characters – if the players consider the hunter to be the enemy, the criterion is met. (Enemies of the Eternal Hunter get advantage on their saving throw to resist or break free from the *dance of death*.)

Surrounding Factions

SOME OF DAVOKAR'S factions – the Iron Pact and the witches – are interested in the clay hill and the conflict revolving around it. Their views on the matter are described here.

THE IRON PACT

The two opposing forest gods may be dangerous to humans, but to elves they are just that; gods, or spirits, of the forest, whose conflict does not yet impinge on their interests. The elves keep out of their way, as they always do when the elder creatures of the woods fight their battles.

However, the Iron Pact does have an agent in place (see *Semel* among the Non-player Characters) to monitor how things develop; partly because the Iron Pact is aware of the Symbarian ruins located in the area (such as the Serpent Temple), partly because these kinds of conflicts attract the corruptive powers of Davokar. It would be a terrible thing indeed if either Gylta or the Eternal Hunter were to become blight born – but as long as there is no sign of this happening, the Iron Pact will not take direct action in the area. The elves aim to fight corruption, not to keep the peace in general. Also, they do not mind if the gruesome deaths of greedy treasure hunters serve as a clear and deterring example to others of their kind.

The Iron Pact agent in Thistle Hold, the former treasure hunter Lysindra Goldengrasp, is not as convinced as her elvish allies – maybe for sentimental reasons; she will not let people die in vain. That is why (should the Gamemaster decide that the characters are acting on orders from the Iron Pact) Lysindra sends reinforcements, just to be safe.

THE WITCHES OF KAROHAR

For a long time, the barbarians have regarded the area as taboo, which is why they will not enter it. As previously mentioned, the barbarians will guard the area from people approaching by land, and hunt down those leaving it. The witch Girind has been charged with overseeing the area, and has been slightly bending the rules of the taboo; she has recruited an agent (see *Roughneck* in the Non-player Characters' section) from the south. The agent now acts as bailiff of Salindra's Hope and uses an alchemical powder called fire dye to convey important happenings to Girind.

Possible Endings

Since the player characters will interfere with the story, the last link in the chain of events – The Carnage on the Hill – will probably not occur; at least not in the manner described above. The Gamemaster may plan for the following versions, since playtesting has proven them to be probable consequences of the players' actions:

1. The Eternal Hunter Prevails

The Eternal Hunter defeats Gylta and her aboars, with or without the player characters' assistance. The Winter Elf is corrupted and turns into a Lord of Horror, the leader of a growing band of death dancers participating in their master's wild hunt throughout Davokar. His following brings death and destruction wherever they go, and will return as a serious threat to barbarians and Ambrians.

2. The Elder Sow Gylta Prevails

The Elder Sow Gylta stomps the Eternal Hunter into the mud, bringing the Dance of Death to an end. Salindra's Hope is abandoned by the survivors, daythalers and treasure hunters alike. The hill of clay stands deserted, as a bleak funerary monument to the Eternal Hunter. But Ambrians have a short memory. Soon, some will surely return – there are rumors of a Serpent Temple being hidden within the hill, and there must surely be treasures!

3. The Player Characters Flee the Slaughter

The player characters think the situation to be hopeless, or in any case not worth the risk, and decide to run. They either flee by river on an improvised raft, or take their chances sneaking through the territory of clan Karohar. Since the player characters' actions won't determine the outcome, the Gamemaster may choose which – if any – of the two forest gods will prevail in the final battle.

4. The Player Characters Evacuate Prospectors and Daythalers Before the Final Battle

The player characters flee the area, as described above, but not before trying to save as many of the daythalers as possible. Basically, this requires leaving the area by foot, which in turn calls for some kind of agreement with Clan Karohar. There is such an opening; when Girind and her people realize that the two forest gods are about to clash, they may consider the player characters' pleas. Here, too, the Gamemaster may determine which – if any – of the forest gods will prevail in the final battle.



OU ARE FINALLY sapproaching Kastor, the infamous jewel of Seragon. There is the stone wall, thick and high, to guard against elven arrows and barbarian war claws; the sun temple with its shimmering dome; the tower with its renowned bell. But there are also disturbing elements – jet-black smoke rising from the annex of the sun temple, and an abundance of town guardsmen. You halt one of the residents. Eyeing you fearfully, she asks: "Have you not heard? They murdered our mayor!" She neither waits for your reply, nor answers your question as to who "they" are.

You approach a squad of town guards, dressed in filthy clothes with single blue details – armbands, belts or patches – visible beneath their service coats: "Murderers struck in the night, killing four members of the council, the mayor being one of them. But you are in safe hands. The new mayor has strengthened the town's defenses."

You head onwards towards the sun temple; there you will find the one you seek, whom you know and trust. Further north stands the Bell Tower; tall and mighty, built by the industrious ancients. At its top hangs the town's proud bell – not having tolled during the murders, and still just as silent as the cooling corpses...



The Bell Tolls for Kastor

FOR LEVELS 5-6

Introduction

The legendary bell of Kastor has always warned the town's residents of attacks, and according to myth, its clang will scatter any darkness threatening the town. The citizens of Kastor are no strangers to suffering and catastrophes; numerous are the barbarian assaults that were repelled in the early days of the town, and many still remember the mass slaughter of year 15, when a cryptwalker prowled the streets searching for an artifact and the treasure hunters who stole it.

Now the bell has not tolled for a long time, and people have begun to take their safety for granted, not noticing the agents of darkness operating in Kastor. But when several members of the Town Council are killed in a single night, the citizens are roused from their slumber. The murders appear to be connected to a witch-burning three years earlier, but soon it is shown to go even deeper – all the way back to the very creation of the town. And, as so often before, the seed of creation is marked by death.

THE BELL TOLLS for Kastor is an adventure for the role-playing game *Ruins of Symbaroum*. The first section addresses ways to make the player characters interested and invested in the adventure. Then the background of the adventure and the town of Kastor are introduced, followed by descriptions of central non-player characters and the chain of events that drives the adventure forward – should the player characters not act to change its course.

The events are divided into Developments (actions that the characters are likely to undertake), and Complications (incidents the Gamemaster may use to make the adventure more interesting). The chain of events ends with a presentation of the story's most probable climax.

Player Characters

THE BELL TOLLS for Kastor may be played using any characters with reason to visit the town, either with each other or on their own. Some possible motives are listed below.

AN OLD FRIEND OR LOVER

The easiest way to start the adventure is to make the non-player character Darda (see page 110) a close friend or former lover to one of the characters. In that case, Darda enlists a professional courier to deliver a message to one or more of the characters. The message comes in a sealed metal tube, containing the letter and a capsule of vinegar. Should the tube or its lock be forced open, a needle breaks the capsule and the letter will wither, becoming unreadable. On the cylinder it reads: *"The moons in the Sun Tower – Darda"*.

This text (which may be construed by a close friend who has grown up in Kastor along with Darda) refers to the nights the friends spent in the copper dome of the sun temple, watching the moon through its lead-framed windows. To the friends it seemed like a hundred and one moons were dancing on the glistening marble floor. "101" later became a secret code for meeting in the sun tower by nightfall, when the priests of the church had gone to sleep.

If it seems inappropriate for someone to have grown up with Darda, their relationship could be of some other nature – close friends or lovers – and the story of the 101 moons could have been something Darda told the character in confidence, perhaps as a code word, so that they will always be able to trust letters or messages from each other.

When reading the letter, note that Darda thinks the characters know about the witch-burning almost three years ago, when in fact they do not. The news did not travel far beyond the borders of Seragon and never reached the player characters' ears. Let it be a mystery to them until they arrive at Kastor where, in conversation with the non-player characters present, they soon learn what Darda is referring to.



The letter can be found as a handout on page 208.



A delegation of templars from Templewall was present at the burning of Kastor's sorcerers.

The Structure of the Adventure

The Bell Tolls... is a combination of an Adventure Landscape and a Classic Adventure. In the spirit of the adventure landscape a setting (Kastor) is presented, along with a collection of non-player characters harboring their own ambitions (primarily the Teratomancers and their leader Kagliostro) and a dramatic incident to set the story in motion. This incident – the murder of the council members and the new order rising as a consequence – has already transpired when the player characters arrive in Kastor. From there on, the players may do as they please.

Let the Players Decide

The players should agree on what reason, or reasons, the characters have for being in Kastor. Individual player characters may of course have their own highly personal reasons (perhaps a previous love affair with Darda?), but it is always helpful for the group as a whole to strive towards a common goal. The Gamemaster should present the possible reasons for the player group's presence, and then let the players discuss which alternative seems most suitable to them.

But there is also an aspect of classic adventure to *The Bell Tolls for Kastor*, as it follows a certain chain of events. Note that the chain of events describes what happens if the player characters do NOT act to change its course. The adventure has many possible endings, the most likely one being a final battle inside an abandoned mine. But the player characters may as well confront Kagliostro at another time and place.

Fever of the Hunt

The adventure *Fever of the Hunt* can end in many ways. One ending results in the survivors of Salindra's Hope traveling south, reaching Kastor and eventually settling down in its slums. The player characters could have gone with them for their protection, or simply because they too yearned for the relative safety of Kastor. Whatever the reason for the characters' presence, in *The Bell Tolls...* it is assumed that the survivors of Salindra's Hope (most being of barbarian heritage) are there as well, making their mark on the town's poorer areas.

Background

THE ADVENTURE'S BACKSTORY can be divided into three parts. First, the legendary time when the Bell of Kastor played a part in defeating a mighty lindworm. Secondly, the more current struggle between two sects, Terato's Dawn and the Spawn of Symbar, in which the former emerged victorious. Lastly, as a consequence of their victory, Terato's Dawn took over Kastor, right before the start of the adventure.

The legend of the Bell and the Dragon is summarized in the Scholarly Matters section (see page 103). The battle of the cults and the takeover in Kastor are described below.

TERATO'S DAWN AND THE SPAWN OF SYMBAR

For a couple of years, the town of Kastor was the scene of a battle between two rival cults; the dark-seeking sorcerers of the Spawn of Symbar and the monster cult Terato's Dawn, led by monster mages known as the teratomancers.

At first, the two cults worked together, but over time they began to compete for the authority over, and revenue from, Kastor's shadow world, as well as the infiltration of the town's various offices and organizations. One drastic move, made three years ago by the ruthless leader of the teratomancers, led to ultimate victory for the monster cult.

After months of planning, they planted evidence proving their opponents to be darkseekers and sorcerers – which they were, but had always managed to keep secret. The teratomancers seized the opportunity to rid themselves of yet another enemy: Garala, the snooping Sister of Prios from the town's sun temple. Evidence was planted so that the infamously callous Black Cloak Baumelo would find it, and soon no fewer than five daemon worshipers – four leaders of the Spawn of Symbar, and the innocent Sister Garala – were burning at the stake. The Spawn of Symbar's remaining members fled the town, were murdered in Kastor's alleys, or disappeared without a trace.

Now, three years have passed and the teratomancers have plotted and schemed, infiltrating Kastor's ruling class. The dawn of monsters is imminent, in Kastor's case taking the form of the Great Awakening. The teratomancers' goal is to find a lost mine outside Kastor, and there free the shackled dragon (actually, the lindworm) Margumal.

In order to reach this goal, they require the Chieftain's Axe (see page 109) and someone to guide them on their journey. They must also maintain control of the Bell Tower and the bell at its top; not to use it, but to prevent it from being used against the dragon. The axe can simply be taken, while acquiring a guide calls for a rigorous interrogation of people who might hold information regarding the mine's whereabouts. Controlling the Bell Tower is basically a military matter, requiring control over the Town Watch.

This is not impossible to achieve, at least not for a resourceful and relentless group of monster worshipers. But not even Terato's Dawn is able to subdue the town for long; a few days at the most. The leaders of Terato's Dawn are aware of this, and will do anything – literally anything – to realize their ambitions within that timeframe. That this would most likely mean the death of countless citizens, and possibly the ruin of Kastor itself, is considered a small price to pay for the rebirth of their monstrous god.

THE TAKEOVER IN KASTOR

About a month ago, the council member Grendol began to have dreams about the destruction of Kastor, watching it emerge in the form of a roaring dragon ("death on rusty wings!" he wrote in his journal). But it was actually the leader of Terato's Dawn, the wizard Kagliostro, who sent him these dreams of doom in order to manipulate the council member into taking his side. Kagliostro later contacted Grendol in person, openly threatening him with the town's – and more importantly, his own – destruction.

Shaken by his dreams, Grendol decided to cooperate. He allowed assassins to enter the Town Hall and kill Mayor Selima. At the same time, two other antagonistic council members were murdered – the town's highest ranking theurg was attacked in the sun temple and the Treasurer on the way home from her favorite tavern. Lastly, another member of the council was thrown in one of the cells beneath the Town Hall.

Grendol justified his actions to himself: *"Better to let these clueless worshipers of light die than allow them to put up a futile resistance when the dragon arrives – for that would be the death of us all!"* This way, only a foolish few would lose their lives. Also, Grendol was appointed mayor, which is always nice – and potentially lucrative. Kagliostro had made it very clear that they sought the riches of the mine as a tribute to their monstrous overlords, and that Grendol would receive a piece of it. However, this was a lie. In reality, the teratomancers intend to wake Margumal and let him feast on the people of Kastor.

Following the murders, the remaining members of the council were summoned to an emergency meeting, where they immediately voted for Grendol to be the new mayor – with "special authority" to deal with the current crisis.

The assassins made two mistakes. The first was killing the wrong person, allowing their intended victim to escape; the second was leaving a witness, and an important one at that. The wine-guzzling treasurer Ardetta had lost her distinctive slouch hat in a game of dice and, in the dark, the assassins attacked the wrong woman. While hiding, the actual council member watched as her "doppelganger" was stabbed to death. One of the assassins noticed the witness and tried to silence her with a poisoned knife, but Ardetta managed to escape with her life.

Another victim was First Theurg Karstak, who at the time of his murder was with his protégé Darda in the annex of the sun temple. A veteran of The Great War, albeit an aged one, the high priest was considered a difficult target; the girl accompanying him was seen as a slight complication. But this proved wrong. Having killed the First Theurg, the attackers were in for

a grave surprise, as their victim's young protégé had soon killed three of them. The surviving assassins retreated, throwing fire bombs into the annex. Wounded, Darda fled down the church's catacombs to where she felt safest: the Temple of the Many.

It is now the morning after the murders and the meeting where Grendol was declared mayor. The official story is that three members of the council were murdered. Another one has – according to Grendol – disappeared, and Darda is thought to be dead. Three of the assassins were killed as well, their bodies severely scorched in the burned down annex.

This is the situation when the player characters arrive in town.

Scholarly Matters

THE ADVENTURE IS largely based on Kastor's past; a fact that player characters proficient in the History skill may draw conclusions from. It mostly revolves around the witch-burning three years earlier and the feuding cults Terato's Dawn and the Spawn of Symbar, but also the legendary bell of Kastor and the "dragon" that is said to have once tormented the town.

THE LEGEND

The legend of the bell and the dragon is of great significance to the adventure's backstory. The tale is widely known in Kastor and its surrounding region, and its two levels – general and specific – are recounted below, along with non-player characters who know of them and the requirements for player characters to hold such knowledge.

Note that the specific level reveals that the beast is not a dragon, but a lindworm.

THE BELL AND THE DRAGON (GENERAL):

Who: Any characters proficient with the History skill.

The Dragon and the Bell is a cautionary tale. Various versions of the legend are told amongst the barbarians of south Davokar, and in the dwarves' account of the story, the bell is claimed to have been forged by their ancestors in Symbaroum.

In the general version of the legend, the main characters are a dragon, a witch and a barbarian chieftain. The chieftain established a mine to rob the earth of its iron, thus luring a dragon to the area. His witch then recalled a bell in the deep of Davokar; one that allegedly had the power to repel monsters. The chieftain retrieved the bell, and with its help, the dragon was shackled and slain inside the mine. The chieftain fell in battle, but the witch survived, and she hung the bell in a tower to protect against future monster attacks. She mounted the chieftain's axe – still stained with the serpent's blood – in the longhouse as a reminder of what awaits those who greedily pursue the earth's riches.

THE BELL AND THE LINDWORM (SPECIFIC TO THE ADVENTURE):

Who: The teratomancer Kagliostro, the self-taught mystic Darda, player characters with the Loremaster feature.

Between a hundred and a hundred and twenty years ago, the barbarian clan Jezora had a settlement where Kastor is currently located. The clan was in possession of a mine, providing them with iron, which they forged into weapons to keep rival clans at bay. The chieftain's witch suggested that part of the iron could be used for trade, not just weaponry. That way, the clan's enemies would grow fewer over time. Fearful of his neighbors, the chieftain did not listen. He dug further into the mine, his zeal even greater than before. The digging caught the attention of a terrible lindworm – named Margumal by certain sources – which seized the mine. Iron weapons could not penetrate the serpent's scales, and the witches' curses were equally ineffective. The clan's chieftain had no choice but to yield to the serpent's supremacy.

The chieftain asked his advisors for a way out of this dilemma, and the solution came from someone unexpected. A captive sorceress, enchained and awaiting her execution, claimed to have the answer: deep within Davokar was an ancient weapon, an alarm bell from the days of old Symbaroum, an artifact the sorceress said could be used against the serpent. Thus, a group of warriors were sent to find and retrieve the bell.

As the decimated expedition returned, the bell was mounted in a tower built for the purpose, and when Margumal came to demand tribute from the chieftain, the sorceress sounded the bell, ridding the serpent of much of its power. The clan warriors charged and drove it back into the mine.

Still not satisfied, the chieftain, his witch, and the sorceress pursued the wounded monster to its lair. There, the chieftain struck it with his axe. The serpent easily deflected the blow and shrieked (if one is to believe the legend): *"You cannot slay me!"* to which the sorceress answered, *"that is true, and why would I?!"* Her magic crashed down on the serpent like a wall of solid rock, and with a loud bang, the creature fell through the fabric of reality, banished to the Yonderworld.

The chieftain arose, leaning on his axe. The sorceress took his hand and grasped the weapon, which still reeked with the blood of the serpent. *"Here is the key,"* she said, nodding towards the axe. Then, she struck the chieftain down with one precise blow. According to the most wide-spread version of the tale, as he died, the chieftain looked at her with bewilderment. The sorceress shrugged: *"The rift must be sealed, must it not?"*

The witch and the sorceress fought each other in the mine, and after a long battle the witch prevailed. She left the mine, concealing the place with her magic so that no one would ever find it. She passed the chieftain's axe to his heir, hoping that it would serve as a commemoration and protect future generations from choosing the same fate.

THE SPAWN OF SYMBAR

Who: Anyone with the Loremaster feature, a Sorcerer, or proficient with the Arcana skill.

A successful check means the person knows about the cult, recognizes their symbols, and may recall what they stand for: the Spawn of Symbar is one of many dark-seeking cults, led by sorcerers who derive their calling and heritage from the glory days of Symbaroum. As they see it, the elves and their Iron Pact allies ruined something great and beautiful – the ultimate liberation and supremacy of mankind; the divinization of the fettered human being. They regard themselves as children of Symbaroum, dedicated to finish what their ancestors could not.

TERATO'S DAWN

Who: People proficient with History or Nature possess superficial knowledge of the matter. Those with the Loremaster feature or who pass a **DC 15 Intelligence (History or Nature) check** may recall further details regarding the cult.

Superficial knowledge: Terato's Dawn is a monster cult convinced that mankind is really a servitor race to monstrous overlords, and that the hardships of contemporary life – the death of Alberetor, corruption, the spread of the undead – are a consequence of the hubris that has driven humans into thinking otherwise. The cult's teachings resemble clan Gaoia's worship of Grandfather Lint, and are not very different from those of the Jakaars in Thistle Hold and other groups within the widely unpopular movement known as the Friends of the Forest. Of course, the Iron Pact shares a similar criticism of civilization, though the elves and their allies do not engage in downright monster worship.

Deep knowledge: The leaders of Terato's Dawn call themselves "teratomancers"; monster mages. They speak to monsters and interpret their will. Though it may seem like they are controlling the monsters, such a claim would be rejected by any teratomancer – the monsters simply protect their own, just as the cultists sacrifice themselves for their monstrous gods.

The cult has its origin in early Symbaroum, where many worshiped powerful serpents and mighty spiders, as well as other godlike beings and creatures. According to the teratomancers, Symbaroum fell because of mankind's growing tendency to worship itself. The worst of these sins was the hunting of dragons; the slaying of these sacred creatures foretold the terrible devastation to come.

The cult lacks historical continuity in Kastor. Its recent incarnation stems from treasure-hunting mystics who found scriptures in the depths of Davokar and, inspired by these texts, recreated the cult. For a long time, members of Terato's Dawn were secretly recruited among the town's mystics. Its core consisted of a few self-taught mystics, who soon were joined by a small group of wizards from Ordo Magica.

Later they also managed to convert a few sun priests; something that has its own particular reasons, connected to the so-called Kastor Heresy...

THE KASTOR HERESY

Who: Theurgs, player characters with the Loremaster feature.

Aside from the military presence, the town of Kastor was initially inhabited by refugees from Alberetor who still worshiped the gods within the Temple of the Many.

It was only after the cleansing of year 13 – known by scholars as "the Kastor Heresy" – that the inhabitants joined ranks with the followers of Prios, or at least pretended to. Today there is still an underground reverence for the Temple of the Many, which recognizes Prios as one of the gods, but would never depict him as the One.

THE WITCH-BURNING

Who: Anyone who has lived in Kastor for at least three years. Everyone with the Loremaster feature, all Sorcerers.

Three years ago, five sorcerers were burned at the stake, in a village just north of Kastor. Four of them were lowborn and of little significance; the real scandal was that a sister of Prios had been converted and had fallen to darkness. Her name was Garala, and she maintained her innocence until the very end.

Those who pass a **DC 15 Intelligence (History) check** remember further details, such as the location of the burned bodies (they were buried in a corner of the catacombs beneath the Sun Temple, where Darda sometimes hides).

THE TEMPLE OF THE MANY

Who: All Ambrians know some of the old gods, just as barbarian characters have practical knowledge about the powers of Davokar. The Gamemaster may assume that the characters are more or less familiar with what is described in the "Spirituality" section on page 10 of the *Player's Guide*. Encourage the players to read this section before the adventure if you think their memories need refreshing, or they could be asked to read it when questions arise during the course of the game.

Characters proficient with Religion or with the Loremaster feature are familiar with the most common gods of the Temple of the Many. With a successful **DC 13 Intelligence (Religion) check**, they may also recognize their symbols and recall which of the gods have an equivalent among the barbarian deities (see the table on the next page).

Today, those devoted to the Temple of the Many make up a small part of Kastor's citizens. They are not very prominent amongst the town's elite, but can be found there as well.

The Temple of the Many is one of several religious groups worshiping the gods of Alberetor as a divine collective. The



The sorcerers in The Spawn of Symbar may have lost the battle in Kastor, but they are intent on winning the war!

Temple of the Many was one of the more prevalent churches in the south, even though it was an organization of commoners, rather than one for the elite. Their main competitors were more specialized mystical cults, who recognized all gods, but focused on one, or sometimes a few of them. The Vestals of Prios were, for example, always popular among Alberetor's nobles, as was the oracle worship affiliated with the Wildling in the city of Berendoria.

Which gods are worshiped within the Temple of the Many, as well as their names, varies from place to place. Sometimes even local heroes have been granted a place among the Many. But most deities are honored wherever there is a temple. People worship the Many, individually and collectively, as gods of certain domains. Usually one prays to the god of the domain one wishes to affect, but the majority of holy days and religious festivals (the spring- and fall equinoxes, and the summer and winter solstices) belong to them all.

These days, people worship in two ways. As mentioned earlier, Prios was one of the gods, and those devoted to the Many therefore visit the sun temple to worship him – albeit in his earlier and more diminutive form (the one represented by Father Sarvola in Thistle Hold). But some people go to secret masses in hidden temples, where the Many are worshiped as a collective.

The persecution of all who renounce the word of Prios as interpreted by the First Father and the Curia has led to bitterness and sheer desperation. Strengthened by the people's discontent, the monster cult Terato's Dawn has managed to convert a number of sun priests – clerics who "played along with the Prios charade" while secretly worshiping the Many, and have grown increasingly hateful of how the Curia treats those who follow the old ways. To these priests, Terato's Dawn is a paradoxical backlash: if the Church of Prios will not recognize the other Young Gods, they should suffer the wrath of the Old Ones: the monster gods who ruled mankind before it found salvation in the Temple of the Many.

PROMINENT GODS OF KASTOR'S CHAPEL

Young God	Symbol	Domain	Barbarian Equivalent
Prios (The Sun)	Sunbeams	Sun/Life/Hearthfire	Lyssa the Sun Cat
The Earthmother	Cup/Well	Harvest/Safe Birth	Uron the World Serpent
The Pathfinder	Triangle of twigs	Luck/Hunt/Safe Travel	Arex the Hunter Wolf
The Executioner	Double axe (stylized rune)	Punishment/Justice/Natural Death	Oroke the Spider Queen
The Wilding	Braid	Passion/Inspiration/Visions	The Blood-daughter (in part)
The Arch-builder	Arch/Open gate	Creation/Building/Forging	Lamarruk the Elder Dwarf

The Landscape

Kastor is located next to the southern shore of River Eanor, a day's march from the edge of Davokar. The town was raised in a location where the stronghold of a barbarian chieftain once stood. There is not much left of the wooden structure; the Ambrian troops who conquered it reshaped it into a military camp of Ambrian design. All that remains is the central stone tower and its bell, engraved with ancient runes.

The Town of Kastor

WHILE KASTOR GLOWS with hope and confidence, the surrounding duchy of Seragon is a nuisance to the town's rulers. Kastor is the largest town in Seragon, the duchy governed by the vain Duke Gadramei. He is the youngest of the late king's many nephews – making him Queen Korinthia's cousin – and known to be an idle drunkard: characteristics somewhat incompatible with fiscal stability. However, he has made defending against the north a priority, prompting many to overlook their duke's dubious lifestyle.

Today, Kastor is the heart of Seragon's economy, but the duke himself is ever absent, constantly indulging himself in pleasure and amusement at his palace further south. He visits the town once a year, enticed by the annual spring festival and its carnival (which is almost solely responsible for Kastor's reputation as a town of decadence and promiscuity), but with that exception, the Council is relatively free to govern its town.

There are more than twelve hundred people living in Kastor, and its demographics have changed in recent years, as conflicts between the barbarian clans of southern Davokar have caused refugees to seek shelter in the town. These people have formed a more or less isolated settlement within the already vast Slum District.

As Thistle Hold grows increasingly bureaucratic and difficult to manage, more and more treasure hunters choose Kastor as the base of their expeditions. Another perk of doing so is that fewer ranger patrols are based in Kastor, making it easier to venture into Davokar without a license. This will probably not be the case for long – hence, one should take advantage of the opportunity while it lasts. The treasure hunters bring riches, but also a degree of public unrest to the town. However, they have caused the town's blighted north-eastern area to flourish and brought an economic surge to other parts of Kastor as well.

The following are brief descriptions of places relevant to the adventure. To aid the Gamemaster, additional establishments in Kastor are also listed below – while they are not essential to the adventure, they could be helpful in bringing the town to life, or be used to answer player characters' questions regarding things not related to the adventure's central locations.

1. THE CHAPTER OF ORDO MAGICA

Ordo Magica's chapter in Kastor was founded by the surviving masters from the city of Berendoria in Alberetor. These masters have now grown old and their leader, Chapter Master Isokles, is nearing death. His imminent demise has led to a conflict of succession between the two masters Myndol and Kyhara. The adventure's main antagonist, the teratomancer Kagliostro, is an established adept at the chapter and, being interested in politics, has been chosen to represent Ordo Magica at the Town Council – a position no master would ever consider accepting.

The tower of the chapter is occupied by the following individuals:

- Arastor, Symbolist of the barbarian clan Vajvod, invited by Isokles to further the exchange of knowledge between Ordo Magica and the Azure Temple of Vajvod
- Kagliostro, Adept of the Order (also leader of the Teratomancers)
- Kyhara, Master of the Order, Illusionist
- Myndol, Master of the Order, Enchanter
- Orondo, witch, invited by Isokles to facilitate knowledge exchange
- Isokles, Master of the Chapter, Pyromancer and war hero, currently dying of old age
- The Magisters Grego, Haas and Ukoul (an ogre)
- Five Adepts
- Seven Novices

2. THE SLUM DISTRICT

Many of Kastor's citizens are poor and have gathered in one of the town's shabbier areas. In the Slum District one finds a mixture of exiled barbarians, refugees from civil conflicts in Davokar, and Kastor's least prosperous. The Town Watch is reluctant to enter the Slum District. Most people living there get by on the charity of Prios's soup kitchen, while some

work odd jobs in other parts of the town. During the day, the Town Watch tolerates the presence of paupers throughout Kastor, but makes sure to drive them back into the Slum District by nightfall.

In the Slum District, order is kept by the newly-arrived Legbreakers – goons working for Silvercheek, a middle-aged lady of barbarian descent who runs the gambling den "5/2". Silvercheek and the Legbreakers are survivors of a failed treasure-hunting excavation deep within Davokar, in a place called Salindra's Hope. They will not speak of it, but the look on their faces clearly suggests that few survived whatever horror was awakened by the diggers.

3. THE SUN TEMPLE'S SOUP KITCHEN

The sun priests manage a soup kitchen to feed Kastor's poorest, which actually keeps the residents of the Slum District from starving to death. The soup kitchen is run in shifts by initiates of the local church. One of the most frequent is young Eglio, who feels closest to Prios while helping those in need, and is happy to take other people's shifts at the soup kitchen. Hence, the other initiates regard Eglio as head of the operation.

Eglio does not mind this unofficial designation, although at times he feels burdened by the responsibility it entails. In fact, he often dreams of heading west, to Thistle Hold, where Father Sarvola runs his mission house. If he was not so desperately needed in Kastor, he would immediately gather his belongings and hope to become one of Sarvola's initiates.

4. THE CHIEFTAIN'S BELL (INN)

At the Chieftain's Bell the Carnival of Kastor never ends; everything the town is infamous for (the drinking, the brawls, the debauchery) can be found here, day in and day out, from before the sun sets to after the break of dawn. There are rooms for hire, but if you want a good night's rest you should definitely go to some other place. The Chieftain's Bell is for those who have no intention of sleeping – either because they returned from their latest expedition laden with treasures, or because they returned with nothing at all.

The inn is run by a family of mixed Ambrian and barbarian heritage. The wife Agshela, called "the Comandress" due to her outspoken style, manages the dining area while her husband, Seralo, does the cooking and the dishes. Their three children do what they can to help out.

5. THE RUSTY DRAGON (INN)

The Rusty Dragon is one of the oldest inns in Kastor. Even though its condition has deteriorated over the years, it is still regarded as the fanciest establishment around, and many of the town's most prominent citizens visit its tavern regularly. The innkeeper, Ramigal, is a direct descendant of the inn's original founder.

The inn was named after the legend of the Bell and the Dragon, which many guests – and certainly all personnel – are

The History of Kastor

–500 (approx.)

Clan Jezora settles in the area, which, according to legend, was deserted.

–100 (approx.)

The Bell and the Dragon, see the *Scholarly Matters* section.

–3

Ordo Magica sends a delegation to clan Jezora. They are the first to describe the settlement and way of life of these barbarians. The Bell Tower is mentioned in detail, even though the wizards are denied entry to it.

5

The duchy of Seragon is founded, along with the other Ambrian duchies, despite the Jezites' ongoing rebellion in parts of the new realm. In Seragon, battles continuously rage between Ambrians and Jezites.

10

Chieftain Haloban is defeated, and all surviving Jezites are hunted down and executed. The Queen's Army sets camp in the strategically important area where Kastor is located. The camp is soon transformed into a wooden fort for permanent occupation of the area.

11

The wooden fortification is replaced with a stronghold of stone, enticing many settlers to set up camp not far from its sturdy walls. The town rapidly emerging around the fort is named Kastor.

12

The barbarians of clan Karohar attack Kastor, bursting through its palisade. The town is saved only by the perseverance of its defenders and the legendary power of the bell. This victory has been celebrated annually ever since, with Kastor's famous carnival.

13

The Kastor Heresy takes place – heretics worshiping the Many refuse to convert and accept the pure teachings of Prios. For this offense, on the opening day of the annual carnival, they are executed by hanging.

15

Treasure hunters draw a vengeful and exceptionally powerful cryptwalker to the town. Hundreds die as this "King Wraith" reclaims its treasures, in the middle of the summer's harvest festival.

16

Kastor receives the title of town and is, as such, granted the proper privileges.

20

Five sorcerers, including Sister Garala of the sun temple, are burned outside the town.


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KASTOR

1. The Chapter of Ordo Magica
2. The Slum District
3. The Sun Temple's Soup Kitchen
4. The Chieftain's Bell
5. The Rusty Dragon
6. The Sorcerers' Crypt
7. The Hidden Chapel
8. The Town Hall
9. The Bell Tower
10. The Executioner's Cottage
11. Garrison
12. Sun Temple

familiar with. They do not know the story in detail, but expect that most learned folk would, and are happy to refer inquisitive characters to the sun temple or the tower of Ordo Magica.

Below the Rusty Dragon, behind a hidden door, is a tunnel leading to the Many's chapel. It is kept secret, of course, as belief in the Many has been considered heresy for years. Few of the inn's guests adhere to the Temple of the Many, but Ramigal and his family do. Yet they keep up the appearance of being god-fearing worshipers of Prios, which is mitigated by the fact that the Temple of the Many does recognize Prios as one of the deities. The inn's cellar is one of a few ways leading to the chapel, but most devotees go through the catacombs and sewers, to avoid drawing attention.

6. THE SORCERERS' CRYPT

Here rest the five "sorcerers" who were burned some years ago. One of them was sister Garala, who had a close relationship with Darda. She was also on to Kagliostro, and had to be disposed of. For a time, Darda used to come here to rest, next to her late fellow Sister of Prios.

On Garala's tomb, covered with dust, lies a triangle made out of rat bones. Player characters proficient with Arcana may make a **DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check** to recognize that the symbol represents the Pathfinder, a now heretic antecedent to the Church of Prios. For more information, see *The Temple of the Many* under *Scholarly Matters*.

One of the sorcerers executed alongside Sister Garala has returned to life as a Necromage (page 158 in the *Bestiary*). Darda is protected by Sister Garala's spirit, but player characters who come there looking for Darda are not given the same protection.

7. THE HIDDEN CHAPEL

The Temple of the Many's chapel is located below the town, west of the Rusty Dragon, and can be reached from either the inn or through the sewers and catacombs. It is a small congregation, comprised of some thirty adults; no children are allowed, as they would risk exposing the chapel. For more about the Temple of the Many and its intricate relation to Prios, see the sections *Scholarly Matters* and *The Kastor Heresy*.

In the adventure *The Bell Tolls for Kastor*, Darda uses the chapel as a hideout, most likely accompanied by a handful of other devotees who have also sought shelter and spiritual guidance in these dark times. The members of the congregation are happy to welcome player characters to their chapel, but will – with the exception of Darda – cover their faces, fearing persecution.

The Temple of the Many's high priest is brother Tamilo, a middle-aged, silver-tongued tinker with a profound love for the Many. He is the first to uncover his face, should the characters prove themselves trustworthy. Then the rest of the congregation will follow his example.

8. THE TOWN HALL

The Town Hall is the mayor's workplace, and ever since the murders the well-guarded residence of the surviving council members. Mayor Grendol sits in the great hall on the second floor, constantly signing arrest warrants.

On the wooden wall behind him hangs the axe mentioned in the legend of the Bell and the Dragon. It is a long-shafted axe with the properties heavy and versatile (d10).

Down in the basement, Kagliostro has gathered all "traitors" who might know the location of the lost mine; one of them being the missing council member Mullando.

For more about the situation at the Town Hall, see *Audience at the Town Hall* (page 116) and the complication *Captured!* (page 118).

9. THE BELL TOWER

The bell-ringers in Kastor are dwarves of the Burukh family. They manage the bell with diligence, but do not ring it until they are ordered to do so. Nor do they stop anyone else from ringing it, although they advise against it, repeating "the price is high" over and over.

The Bell Tower is central to this adventure. As its power threatens the plan of Terato's Dawn, they keep it under strict surveillance as soon as they have gone through with their coup. The sellswords of the Blue Company make the tower their headquarters, by order of Kagliostro, to prevent it from being used against the lindworm Margumal after it has been freed.

10. THE EXECUTIONER'S COTTAGE

This is the home of Kastor's executioner, Segvilla. She is a middle-aged changeling and a loner, who – when not working – carves intricate wooden figurines, which she then sells to wealthy collectors. Segvilla remembers the witch-burning very well, and can give a detailed account of how it was performed. However, she is less observant when it comes to people, and if someone asks about who was present at the burning, or what their reactions were, the changeling simply shrugs and matter-of-factly describes how she picked the firewood, impregnated it, and placed it so that it would catch fire as quickly as possible.

Non-player characters

Below you will find descriptions of the non-player characters featured in the adventure. Some of the recently deceased individuals are also listed, as they will probably be mentioned during the player characters' investigations. Non-player characters who play no significant part in the adventure are instead mentioned in the description of the location where they can be encountered.

Some non-player characters have boons and/or burdens (pages 147–152 of the *Player's Guide*).

Ardetta, Treasurer

Ardetta is Kastor's treasurer, and normally quite a lively person who enjoys playing dice, having a glass of port, and smoking her ceramic pipe. On the night of the murders she got more drunk than usual, gambling away her characteristic slouch hat. This saved her life, as it caused the assassins to target the hat's new owner instead.

After witnessing the murder she was detected by one of the assassins who then threw a poisoned knife at her. She survived the poison, but will never be the same, with scales covering her chest and neck – still spreading – and a strange hunger for the wild (see Terato's Draught on page 196).

Ardetta has the stats of a **cult follower** (page 183 in the *Bestiary*), with the following additions:

- **Manner:** Polite and tired
- **Features:** Privileged (see page 75 in the *Player's Guide*)
- **Boons/Burdens:** Bestial (scaly skin), Dark Blood (regeneration)
- **Shadow:** Silver with black lining (Corruption: 5/5)

The Blue Company

The Blue Company is an infamous group of sellswords, commanded by the charismatic and vicious Captain Tredella. By order of Kagliostro, she has occupied the Bell Tower, from which she commands her troops. For this particular mission, the troops are dressed in the uniforms of the Town Watch. However, all sellswords wear some kind of distinctly blue-colored sign on their clothes or weapons, which may be perceived with a successful **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check**.

The sellswords of the Blue Company – including Captain Tredella – have the stats of a **robber** (page 186 in the *Bestiary*), with the addition of:

- **Manner:** Grinning arrogantly.

Burukh, the Bell-ringers

The Burukh family, and its matriarch Artak, keep to themselves. They have no connection whatsoever to Yndaros' dwarven families or the kingdom of Küam Zamok, nor do they practice Dwarf Law. Their kin have lived in Kastor for ages; they claim to have been present even before the refugees who, following the war against the Spider King, established an outpost in the area about five centuries ago.

The dwarves are a quiet lot, and if they have anything to say at all, they gently but firmly refer to their matriarch, Artak, who speaks on their behalf. The dwarfs have the stats of an **artisan** (page 202 of the *Bestiary*), with the additions of:

- **Features:** Earth Bound and Absolute Memory
- **Manner:** Quiet

Artak has the following changes:

- **Hit Dice:** 6 – 33 (6d8 + 6) hit points
- **Features:** Earth Bound and Absolute Memory
- **Feats:** Retribution
- **Challenge rating:** 2 (450 XP, proficiency bonus +2)
- **Manner:** Muttering

Belago, Sun Priest

Until recently, Belago was the second highest ranking sun priest in Kastor. When father Karstak was murdered, Belago took his place as First Theurg. With this sudden advancement and the chaos following the temple fire, he now focuses on keeping his people calm and securing the burnt-down annex.

Politics, on the other hand, do not interest Belago. Even though he has officially inherited Karstak's place at the Council, he will not take any part in it. However, tenacious player characters may convince Belago that something strange is going on at the Town Hall, prompting him to take action.

Belago is a **theurg** (page 171 of the *Bestiary*). In combat situations, Belago does not fight, he heals. If he indeed finds himself in battle, he protects himself with *hold person* and *dispel magic* and asks the attacker to show Prios' mercy; should that not help, he turns to flee or hopes that his allies will save the day.

Darda, Heretic Theurg

Darda was raised in Kastor and has, with the exception of one year in Thistle Hold, spent all her life in the town and its Sun Temple. That being said, Darda is an apostate; a heretic devoted to the Temple of the Many. Darda's position as liturg of the Sun Temple protects her and provides a place to worship Prios as she deems proper.

Darda had a rough upbringing, and often stayed close to Sister Garala. As the priestess was accused of sorcery – and burned for it – Darda entered a very dark period in her life. When she emerged from it, she started looking into what really happened.

When the characters meet Darda, regardless of when or how it happens, she tells them the following: She is certain that Garala had uncovered some dark cult, and that the evidence of her being a sorcerer was fabricated in order to get rid of her. One important piece to this puzzle is that it was Kagliostro who presented the allegations against the five sorcerers and saw to it that they were burned. While Darda has no physical evidence of this, there are witnesses (Belago, Illeva and Purgida) to confirm it – if they dare, and if the characters get to them before they are taken to the Town Hall dungeons.

It is an open secret that Darda often visits the catacombs beneath the Sun Temple. She is also said to dwell in the mausoleum where Sister Garala is buried. This is not true, but certainly not something Darda wishes to correct, as she uses the catacombs to reach the Temple of the Many.

Darda

Medium human (Ambrian)

Armor Class 13 (blessed robes)
Hit Points 37 (5d8 + 15)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	18 (+4)	13 (+1)

Saving Throws Intelligence +3, Wisdom +6
Skills Alchemist's Supplies +3, Insight +6, Perception +6, Religion +3
Senses passive Perception 16
Languages Ambrian
Challenge 2 (450 XP, proficiency bonus +2)
Manner quiet but friendly
Shadow a copper surface with spots of verdigris (Corruption: 3/12)
Equipment component pouch, 2 daggers, 3 doses of moderate poison (DC 15, 1 round, 1d6)

Spellcasting. Darda (spell attack +6, save DC 14) knows the following spells:

Cantrips: *light* (0), *guidance* (0), *mending* (0), *sacred flame* (0), *spare the dying* (0), *thaumaturgy* (0)
1st-level spells: *bless* (1d4 + 1), *command* (1), *healing word* (1d4 + 1), *inflict wounds* (1d4 + 1)
2nd-level spells: *borrow beast* (2), *spiritual weapon* (2)
3rd-level spells: *revivify* (1d4 + 3)
Rituals: *anathema*, *purify food and drink*

ACTIONS

Dagger. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage, plus possible poison damage.

Darda as a Companion

Should it be needed, Darda may join the player group, controlled by one of the players during combat. She can also replace fallen characters throughout the adventure.

Garala, Secret Heretic

Garala was Darda's protector and friend, and the one who led her to the Temple of the Many. Sister Garala was on to Terato's Dawn, which is why Kagliostro planted false evidence of her being a sorcerer. Sister Garala was burned alongside actual sorcerers affiliated with the Spawn of Symbar (see pages 104–105 for more about the Temple of the Many, Terato's Dawn, and the Spawn of Symbar).

Grendol, Undead Mayor

Grendol had only been Mayor for less than a day when he was killed and brought back to life by Kagliostro. Now undead, he is at the Town Hall signing arrest warrants with machine-like motions, and will keep doing so until interrupted. Should someone attack him, or interfere with the job at hand, Grendol will defend himself. He attacks by grabbing and headbutting his enemy – with the tip of the sword that killed him still protruding from his eye socket.

The undead Grendol has the stats of a **dragoul** (see page 156 in the *Bestiary*), but with the following changes:

- **Manner:** Twitching, repetitive motions.
- **Actions:** Change Rusty Sword to Sword-tipped headbutt, and damage type to piercing.

Harbassas' Marauders, Goblin Warriors

Harbassas' Marauders are a band of brigands named after its leader. The Marauders are hired by Kagliostro to tighten his grip on the town; a welcome respite to the goblins, who would otherwise be lying in soggy ditches waiting to rob bypassing paupers.

The mystic has also promised them the right to harass and subdue the people of Kastor – quite a tempting offer to the vengeful goblin warriors. There are at least half-a-dozen **goblin warriors** (page 189 in the *Bestiary*) for each member of the party and they prefer to gang up on individuals, relying on significantly outnumbering a target before striking. Add **Manner:** Nervously giggling.

Uwulgas and Murky

The goblins' two ogre companions (more like servants) obey no-one but Harbassas. They have the stats of a **plunderer** (page 186 in the *Bestiary*), with the addition: **Manner:** Glaring arrogantly, muttering.

Illeva, Commander of Kastor

The town's commander is a taciturn veteran (an **officer**, page 198 of the *Bestiary*), hardened by many battles against monsters and barbarians. She is the firm-handed leader of Kastor's Town Watch, although she prefers resolving problems herself. She is often seen where order is disrupted and crimes are being investigated. She has **Manner:** Suspicious and worried.

Karstak, Killed in the Sun Temple

Karstak was a leading political figure in Kastor, and one of Mayor Selima's strongest allies. Following sister Garala's execution, he was the one taking care of Darda, but their relationship was not without friction. In secret, Darda was already worshiping at the Temple of the Many, and she blamed Karstak for not having fought hard enough to save Sister Garala from the fire. On the night of the murders, Karstak was killed in the sun temple's annex, where he was speaking to an upset Darda. She got away – he did not.

The Town Watch of Kastor

Kastor's town watchmen are strangers in their own town, outnumbered by Kagliostro's forces – the Blue Company, Harbassas' Marauders, and the cultists of whom they are not even aware. Formally, all orders come from Mayor Grendol, though all but the most ignorant realize that something is terribly wrong with the current situation. They trust in their commander, Illeva, but since her complaints have been ignored by her superiors, most watchmen now make as little effort as they possibly can without disobeying direct orders.

The Town Watch of Kastor has the stats of **thugs** (page 187 in the *Bestiary*, with the addition **Manner:** Demoralized and afraid.

Mullando, Head of Sanitation

Mullando is a modest and thoughtful man, to whom excelling at his job and being appreciated by strong leaders was always important – one such leader being Kagliostro, until the mystic threw Mullando in the Town Hall dungeons for "treason".

Initially, he was said to be one of the murder victims, though no one has seen his dead body; he is simply assumed dead because of his disappearance. Mullando has actually been imprisoned, as Kagliostro suspects that he knows where the mine is located.

Mullando has no significant abilities to speak of – use the **drunkard** stat block (page 203 of the *Bestiary*) and add **Manner:** Smiling ingratiatingly, nervous hands.

Kagliostro, Teratomancer

The son of Ambrian settlers, raised at the edge of Davokar, young Kaglio watched his family get annihilated by a beast of the forest, a raging aboar, furious from being wounded by Ambrian monster hunters. Only Kaglio managed to survive, thanks to his curious talent for moving unseen.

For a few years he lived on the streets of Kastor, stealing to survive, before his talents were discovered by a passing member of Terato's Dawn, who took him in. Kaglio has since advanced rapidly within the cult, and some years ago he

Kagliostro

Medium human (Ambrian)

Armor Class 16 (lacquered silk cuirass)
Hit Points 112 (15d8 + 45)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)	20 (+5)

Saving Throws Int +4, Wis +3
Skills Arcana +4, Deception +8, Investigation +4, Perception +3, Persuasion +8
Senses passive Perception 13
Languages Ambrian
Challenge 6 (2,300 XP, proficiency bonus +3)
Manner Grandiose gestures, grand words on exaltation
Shadow Lush green with streaks of rotting vegetation (Corruption: 5/16)
Equipment tome of ceremonies (see page 196), disguise kit, ritual focus, mystical focus, field library, 2d10 thaler

Bestial. Kagliostro has small horns on his forehead, scales on his neck, chest and back, and his hands clench into claws with large and sharp nails.

Dark Blood (Regeneration). At the start of his turn, Kagliostro regains 6 hit points unless he has taken radiant damage since his last turn.

Extensive Learning. Kagliostro knows four additional spells (included below).

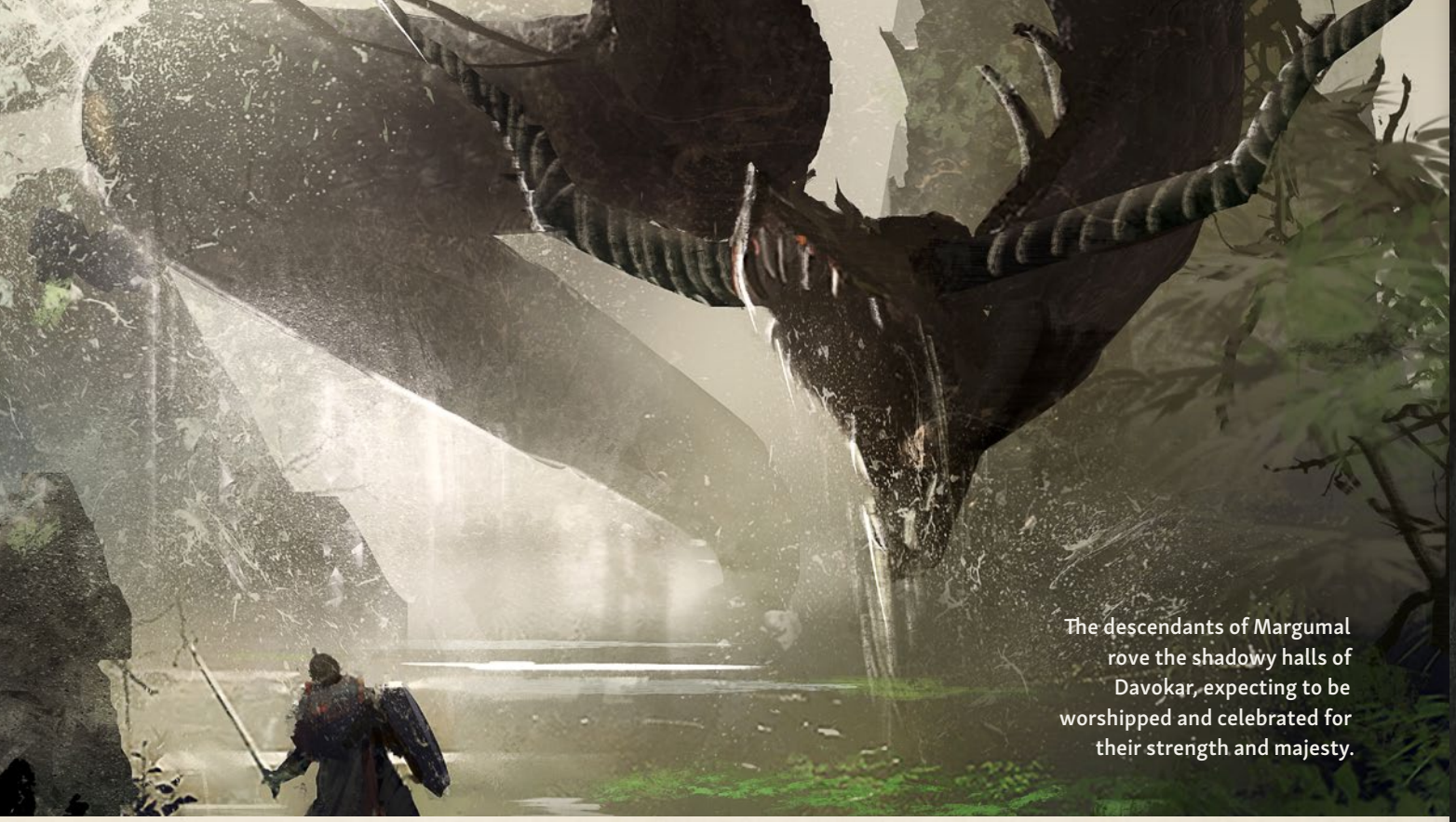
Shadow-sight. Kagliostro can see people's shadows and traces of Corruption in the environment.

Spellcasting. Kagliostro (spell attack +8, save DC 16) knows the following spells:

Cantrips: *dancing lights* (0), *message* (0), *minor illusion* (0), *poison spray* (0), *prestidigitation* (0), *ray of frost* (0)
1st-level spells: *detect magic* (1d4 + 1), *magic missile* (1d4 + 1), *shield* (1d4 + 1), *sleep* (1)
2nd-level spells: *detect thoughts* (1d4 + 2), *misty step* (1d4 + 2), *scorching ray* (2)
3rd-level spells: *animate dead* (1d4 + 4), *counterspell* (1d4 + 3), *larvae boil* (3), *magic circle* (1d4 + 3)
4th-level spells: *confusion* (1d4 + 4), *dimension door* (1d4 + 4), *dominate beast* (4), *wall of fire* (1d4 + 4)
5th-level spells: *hold monster* (5), *teleportation circle* (1d4 + 5)
6th-level spells: *chain lightning* (1d4 + 6), *globe of invulnerability* (6)
Rituals: *alarm*, *flaming servant*, *tiny hut*, *fire soul*

ACTIONS

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.



The descendants of Margumal rove the shadowy halls of Davokar, expecting to be worshipped and celebrated for their strength and majesty.

adopted the suffix "-ostro", thinking it a powerful name more suitable to a man of his potential. If his plan to free the serpent Margumal is successful, Kagliostro will be able to claim leadership of Terato's Dawn – and then mankind will enter a new era, ruled by monstrous masters!

Kagliostro conceals his growing horns and claws by wearing long gloves and a large slouch hat, and covers his spreading scales with cosmetics. An attentive player character may see through all of this with a successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check**. Kagliostro is well aware that his exalted state cannot be kept secret for long, but soon, such things will no longer matter: when his plan has succeeded, he will display his bestial features to the world as a badge of honor.

Margumal, Legendary Lindworm

The **lindworm** (page 35 of the *Bestiary*) Margumal hatched sometime during the glory days of Symbaroum. The serpent still remembers with horror the human lords' hunt for his kin, and the joy of seeing Symbar crumble to dust. In memory, he can still enjoy his own hunt across the open reaches where the accursed elves saw fit to plant the forest of Davokar.

These memories, and many more, are now overshadowed by his long and harsh stay among the abominations haunting the Yonderworld. Margumal has survived only by falling into hibernation over long periods of time, protected by his great magic; a lesser creature would surely have returned to this world thoroughly corrupted.

However, the serpent has not returned completely unaffected – his horns are glowing red, his eyes are black as tar, and streaks of rust stretch over the silvery blue pattern on his body (Corruption 5/13).

Purgida, Adept of the Order

Among the headstrong wizards of Kastor, squabbling between themselves while leaving external affairs to the sociable Kagliostro, there is but one potential ally to the player characters: the ambitious adept Purgida. A student of the pyromancer Isokles, she dreams of one day being a master pyromancer herself.

Her fiery disposition makes her less inclined to be reading tomes and scrolls in her chambers; she prefers to put her skills to the test by, for example, assisting the Town Watch.

Use **adept of the Order** (page 178 of the *Bestiary*), swapping *magic circle* for *fireball.*

Selima, Former Mayor, Deceased

Selima was popular as Mayor, re-elected on several occasions. During the night of the murders, she was killed in the Town Hall by Kagliostro himself. Her corpse was burned in the fireplace, in the dining room below the Grand Hall.

Terato's Cultists

Terato's Dawn in Kastor is composed of Initiated Cultists and Enlightened Cultists, of which the latter command the former and report to Kagliostro. All Enlightened Cultists have willingly subjected themselves to Terato's Draught, and survived with holy marks – both the **Boon:** Dark Blood (regeneration) and **Burden:** Bestial (scaly skin).

Initiated Cultists have the stats of a **cult follower** (see the *Bestiary*, page 183), plus **Manner:** Fanatic gaze and **Equipment:** Monster mask. Most Enlightened Cultists have the same, plus the boons and burdens indicated above. For higher level Enlightened Cultists use **cult leader** (in the *Bestiary* on the same page) as their base instead.

Events

Depending on how the characters decide to approach the situation, the following events may transpire or be used as inspiration in describing what is happening. Should they act unexpectedly, the Gamemaster must (as always) play along, based on what the they know about the goals of other actors.

A State of Emergency

WHEN THE PLAYER characters arrive in Kastor, it is already obvious that something terrible has occurred: everyone seems to be on edge.

Serious-looking guards are posted on street corners and outside important buildings. When faced with questions, they answer curtly, and then refer to the declared state of emergency, hoping to cover up the fact that they themselves know very little. However, if the characters pass a **DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) check**, they may provide the following information:

Four members of the council, including Mayor Selima, were murdered during the night. An emergency meeting was held, where Grendol – the merchants' representative at the council – was appointed mayor.

The new mayor is at the Town Hall with the rest of the council, protected by ranks of grim guards. Apparently, the murder victims were Selima (former mayor), Father Karstak (high priest), Ardetta (treasurer) and Mullando (Fire Chief and Head of Sanitation).

The Sun Temple is still smoking from a fire that recently burned its annex to the ground. The temple is not guarded by the Town Watch, but by frightened layfolk and a few novice priests.

When meeting the Town Watch, a successful **DC 13 Wisdom (Insight or Perception) check** reveals that at least some watchmen differ from the others – they wear blue details among their equipment, indicating that they are sellswords of the infamous Blue Company. Furthermore, a success by 5 or more indicates that the characters have noticed that there appears to be a secret elite among the Town Watch. A few seemingly ordinary watchmen use secret signs to communicate with each other; signs that neither regular guards, nor Blue sellswords, seem to notice. The ones using signs are actually cultists who, a long time ago, infiltrated the Town Watch.

Initial Investigations

SNOOPING PLAYER CHARACTERS may gather many pieces of information, but while some are obvious to everyone, others are revealed only to the wise, the perceptive, and the well-connected.

QUESTIONS REGARDING DARDA

When the player characters go looking for Darda, no one will answer questions about her, but only refer to Father Belago, who has replaced the late Father Karstak.

Belago tells them about the attacks, and that Darda was with the high priest when the enemy burned the church's annex to the ground – with her and Father Karstak still inside. Father Belago thinks aloud: *"Darda's return was most unfortunate; the witch-burning took its toll on her, with Sister Garala and all that..."* Since the characters probably know nothing of this, Belago continues: Sister Garala was, along with four others, accused of witchcraft and collaborating with daemons, and burned at the stake three years ago. Darda did not take Garala's death very well, and would have succumbed to despair had father Karstak not been there for her. But despite his support, she made plenty of poor choices – and her fascination with death did not help. *"And now, they are both gone..."*

If pressured, Belago admits that Darda never seemed happy with being a priest: *"She preferred dwelling in the catacombs, with the dead..."* Note that this is misleading: Darda is a member of the heretical Temple of the Many; sure, at first she only visited the catacombs to be near sister Garala's grave, but later she used it as an excuse for heading underground – to secret gatherings at the Temple of the Many's chapel.

ON NEW COUNCIL MEMBERS

Grendol (formerly representing the merchants) is said to have been appointed new mayor. Other surviving council members are Illeva (commander of the Town Watch) and Kagliostro (representing the wizards). Who will replace Mullando as Head of Fire and Sanitation is, apparently, unclear (due to him still being alive).

GUARDS AROUND THE BELL TOWER

A successful **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check** while exploring the town allows a character to notice that there are a remarkable number of guards standing watch around the Bell Tower – for what reason is unclear.

The number of overall guards is surprisingly large for a town of this size; citizens can also confirm that many of them (further investigation proves it to be 50%) are people they have never seen before (the Blue Company, cultist infiltrators, and assassins – all in Town Watch uniforms).

The purpose of the bell is to warn the town and its surrounding settlements in case of an attack. According to rumors, the bell is an artifact of tremendous power, capable of dispelling dark magic, that has saved Kastor's population many times in the past.

SHADY CONTACTS

If a character has or can make an Alleyway or Mark contact, they are automatically informed that arrests have occurred and there are rumors of "traitors" being rounded up and taken to the Town Hall dungeons.

Developments

THIS SECTION EXPLAINS what happens when the characters decide to follow up on certain leads or walk down a particular path. In their eagerness to find out what is going on, it is of course possible for the players to come up with completely different alternatives, in which case the Gamemaster must, with discretion and flexibility, bring them back on the right track.

EXAMINING THE MURDER SCENES

The player characters will probably want to examine what is left of the burnt-down temple annex, where Darda and Karstak are supposed to have been. Most of the wooden inner walls were completely incinerated. The scorched remains of four bodies can still be found where the dining hall used to be, in the middle of the scene, yet to be dealt with by Commander Illeva and her medicus. The following conclusions may be drawn:

- Passing a **DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check** is enough to realize that only one of the corpses is wearing a priest robe, while the others seem to have worn leather armor beneath thick wadmal clothes.
- A successful **DC 10 Wisdom (Medicine) check** or a character with the Medicus feature can determine that the dead priest was a man (Karstak).
- A successful **DC 13 Wisdom (Medicine) check** directed at the other corpses shows that they were stabbed repeatedly with a knife. Furthermore, a **DC 10 Intelligence (Alchemist's Supplies or Poisoner's Kit) check** reveals that it was not the blade itself that killed them, but the poison with which it had most likely been smeared.
- A close friend or lover of Darda recalls that she often carried a pair of daggers, and was a skilled alchemist.
- It takes a successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check** of the leather-armored corpses to notice that their charred faces appear to have been deformed, or possibly covered by some sort of leathery mask…

Selima was murdered inside the inaccessible Town Hall, and apparently no one knows exactly where Mullando died (since he is not really dead, but merely imprisoned in the Town Hall basement). However, the characters are free to have a closer look at where Ardetta was killed.

At the scene of her murder, just north of the Town Square, they find nothing more than a large stain of dried blood on the ground. But if the characters expressly decide to search the place for clues (hoping to find something related to the murderers) and pass a **DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check**, they notice another dried-up bloodstain in the western part of the square.

A successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine) check** reveals that the blood found at both of these locations was spilled around the same time, and the size of the western stain indicates that the victim could still be alive. In other words, there may be a witness to Ardetta's murder! (This is actually Ardetta herself, see page 110.)

DARDA IN THE CATACOMBS

Having listened to Father Belago, the player characters might decide to go after Darda and try to locate her in the catacombs – and the town's sewers to which they are connected – beneath the Sun Temple.

Finding the trail requires a **DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check** – many people have visited the catacombs, particularly near the entrance where the graves of former high priests and other deceased are still looked after and provided with flowers and candles. Finding Darda's trail, among all the others, is not easy.

Having found her trail, one must follow it to the correct location. It takes three successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) checks** to track Darda through the catacombs, to the underground chapel of the Temple of the Many.

Should one fail the first check, a second attempt is granted, but any further failures lead to the Sorcerer's crypt

instead. Darda used to go there for rest, and sometimes still returns to lay flowers by Sister Garala's grave. The problem is that a necromage haunts the place; one that Darda is aware of, but not affected by (as she has Sister Garala's protection).

Arriving player characters may not be as lucky (for more information about the place, see the description of Kastor, page 106).

THE TOWN HALL

There are multiple possible approaches to the Town Hall:

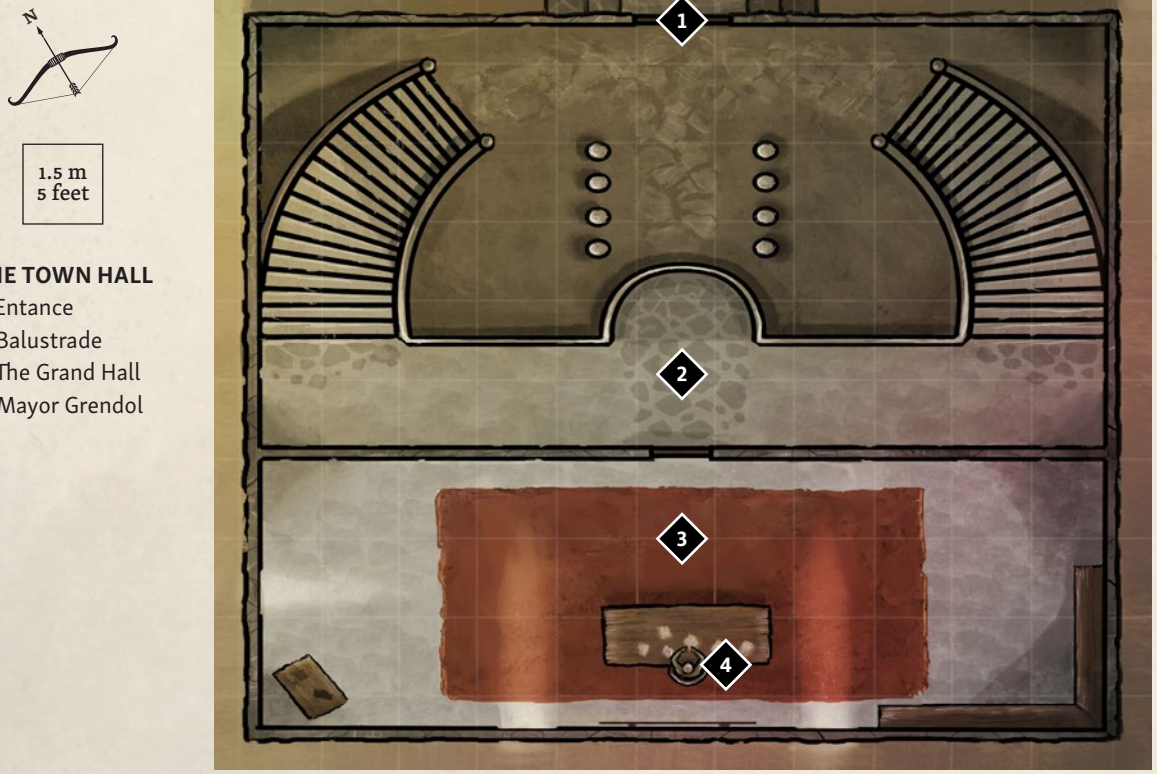
Audience. The characters may seek an audience with the new mayor, Grendol, at the Town Hall. But actually meeting him is difficult, as Kagliostro claims him to be *"terribly busy"*. If the player characters insist – a **DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check** – Kagliostro allows them to see the Mayor – or rather, to walk into a trap in front of the undead Grendol. Then, the goblins and their ogres sneak up on the player characters from behind and attack them – as does Kagliostro – when they approach the Mayor in the Great Hall.

Forced entry. Should the player characters try breaking into the Town Hall, they are greeted by Harbassas' Marauders (at least 4 goblins for each character), who will fight until half of them are injured. Then they flee to gather reinforcements (their ogres and another group of goblins) – Kagliostro had promised them power and authority to harass the snooty humans, and they did not expect any heavy resistance.

The bottom floor of the Town Hall is empty, its basement serving as Kagliostro's prison (see *Captured!*, page 118). In the Great Hall on the top floor sits a solitary mayor, signing arrest warrants for people singled out by Kagliostro as potential "traitors". The Mayor does not respond when spoken to, and when the player characters come closer, they realize something is wrong. A **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check** allows a character to notice the shaft of a small sword protruding from the back of Grendol's head – yet, he is still moving! He is undead, slain and reanimated by Kagliostro in order to keep doing the necessary paperwork.

Combat in the Town Hall

A fight against the goblins, ogres, the undead Mayor and Kagliostro himself may overwhelm the party. If the characters wish to flee, the most expeditious way is to jump out the windows (a 20-foot fall). Otherwise they must concede or be struck down. If they surrender, they're disarmed and placed in the Town Hall basement (see *Captured!* on page 118).



THE TOWN HALL
1. Entance
2. Balustrade
3. The Grand Hall
4. Mayor Grendol

AUDIENCE WITH THE WATCH COMMANDER

Gaining an audience with Illeva, Commander of the Town Watch, is not very difficult, as she already suspects that something is wrong. She thinks the assassins might have had help from the inside; how else could they know so much about the town's leaders and where to find them? She has also gotten hold of the cultists' monster masks, left behind at the murder scene of "Ardetta". Illeva has not yet shown it to anyone, but may reveal it to the player characters, should they ask for help and pass a **DC 10 Charisma (Persuasion) check**.

Illeva also knows that the corpse now lying on a stretcher below the Town Watch Headquarters is not really Ardetta, but a widow named Gerda – an avid drinker and gambler who had squandered her late husband's entire fortune. That the assassins murdered the wrong woman, is only known by Illeva and the Town Watch's medicus, Klarag. If it were to get out, the killers would surely come after the former treasurer, which Illeva would rather avoid.

If Illeva is absolutely convinced that the player characters speak the truth and can be trusted, she will ask them for help in finding Ardetta (as she herself is probably being watched by whoever is behind it all). Later on, she is willing to lead the original half of the Town Watch against the other half (the Blue Company, Harbassas' Marauders and cultists), for example in an attack on the Town Hall or the bell tower.

MAYOR GRENDOL'S RESIDENCE

As the Mayor is never home, but stuck at the Town Hall, breaking into his private residence is quite a simple feat. In the bedroom/office, players who pass a **DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check** may find Grendol's diary, in which his dreams of Kastor's death and destruction are described in detail.

He writes about desperately explaining his concern to the other council members; *"the only one who appears to be listening is the wizard Kagliostro, but him I do not trust!"* The last entry is dated three days ago: *"I have received an anonymous letter; someone wishes to see me and present a proposition. I do not know if I can listen to any more of this town's schemes, for tonight everything was clear to me. Death approaches on rusty wings!"*

THE MYSTERIOUS BELL OF KASTOR

Darda and the other wizards in town (such as Purgida) know the bell to be a powerful artifact but have not been able to study it more closely, as the bell-ringing Burukh family has not let them. Now the dwarves have been "sent home," and the guards will not allow anyone but Kagliostro to enter the tower.

The Burukh family home – not far from the Bell Tower – is empty. There are clear signs of the family members having been violently abducted. They are now being held captive in the Town Hall basement, along with the rest of the "traitors" (see the *Captured!* complication, page 118).

The Blue Company has taken complete control of the Bell Tower, and their leader, Captain Tredella, has turned it into her headquarters. Its gate is guarded by sellswords (twice as many as the characters) at all times, and there are an additional number of sellswords sleeping on every one of the five floors. On the top floor – where the legendary great bell is mounted – a single sellsword keeps watch.

It is possible to climb the tower's exterior all the way to its top. Reaching each floor requires a **DC 10 Strength (Athletics)** or **Dexterity (Acrobatics) check** (a total of five checks), and you can use group checks if the characters decide to climb together. Failing means the characters cannot continue, but must either turn back or enter the nearest floor through a window. A player character reaching the bell may throw down a rope for the others to climb, causing them to succeed automatically.

Holding the top floor against sellswords charging from within is quite a challenge. However, the narrow staircase only has room for two enemies at a time, while those holding the high ground may attack from all directions. The sellswords are not interested in suicide missions, and if they suffer ten casualties, they will settle for closing off the way down and inform Kagliostro that there are traitors at the top of the tower.

Complications

WHILE THE PLAYER characters conduct their investigations, many complications may arise. These are described below.

ARDETTA ASKS FOR HELP

Council Member Ardetta was lucky enough to escape the attacks. She spots the characters from her hideout on the Rusty Dragon's second floor, and as she is unsure if any of Kastor's permanent residents can be trusted she decides to put her faith in the newcomers.

She later contacts them through the innkeeper Ramigal, who offers to help the characters in their search for Ardetta. Should they accept his offer, he will bring them to her. She recounts what happened to her on the night of the murders, and will answer questions regarding the town and its history. If the player characters ask for details concerning the assassins, she answers thoughtfully: *"Well, I think they wore monster masks to cover their faces, but... I was rather tipsy, you see, and it was dark, and... And I was quite terrified, so I might have been mistaken."*

The skin on Ardetta's neck has grown scaly, as a result of her being infected with the enemy's poison. Obviously, this scares her to bits, and she asks medically or alchemically skilled characters for help. There is no help to be had, but despite the condition of Ardetta's skin, her actual health

is improving. However, she is now being hunted by both Terato's cultists and, in the long term, witch-hunters.

A character learned in alchemy may extract the poison from her wound – this requires passing a **DC 13 Wisdom (Medicine) check** – and in doing so, learn its forbidden and quite valuable formula. For more details concerning the poison, see Terato's Draught on page 196).

GREEN-EYED CREATURES

Following the attack, Darda fled to the chapel below the town. There she received further information from other members of the heretical movement, and soon it became clear that the attack had nothing to do with the Temple of the Many.

To learn more, she uses *borrow beasts* to spy on the local government. She is also likely to notice her friend/s – the player characters – as they will be drawn to the places of interest to Darda. A character with a passive Perception of 16 or higher will realize that a nearby animal – a dove, crow, dog or cat – has green eyes.

A person who knows Darda automatically remembers that her eyes are green. A coincidence?

THE TOWN WATCH'S RAID

When the player characters have pursued two or three leads, Kagliostro sends several bands of cultists on raids, supplied with thick bundles of arrest warrants for "traitors", signed "Mayor Grendol".

Each group is composed of a number of Enlightened Cultists (see page 113), led by a higher-level Enlightened Cultist, all wearing Town Watch uniforms. The characters' names are among those listed in the arrest warrants. Belago is captured, as is Ardetta, who is found and dragged away if the characters do not intervene. If Commander Illeva and Purgida have openly assisted the player characters, they too are arrested.

The captured "traitors" are hauled to the spacious basement of the Town Hall through a backdoor. There Kagliostro and his thugs question them about the location of the lost mine. For more details, see the complication *Captured!*.

CAPTURED!

It is possible for the player characters to be captured by Kagliostro's minions. This could be the result of the characters either being defeated in combat or failing in their attempt to break into the Bell Tower or the Town Hall.

Captured characters are taken to the Town Hall basement, where other "traitors" are already gathered. If the characters are wounded or dying, their wounds are bandaged – not healing them, but preventing them from dying. Kagliostro was clear on his point: people caught snooping around are likely to know something, and must be interrogated.

Among the other captives are the Burukh family and the Head of Fire and Sanitation, Mullando, who was imprisoned just after the takeover as Kagliostro had no further use for him. The following people may also be found here, depending on how far into the adventure the player characters end up in the dungeon, and what has transpired before then:

- **Ardetta.** The treasurer is caught in a raid, if the player characters do not come to her rescue.
- **Belago.** The sun priest is arrested if he draws attention to himself (for example by helping the player characters) or is believed to know the location of the mine.
- **Illeva.** The Commander ends up in the dungeon if she openly sides with the characters.
- **Purgida.** The Adept is also arrested, if she displays an abnormal interest in what has happened in Kastor, or if she helps the player characters.

Kagliostro resides in a room in the basement, some distance from the dungeon, leaving all dirty work to the goblins of clan Harbassas and their ogres. They threaten, beat, and intimidate the prisoners, dragging them to Kagliostro, who uses *detect thoughts* to find out the location of Margumal's lair.

If the player characters end up in Kagliostro's dungeon, they will have help getting out of there. Darda has kept her eyes on them, and decides to intervene. Through the sewer system, which is connected to the catacombs where she has hidden ever since the murders, she enters the Town Hall. They hear a scraping sound from the other side of one of the walls, where Darda is digging. If the characters do not give themselves away in some obvious manner, they may soon crawl through the opening and meet Darda. She leads them through the sewers, to the relatively safe Temple of the Many.

Captivity as a Deus ex Machina

It could be useful for the Gamemaster to use captivity as a Deus ex Machina, rather than letting defeated player characters die. This happened in a play-test: the entire player group was beaten down during a less successful foray into the Town Hall, and instead of being killed, they woke up in the Town Hall basement, each with 1 hit point remaining...

KAGLIOSTRO HEADS FOR THE MINE

Sooner or later, Kagliostro will learn the location of the mine. Whom he receives this information from is irrelevant in this scenario.

When this happens, Kagliostro and his thugs leave the town heading east. Many people watch him go, accompanied by some twenty cultists. They cover their tracks as best they can, and a character must make a **DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check** in order to track them to the mine, located near the low hills, a three-hour march east of Kastor.

Climax: In the Serpent's Lair

A POSSIBLE CLIMAX is the confrontation with Kagliostro and his cultist in the mine, where the teratomancer is about to free the lindworm Margumal from his prison in the Yonderworld. A series of battles take place to stop Kagliostro from completing the ceremony.

THE AMBUSH

The goblins and ogres who have managed to survive thus far are planning an ambush by the overgrown path leading to the mine. Luckily for the player characters, neither goblins nor ogres are able to keep quiet, constantly squabbling amongst each other.

A **DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check** allows a character to hear the sound of bickering and shushing, preventing the characters from being surprised by an attack.

Those passing the check detect the goblins in time, and can also tell that their argument concerns whether or not to support the "Monster King" (which is what they are calling Kagliostro) in freeing the "Killer Snake" (Margumal). The leader of the clan, Harbassas, is the strongest proponent for completing the mission, as they have not yet been paid. He is supported by any surviving ogres. The rest of the goblins are strongly opposed to the idea, stating everything from chafed feet to fear of both the dragon and the characters (if they have beaten the goblins before) as reasons for finding other work.

The player characters have several options:

- attack head-on
- sneak up on them for a surprise attack
- negotiate with the goblins, or
- proceed towards the mine – the long way around

Head-on Attack. The goblins are not surprised, and the fight unfolds as usual.

Sneak Attack. The group must succeed at a **DC 13 Dexterity (Stealth) check**. On a success, the goblins and ogres are surprised.

Negotiation. Should the player characters choose to negotiate, they must persuade Harbassas, which requires a successful **DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) check**; if the player characters offer to match what Kagliostro is paying them, they will have to offer up ten thaler for every goblin and ogre, and then pass a **DC 8 Charisma (Persuasion) check**.

If they do, the goblins set off on new adventures (*"There is a sun temple filled with gold near Karvosti! Come on!"*). Should they fail the check, the goblins attack regardless of whatever they were offered.

A Detour. Taking a detour on the way to the mine requires no checks, but wastes a lot of valuable time, causing events in the mine to skip stage 1 and begin with stage 2: Margumal partially freed. The Gamemaster should explain that the detour will be time-consuming, but not reveal what consequences it will have.

1. THE MINE'S ENTRANCE

The mine's entrance is guarded by a number of Cultists equal to twice the number of characters, led by an Enlightened Cultist. As they are lurking in the shadows, player characters must pass a **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check** to detect their leader, and a **DC 18 Wisdom (Perception) check** to notice the others. Should they fail to do so, they are surprised by attacking cultists.

When the cultists are defeated, characters who pass another **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check** can hear the sound of polyphonic chanting coming from deep within the mine.

Player characters proficient with Arcana realize that a ceremony is being conducted; some kind of powerful, collective ritual. If they haven't already, the player characters can learn the basics of ceremonies (page 150 of the *Gamemaster's Guide*). With a successful **DC 13 Intelligence (Arcana) check**, they may also recall how to cancel a ceremony; by taking out its leader, or by causing enough participants to lose their focus (harming them would do the trick).

2. THE FIRST CHAMBER

More cultists (twice the number of characters) guard this area, but are completely mesmerized by the miracle taking place deeper inside the mine. They do not watch the opening, where the player characters enter, but gaze towards the main hall further in. The player characters automatically surprise them.

A character with passive Perception 13 or higher realizes that the ground is shaking, as though something enormous is twisting and writhing inside the mine.

3. THE MAIN HALL

Here Kagliostro's ceremony, meant to free and assume control over Margumal, is being conducted.

It is assumed that the characters arrive at the main hall as the ceremony is reaching its crescendo. Then follows a number of stages, starting the turn after all enemies in the First Chambers are defeated.

Leading the ceremony, Kagliostro is utterly entranced. Around him stand five higher level Enlightened Cultists, assisting him in the ceremony. All of these mystics are concentrating on the ceremony. Other Enlightened Cultists (twice the number of characters) have formed a semicircle around them for protection.

The ceremony is canceled if Kagliostro is taken out (reaching 0 hit points) or if three or more higher level cultists lose their concentration. If the ceremony is canceled it remains in stage 2, as described below.

Stage 1: The Ground Trembles

Duration: 1 turn.

The ground is now shaking with enough force for any player character to notice.



Stage 2: Margumal Partially Freed
Duration: 2 turns

Margumal's head and upper body break through the fabric of reality. With its terrible fangs, the serpent attacks anything in its way, but is unable to move. It cannot use its legendary actions while still being partially trapped in the Yonderworld. The serpent can only reach partially into the main hall, making fighting it avoidable by staying close to the western wall. The enemy is also aware of this, and five cultists position themselves by that wall, defending the ceremony.

If the ceremony is canceled at this stage, the ritual goes no further, and those trying to stop the serpent may exit the mine and destroy its entrance. If so, the last thing heard as the rocks collapse over the opening is the resounding roar of Margumal.

Stage 3. Margumal Freed and Disoriented, But in Control of Himself
Duration: 2 turns

Margumal breaks loose, master of his own fate, if only for a moment. Should no-one stop Kagliostro within 2 rounds

after the serpent has been freed, the mystic will take control of it. However, if Kagliostro is defeated, the serpent remains its own master.

While the ceremony is being conducted, the disoriented serpent will not attack except in self-defense. If the lindworm is harmed, it loses its mind with rage, attacking whoever is closest. If there are several people within the same distance from it, it chooses a victim at random.

The player characters must decide whether to ignore the serpent and continue fighting the cultists, attack the serpent (a foolish choice, but the characters might not realize it), or try to negotiate with it. Should Kagliostro fall and the cultists be taken out, the characters may once again choose to either attack a free Margumal or give him safe passage.

Ignoring the Serpent. Margumal is disoriented, growling and roaring, but not fighting unless he is attacked.

Negotiation. Those who know the barbarian or elvish tongues are able to calm the serpent down, and convince him that Kagliostro is the real enemy. This requires a successful **DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check**, requiring a character's action.

The serpent will not attack the negotiating character. They have two chances at persuasion; should both of them fail, the serpent attacks the group, making any further negotiation impossible.

Safe Passage. If the ceremony is canceled while the serpent is loose, the player characters may choose to stand back. If so, the serpent will neither attack, nor pursue them. Having fed on the corpses of fallen cultists, the free Margumal will head out, terrorizing the world until driven into Davokar (or some other forest) by mightier forces.

Stage 4. Margumal Freed and Under Kagliostro's Control

Duration: 3 turns, but only if the ceremony is allowed to run its course.

If the player characters fail to stop the ritual, Margumal will be bound to Kagliostro's will. Kagliostro orders it to attack the player characters, as he himself attacks along with any surviving members of his cult.

This is a battle the player characters cannot win, but they might be able to escape. Kagliostro would rather set his grand plan in motion than chase after the player characters. He intends to head for Kastor, carried by Margumal, and there establish the Capital of the Beast Realm, with Margumal as god and himself as high priest.

KASTOR IN THE SNAKE CHARMER'S GRIP

What happens to Kastor under the monster cult's reign is not part of this scenario, even though it is a possible outcome of the player characters' failure. But such information might be useful to the Gamemaster, should it come to pass and the player characters want to continue fighting the menace. Therefore, a possible course of events is summarized in the following:

Kagliostro forces the remaining leaders of Kastor into submission, proclaiming himself High Priest of the Serpent Church. Margumal takes hold of the Bell Tower, staying by the bell at its top after having demolished the lower floors. Kagliostro takes his place at the Town Hall; soon to be the high temple of his monstrous order. Monster worshipers are summoned to Kastor, to begin the new era, but those heeding the call are vastly outnumbered by the people fleeing the town. Soon, Kastor is but a shadow of its former self, its citizens cowering before the sacrificial monster cult.

As this does not go unnoticed by the surrounding civilization, the Duke sends troops to liberate the town. The siege of Kastor becomes a protracted one, as the cultists are not only protected by the town's thick walls, but have both Margumal and the bell at their disposal.

After a time of guarded attacks and failed diplomatic initiatives, it becomes clear to the besieging commander that the only hope is storming the town, while simultaneously striking at the heart of the enemy: as they charge, a small group of soldiers moves stealthily into Kastor to assassinate Kagliostro and/or take control of the bell.

Maybe such a raid would suit the player characters, as they are already familiar with both the town and the enemy?

The Gratitude of a Lindworm

If the player characters manage to convince Margumal that Kagliostro is their mutual enemy, and then fight alongside the lindworm against the cultists, Margumal will consider itself in their debt. The serpent breaks off one of its fangs, handing it to the negotiating character – when the pulp has rotted away or been removed, the fang may be used as a flute. "Blow it, and I shall appear," the serpent says before leaving the place. It takes the serpent 10d10 hours to reach the person blowing the horn (the Game master is free to choose a time span more suitable to the adventure). Having arrived, Margumal will do the person a favor before disappearing, believing the debt to be paid. The serpent may join the player characters in battle (if it can be won) or teach them some bit of ancient knowledge. When Margumal has paid its debt, it has no sentimental bond whatsoever with the player characters; should they ever encounter it again, it would be as though it was the first time, except Margumal would recognize their scents and names, and have a clear understanding of their capacity.



NIGHTTIME DESCENDS like a deep blue veil over the River Veloma and the village of Prios Pass. The snow no longer falls, the wind no longer blows, and a grim calm settles in the shadows of the Titans. Somewhere on the other side of the river is the refugee camp, occupied by Alberians hoping to be welcomed into Queen Korinthia's Promised Land.

Creaking and squeaking, the raft is reeled south across the flowing waters, toward the points of fiery light glimmering along the northern shore. The boatman grunts a brusque farewell as he pushes you up on the slushy pier. Now, all that remains is waiting and hoping – waiting in the shadows of the mountains and the towering cliff which raises Baroness Karolia Meleon's Keep high into the sky; hoping that the incoming caravan has not gotten stuck in the snow. Or worse.

Though you would rather not think about it, you have all heard accounts of what can happen on the journey across the Titans. Predators, bandits, even trolls and elves. Other tales warn of the infectious darkness which many travelers bring along from Alberetor, the diseased south, to the hopeful refugees at Prios Pass.



The Howling of Damned Gods

FOR LEVELS 6-7

Introduction

At the foot of the Titans, near the headwaters of the River Veloma, lies Prios Pass. For almost two decades, the border crossing's restored stone bridge has been the gateway into Ambria. While the flood of refugees fleeing the south has diminished somewhat, the need to control their status grows ever greater as Alberetor darkens, blackens, and dies. Prios cannot protect or heal all his children, and the future looks particularly bleak for those who are branded enemies of the Sun God – in Queen Korinthia's realm, no one has more enemies, or more powerful ones, than the alleged heretic.

Background

IN ORDER TO really understand what is taking place at Prios Pass these early winter days, one must look to history. The events are deeply rooted in the barren soil of Alberetor and relate to what became known as the Exaltation (year –5), when the Sun God Prios was proclaimed the One and the Giver of Laws, to the detriment of the pantheon known as the Young Gods.

THE MAKING OF A HERETIC

Prios' exaltation did not go unchallenged. True, most people were indeed willing to obey Queen Korinthia's decree, realizing that the power of the Sun God would be their greatest weapon in the war against the Lords of Darkness. But at the same time, many refused to abandon the faith of their ancestors – either out of devotion to one particular Young God, or because they worshiped the pantheon in its entirety and feared that the unrighteous exaltation of Prios would anger them all.

Within a month, thousands of people had left Alberetor and traveled west, where they eventually established the Realm of the Order. Over the years more would follow, as they could no longer stand having to keep their religious practices secret. But there were some who stayed behind to defend their gods against the new and, as they saw it, distorted version of Prios – once the god of warmth, mercy, and all-embracing love. One of these was Mother Elsana, High Priestess of the Earthmother.

She refused to leave her temple in the capital, Kandoria, and for a time the authorities tolerated her behavior. Soon her open criticism and heretical exhortations became a problem, especially when Korinthia was captured and the need to unite against the darkness grew even stronger. At a public trial in the largest square in the city, Elsana was given a chance to see reason and repent. Instead, she made her loathing for the Lawgiver perfectly clear; she would not even say his name, calling him *"the False God of War"* and *"The Black Sun."*

The crowd roared and called for the heretic to burn, but Abramelin, First Father at the time, did not want to make a martyr of her. Thus, he decided to show mercy: he sentenced her to imprisonment and ordered that, once a year at the summer solstice, she would be given a new chance to renounce her blasphemous delusions. Elsana was put behind bars about a year before the Victory, and has spent her days in the darkness of the dungeon ever since. A player character proficient with Religion knows Elsana's name and that she is a heretic; with a successful **DC 13 Intelligence (Religion) check**, they can also recall the aforementioned story.

A SYMBOL OF SIN

Kandoria was long ago devoured by the Gray Death which slowly turns Alberetor into an ashen wasteland, but people still linger in a few places, to prevent others from looting noble homes or destroying holy sites. Now, these too are abandoning their posts, one after the other, due to the lack of clean water and other necessities.

Some months ago, the Curia reluctantly decided it was time to leave Kandoria. The twenty or so heretics still held beneath the temple which before the Exaltation had been dedicated to the Executioner were all sentenced to cleansing by fire – save one. The First Father ordered that Elsana should be taken to Templewall and given yet another chance to repent; with the growing conflict within the Knights of the Dying Sun (known as Templars) and the Queen's efforts to distance herself from the Church, the people had to be reminded of what awaits those who turn their backs on Prios' radiance!

The task of bringing the heretic to the First Father's stronghold fell upon a group of four Black Cloaks, led by Father Mogdas, who had all made the journey across the

mountains on several occasions. The Queen was informed of the transport, but was for political reasons unwilling to publicly support or protect it, which meant that the operation had to be kept secret from known threats: fallen Sun Knights who would love to see the heretic purged by holy fire; the leaders of the Realm of the Order who wish to free their martyr; and traitors within their own ranks who want to get their hands on Elsana for sinister political purposes.

But despite the secrecy, information about the operation leaked to the Church's enemies. When the adventure begins, a group of expelled Templars, a Reformist agent, and representatives from the Realm of the Order are all present at Prios Pass, but have not yet been detected by the Black Cloaks who just arrived with their prisoner. The agents of the Order are the first to make a move in the fight for the heretical priestess.

THE AGENTS' PLAN

Father Orun of the Executioner's Order leads the two-man effort to free Elsana and bring her to safety. Thanks to a mole within the Twilight Friars' organization, they have managed to obtain detailed information regarding the transportation of Elsana (see the handout on page 209).

Their plan is as simple as it is cruel: to provoke such a dangerous situation at the refugee camp that the guards escorting the prisoner must leave and seek shelter in the nearby monastery, and then stage an ambush by the road along with two fellow agents in the area. This will be accomplished by poisoning the soup being served at the camp, thereby turning one or more of the already blight-stricken refugees into raging abominations.

After Elsana has been freed, the three of them will lay low for a few days while the situation settles. Their hiding place is one of the rebel leader Maridja's campsites just north of the border, secured in a negotiation between her and the head of the Order, the Theologist. Maridja, commonly known as the Ice Witch, has really nothing to gain from the agreement, except that it causes problems for the Ambrians.

THE TEMPLARS

The cell of fallen Templars who are hunting the heretic learned of the prison transport from a like-minded cell still operating in the old capital of Alberetor. While they lack details such as its destination and whether the Queen has approved it, they know that the prisoner is being transported in an enclosed carriage and that the guards are posing as a master weaver and apprentices.

Because of their status as heretics, the members of the cell cannot act openly in Ambria, even though many support their cause. The three young knights present in Prios Pass are disguised as Alberian refugees, and they are determined to slay the prisoner. What happens to them after the mission has been accomplished is of less importance – if they manage to escape with their lives, the pursuit of vengeance will simply continue somewhere else; if they are killed or captured by the Queen's lackeys, they will spend an eternity kneeling by the side of Dead Prios.

THE REFORMISTS

The faction promoting change within the Sun Church also obtained information regarding the prisoner transport, as well as its written orders (see the handout on page 209). Father Sarvola and Deseba the Old want Elsana freed, and eventually pardoned; a senior representative of the Earthmother would be invaluable in healing the spiritual wounds of the kingdom.

They notified the Queen, but though she welcomes the idea, she still does not dare to openly oppose the Curia in ecclesiastical matters – the time is not yet ripe. However, the Reformists are under the impression that they have Korinthia's implicit permission to act.

Their plan is to identify the transport at Prios Pass and keep an eye on it until it approaches Yndaros. Then they will strike, free Elsana, and bring her to the Reformist Count Hastorio Arobel. The mission to locate and tail the prison transport has been assigned to Brother Huberdo. He is their only man at Prios Pass, but if necessary, he may seek shelter (though not receive any public assistance) at the local sun temple.

The Player Characters

AS USUAL, WE hope that this adventure will be playable with any player characters, regardless of their background, opinions, or ambitions. Sure, the theme of the story makes it particularly interesting to use characters with clearly stated views on spiritual matters, and it becomes even more exciting if the gaming group's characters have taken more or less divergent positions in the conflict between the various factions of the Sun Church. But this is certainly not a requirement.

Rather, any character who has previously ignored all theological conflicts will, because of how the adventure is designed, most likely be forced to take a stand – something that will enrich and add further depth to their personality.

FEATURES

The character group will benefit (as always) from at least one member possessing the Loremaster feature. Other useful features will be Medicus, Alchemy and Poisoner. The Bloodhound and Contact boons, along with the Bushcraft trait, will also be useful.

CONNECTIONS

Before starting the game, you must think carefully about how to make the characters (and players) of your gaming group feel engaged and invested in the adventure. Our main suggestion would be that they come to Prios Pass to see a

close friend or relative (see *A Happy Reunion* below), but there are obviously many ways to spark their curiosity and strengthen their resolve. It takes reflection, planning, and adjustments for an adventure designed for a wide variety of players with different play styles, to work well for your particular gaming group.

A HAPPY REUNION

We propose that the player characters have come to Prios Pass to greet a close friend, colleague, or relative, who until now has chosen to remain in Alberetor. We also suggest that this person has sent one (or more) of the player characters a letter, by courier, delivered in a metal cylinder along with a vinegar ampoule meant to render the text illegible if the container is opened incorrectly.

Besides the usual pleasantries, the letter contains the following message(s):

- *"I have discovered grave misdeeds within* [appropriate faction/organization]*."*
- *"I fear for my life; they may come after me at any moment."*
- *"Meet me at Prios Pass, and please bring some capable and trusted friends."*
- The date on which the caravan is expected to arrive in Prios Pass (no more than a few days after the message is delivered).

This gives the characters a reason to visit the border crossing, and later also to look for the relative's/colleague's journal (which describes some interesting observations). Another advantage of this premise is that the characters do not need to know what the adventure is really about (i.e. the transportation of a convicted heretic) beforehand; instead, they get to discover the backstory through their investigations.

Furthermore, it is likely that the players and their characters will think, at least initially, that what is happening at the refugee camp is somehow linked to the relative's/colleague's discovery. This has two desirable effects – it creates an urge to find out what really happened, and makes the unveiling of the adventure's true plot a kind of dramatic turning point in the story.

The friend/colleague is killed in the beginning of the adventure, before telling the characters about what was discovered. They should then have enough reason to start investigating the circumstances of that person's death, but if they should require further incentives, the Gamemaster could add one of the other ideas listed below.

ENEMIES OF THE DARKNESS

Characters who regard abominations, cults, and the darkness of the world as their natural enemies will not need any persuading to take an interest in the adventure. Humans becoming blight-born are bad enough; it being the result of deliberate poisoning is even worse. Obviously, the characters must find and stop the villains before they do something even worse and more innocent lives are lost!

PROBLEM-SOLVERS

After the start of the adventure it becomes clear that the local authorities are in need of assistance – an excellent opportunity for characters who like taking jobs as problem-solvers. Guard Captain Egusta, Field Marshal Beniam Starak or the Queen's Legate, Neiem Kirte, are all possible employers. No matter who contacts (or is contacted by) the characters, their mission will be to identify what caused the tragic events and bring the perpetrators to justice.

MOVING UP THE LADDER

Player characters who are involved, or want to be involved, in a certain faction or organization may see the adventure as a chance to prove themselves. In the beginning of act two, local representatives of the Sun Church (Father Koramei), Ordo Magica (Loria Argom), and the Army/Rangers (Beniam Starak) will arrive at the refugee camp. They all have different reasons for wanting the perpetrator caught, and might recommend the characters for both rewards and promotions, should they agree to help.

Naturally, the Iron Pact and the witches are not present at Prios Pass, but characters who are allied to them could realize that their leaders would want the case to be investigated and the culprits punished.

A more significant adjustment would be to leave out the happy reunion and the friend/colleague from Alberetor entirely, and instead link the characters' mission directly to the prison transport. Characters who are allies of the Templars could be offered the job of killing Elsana; allies of Deseba/Sarvola could be sent to free the "heretic" and bring her to safety; alternatively, someone within the Sun Church could "sense" that the transport is in need of further protection and send the characters to provide just that.

The Relative/Colleague's Letter

As a suggestion, the Gamemaster could create a handout of the letter delivered by the courier, adjusting it based on which character (or characters) the message is addressed to and who the relative/colleague is. Keep it short and make sure to include the four suggested items, as well as a hurried greeting, and end with an appropriately dire closing phrase. It can be made rather elaborately or simply with pen and paper – regardless, it is sure to enrich the gaming experience.

A Grave Discovery

The relative's/colleague's discovery is irrelevant to this adventure; they just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. But perhaps the player characters could figure out what actually happened? Suggestions on the matter can be found on page 151.

The Structure of the Adventure

The Howling of Damned Gods is divided into three acts. The first two are quite linear, while the third presents a small adventure landscape for the player characters to navigate if they want to get their hands on the heretic.

ACT 1: SILENT NIGHT

The player characters arrive at Prios Pass and soon learn that the passage to the refugee camp has been temporarily blocked off; a caravan approaches from the south, and the gate will not be opened until the situation has calmed down and the Rangers announce that the village is no longer under threat. It could be up to six hours before they do so, which is why the player characters are advised to wait in some tavern until the gate bell tolls three times. *The Queen's Threshold*, the *Trout*, and other establishments are packed with guests, most of them waiting for someone to arrive. The player characters may take a seat wherever there is room, for example by Brother Huberdo's table, or that of some other relevant non-player characters. When the Gamemaster deems it appropriate, the bell suddenly tolls. But not three times. It tolls frantically!

They soon learn that an abomination runs wild at the refugee camp. The gate by the bridge to the camp is still sealed, and the village guards have been joined by a troop of rangers who will not let anyone through. The player characters may choose to wait until the situation is under control or try to reach the other side of the river. With some skillful persuasion, or reckless courage, they might make it in time to help the guards fight off a half-dozen disoriented, blight-born humans.

However, they are unable to save the relative/colleague, who is killed by an abomination – one that seems to have been spawned deliberately. But how? Why? And by whom?

ACT 2: OUT OF THE ASHES

Act two opens with a number of places to investigate. In the relative's/colleague's tent is a journal containing interesting information. The characters may also (either for the Rangers or on their own accord) investigate a pavilion that was set on fire during the abomination attack, and figure out what caused those people to become blight-born (the poisoned soup).

Near the pavilion are some tracks which, if followed, lead to three former Templars (one dying and two wounded) who seized the opportunity to attack the heretic's pavilion as the chaos erupted. They ask the characters to help them hunt down the prisoner, but do not reveal who she is, other than *"a heretic with blood as black as tar."* Even without this information, the characters can figure out that a heretic was held in the burned-down pavilion and that two guards fled south with the prisoner, leaving behind a pair of corpses, most likely Black Cloaks.

With the help of two terrified children claiming to have seen the Arch Witch, the characters can track down the guards by following their trail along the road to the Twilight Friars' monastery, in the mountains some 10 miles southeast of Prios Pass. About half-way there they encounter three beasts feasting upon two seemingly lifeless bodies. These turn out to be two Black Cloaks; one is still alive and manages to wheeze a few last words to the characters: *"The Night Lady, you must find her, take her to the monastery; by Prios, darkness falls..."*

The prisoner and her liberators can be tracked directly from the scene of the attack to the narrow valley where the Ice Witch has one of her campsites, but that path goes through a challenging ambush. A less risky alternative would be to follow clues back to the village and one of the Order's agents who participated in the attack (something that could also result in a meeting with Brother Huberdo). That way the characters will have less difficulty finding the hideout and not risk walking into an ambush.

ACT 3: THE LADY OF THE NIGHT

One way or another, they eventually reach the valley where the Ice Witch's rebels are encamped, and where the heretic and her escort are hiding. The player characters are outnumbered, there are watchdogs roaming the area, and the hideout itself seems to be protected by some kind of ritual.

The player characters must decide how to proceed. They are presented with four alternatives: negotiation with the rebels, stealthy maneuvers, direct attack (possibly with the help of allies), and simply waiting out their prey. If all goes well, they will eventually come face to face with Elsana and have to make another difficult decision – should they let her flee to the Realm of the Order (along with the two warrior monks responsible for the relative's/colleague's death), or put her in irons and turn her over to someone else?

The latter alternative obviously involves fighting Elsana and the monks. On the other hand, should they decide to let her go, they may first have to help her get past a hostile group which attacks, or possibly waits outside, the rebels' hideout.

Prios Pass

The border checkpoint by the bridge over the River Veloma was established in the same year the Ambrians arrived in the region. General Karlogoi Meleon was charged with restoring the old fortress and stone bridge found on an island near the southern shore. The village that developed on the island started as a builders' camp, but evolved as the surrounding lands were cultivated and the fortress became the residence of the exalted Baron Karlogoi of House Meleon.

AS THE SOUTHERN gate of Ambria, Prios Pass has suffered all kinds of hardships, the most frequent being the outbreaks of disease in the refugee camp which, at worst, can reduce its population by as much as half. The threat of kotka cats, jakaars, and bands of robbers is particularly great when the freezing cold comes creeping from the north. And though it is less common, the danger of the southern darkness should also be mentioned – it is not unusual for refugees to be tainted by corruption, and small hordes of dragouls have twice wandered through the mountain passes, starving and thirsting. On all these occasions the bridge was closed off and the guards were ordered to kill anything that moved on the southern shore.

Baron Karlogoi died in year 19, on a hunting trip in the mountains, leaving his keep and estate to his daughter, Karolia. Like her father, she leaves the management of the village and the checkpoint to Queen Korinthia's agents, unless the authorities in Yndaros order otherwise. The only exceptions are the border patrols which she is obligated to maintain and the search for rebel encampments in the mountains. Furthermore, her standing force of thirty riders and fifty archers can be called upon to aid the rangers and the border guards in battle.

Overview

PRIOS PASS LIES on an island in one of the mountain streams which further north converge into the River Veloma. In the area where the village is located, the stream is about 800 feet wide. The original suspension bridge was soon replaced by a sturdier structure, 100 feet long, built on foundations whose oldest parts are thought to have been built in Symbarian times. The last 20 feet closest to the northern base of the bridge are made of wood and can be lowered, if necessary, by removing the stanchions and using chains attached to a winch in one of the watchtowers.

The 12-foot tall wall of stone which runs along the island's southern shore is placed by the waterline, which means that those crossing the bridge must go through the gates to proceed into Ambria. Whenever a threat arises, the gate is shut and metal bars lowered in front of it, as archers man the towers and battlements. In truly dire situations, the last section of the bridge is also lowered.

On the northern side of the island are some jetties, the largest acting as a wharf for the ferry which people use to travel the 400 or so feet between the wilds of the Titans and the kingdom of Ambria. Private boats and vessels are anchored by the smaller jetties, alongside two Ranger triremes and a larger galley belonging to the mistress of the fortress.

THE VILLAGE CENTER

Thanks to the border checkpoint, the Baroness of Meleon's fortress, and its proximity to the Twilight Monastery, Prios Pass is relatively well-off. It now has roughly a hundred permanent residents, most of them belonging to one of three distinct factions:

- Builders and merchants who supply the village with basic necessities.
- People who own or work at the inns and taverns welcoming newcomers to the Promised Land.
- Various public officials whose primary function seems to be restricting the number of refugees who are allowed to cross the River Veloma.

Prios Plaza is the hub of the community, surrounded by the Queen's Legation, the *Queen's Threshold* inn, and two taverns called the *Blue Goblet* and the *Mill*. The rest of the village comprises a mix of various buildings, with a few exceptions:

- In the east, by the river, is the relatively modest tower of Ordo Magica, next to the equally plain sun temple.
- By the South Gate, the Rangers keep their barracks, stables and officers' quarters.
- Much of the village's western parts are dominated by *The Golden Swan* – an inn only open to nobles, either as a first stop upon entering Ambria, or as a comfortable place in which to wait for friends or relatives to arrive.

THE REFUGEE CAMP

By the bridge's southern head lies the refugee camp. Its size varies greatly according to the season, and there has also been a slight, general decrease in the number of travelers venturing through the mountain pass.

The camp's only permanent buildings are the fortifications around the bridgehead and three Ranger watch towers, each normally occupied by four sentries. Other than that, the camp consists entirely of tents, pavilions, and wagons.

What Happens to Those who are Rejected?

More than half of all hopeful refugees coming in from the south are denied entry into the Queen's new realm. While the reasons for their rejection vary (see *The Queen's Legation* on page 130), they are all struck by the same terror and desperation that arises from being turned away by the border guards. Roughly a third join the caravans returning south, to seek a new home in Freetown, the Realm of the Order, or one of the city states. The rest choose to stay where they are.

Of those who do stay, some join the rebel or bandit groups encamped in the mountains, others establish small and often short-lived settlements in the valleys of the Titans, but most try to sneak themselves into Ambria without the Queen's blessing. Many are killed on the way there, by predators, border patrols, or cold and starvation. Those who succeed face a perilous existence, in constant fear of being discovered, and must be willing to do anything for food and shelter. In the best-case scenario, they are taken in by some unscrupulous landowner who feeds them in exchange for backbreaking labor while constantly threatening to report them to the Queen's Rangers.

These are usually positioned outward from the central watch tower, as instructed by the duty officer.

There are two soup kitchens serving hot, flavorsome, and free meals three times a day. Bread is included, but those who want their goblets filled with something other than water must pay a small sum. It is customary for newcomers to buy a pint (or more) of Zarekean blackbrew to celebrate their arrival.

SURROUNDINGS

North of the River Veloma, rolling farmlands stretch as far as the eye can see. House Meleon's crofters and farmers are known for producing good crops and processing them with considerable skill and taste. Their stut, the Titan's Bitter, is widely recognized by connoisseurs throughout the capital, and the region's new signature dish – a trout pâté called Meleon's Temptation – is served in taverns across the kingdom.

South of the river there is nothing but wilderness, apart from a few fishermen's wharfs and hunting lodges. The monastery of the Twilight Friars can be found about a day's march south-east from the village, and about as far to the south-west is an outpost where the Baroness's scholars and a handful of adepts from Ordo Magica are investigating an abandoned mine. The rest is naught but mountains and dales, ravines and groves, predators and plunderers.

Two major bandit groups dominate the mountain road between Alberetor and Ambria. The undead robber baron Mal-Rogan torments the west, with his growing horde of enslaved rabble – mostly those who have been cowed into submission and, in their desperation, follow the former noble's orders with feigned gratitude. The group of settlers led by Maridja, the barbarian woman also known as the Ice Witch, is by far the larger and better organized of the two. But from their own perspective, neither Maridja nor her followers are plunderers; while they admittedly help themselves to Ambrian wealth from time to time, they are basically rebels who violently oppose the intruders' rule.

An Alternative Bandit Chief

Mal-Rogan is introduced in the first adventure of this book, *The Promised Land* (page 7). If him still living in the mountains does not correspond to the previous experiences of your gaming group, he can easily be replaced with some other undead robber baron.

Perhaps it is the robber baron Nightblade from the *Blight Night* scenario (see the *Gamemaster's Guide*) who now resides in the mountains? Or could it be that the rumors of Baron Karlogoi's death are exaggerated; that he was murdered on orders from his daughter, but rose again to seek vengeance?

Adventure Locations

THE FOLLOWING PLACES and establishments in Prios Pass and its surrounding area may be relevant when playing *The Howling of Damned Gods*. The Gamemaster is of course free to add more locations, and must, as always, be ready to improvise whenever the players act in unexpected ways – which should be expected!

1. THE QUEEN'S THRESHOLD (INN)

Having been in business for seventeen years, Febeo and his wife Eda run the oldest inn in the village, in one of its oldest buildings – a rectangular stone house first built to accommodate construction workers. The kitchen and dining room are located at its center, while a total of twelve rooms can be reached through corridors running towards the short ends of the building. Each bedroom has two bunkbeds, except the four in the corners – more luxurious chambers with only two well-feathered beds each.

Like all innkeepers in the village, Febeo and Eda are obligated to keep a record of what happens at their establishment and report suspicious people and events to the Queen's Legate. But at *The Queen's Threshold,* it might actually be possible to conduct dubious affairs without being caught, whether it concerns the smuggling of sensitive goods, hidden diseases, or meetings with questionable individuals – the landlady has a taste for fine spirits, and will often try to extort such guests before reporting them to the Legate. By doing so, she has amassed a long list of secrets to be used, if necessary, against an equally long list of prominent Ambrians; a list she keeps in a small, lavishly pearled notebook beneath a loose floorboard in the kitchen.

2. THE SOUTH GATE

North of the bridge is an open space, about 30 feet from north to south and twice as wide, surrounded by a 12-foot high stone wall with four towers. In times of danger, the 15-foot-wide double gate is bolted, the portcullis is lowered, and the battlements are manned with guards, ranged weapons at the ready. There are also two ballistae mounted on top of the northern towers.

With all this in mind, it would take a lot for predators, bandits, or desperate refugees to attack the island from that direction – nothing but a large and highly organized military force could do so successfully. There have only been a handful of serious attempts over the years. Twice it was dragouls who came swarming across the bridge, and on three occasions the desperate masses at the camp have attacked (probably spurred by someone representing the enemies of the Queen), when the Istaros winter was so harsh that the strait had frozen solid.

To head south through the gate during a crisis, one must either be well-connected or glib-tongued. The only way out is through the large gate, which will never be opened. However, the duty officer may allow people to rappel down the south side of the wall, provided that no enemies are occupying the bridgehead and that the person asking for permission seems capable of dealing with the approaching threat.

3. THE SUN TEMPLE

The head of the sun temple at Prios Pass is a man named Father Koramei. He is the younger brother of the late Karlogoi, and hence the current baroness's uncle. He is also a gloomy and reclusive individual who early on renounced his claim to the barony. Koramei is assisted by two liturgs and three initiates, and all six are members of the faction within the Sun Church which questions the Curia's interpretation of the Sun God's will and nature. While they keep their skepticism to themselves, Koramei is actually in sporadic contact with Father Sarvola in Thistle Hold. The Curia's Black Cloaks suspect as much, and keep the temple under surveillance.

The temple itself is not very large, with room for no more than thirty or so people in its light yard. There are also five prayer alcoves and living quarters for the staff. The real jewel of the temple is found in Koramei's private chambers – a bottle containing six drops of Water of the Dusk (see the *Gamemaster's Guide*, page 141); a gift from Templewall, to be used in combating the darkness which seeps north from Alberetor.

4. THE TOWER OF ORDO MAGICA

A month ago the senile Master Marfal, who until then had managed the order's modest operations at Prios Pass, was replaced by a newly-appointed master named Loria Argom. Having studied under Seldonio himself, she certainly has her qualities, but the Grand Master believed that she needed to "toughened up" a bit, which is why he made her Chapter Master. She is still not entirely comfortable with her new job – barely thirty years of age, she displays great uncertainty and a fiery temperament whenever she is pressured or challenged.

The other masters stationed at Prios Pass are a young ritualist by the name of Toreo and an aged Medicus named Ginda. The latter studies the various diseases carried by refugees from the south, along with two adepts and a group of novices who work in direct contact with the sick. She is always looking to hire new novices – at least one is killed each year, by infections, rashes, or violent outbursts.

5. THE QUEEN'S LEGATION

The Legation at Prios Pass has a staff of ten people, supervised by the former general Neiem Kirte. Due to injuries sustained in The Great War, the general had to look elsewhere for work, but as he sees it, his transfer to Prios Pass was a promotion – in these troubled times, nothing could be more important than stopping old enemies from infiltrating the new realm! Neiem has a well-founded reputation for being incorruptible, loyal, and unforgiving.


PRIOS PASS
1. The Queen's Threshold
2. The South Gate
3. The Sun Temple
4. The Tower of Ordo Magica
5. The Queen's Legation
6. The Trout
7. The Watch Towers
8. The Soup Kitchens
9. The Keep
10. The Golden Swan
11. The Garrison
N
0 50 m
0 50 yards

The Legate and his staff decide who does, or does not, become full-fledged Ambrian citizens. Their subordinates conduct thorough interviews and health examinations of all who arrive at the refugee camp, unless they already possess, and are able to present, a document (known as a Queen's Permit) certifying that they are loyal subjects of Queen Korinthia. These days, only skilled craftsmen, farmers, and intellectuals are welcomed into The Promised Land. Apart from nobles, very few are exempted from the screening process. Sometimes a decision can be made in just a few hours, but it may just as well take a week or even a month. Until then, the applicant must remain in the camp, ready to answer any questions that may arise or undergo further examinations.

Basically, the only chance for contaminated and/ or unskilled people to enter the kingdom is the notaries, and brothers, Laras and Demed. For the past two years they have, along with a handful of subordinates, made a profit from selling Queen's Permits to certain carefully selected refugees. They have so far managed to avoid any suspicion, but who knows how long it will be before one of their "clients" suffers a serious case of honesty, or succumbs to a tainting illness they carry?

6. THE TROUT (TAVERN)

The *Trout* is a tavern near the docks on the north side of the island, and serves some of the best food in the village. Their menu consists mostly of various fish dishes, based on recipes from the port towns of Alberetor. Though the salmon has been replaced by trout from the local river, the fish sticks, pâtés, soups, pies, and cakes still taste very much like their southern equivalents.

The owner, a widow called Madam Flora, may seem like a thoroughly amiable and tender-hearted person, but appearances can be deceiving. Beneath the good-natured surface, she is the leader of a smuggler organization with branches from Alberetor in the south to Karvosti in the north. Most of the smuggled goods – which can be anything from Alberian antiquities to corrupt artifacts from Davokar – will at some point pass through her three-level basement. The buyers are just as diverse, ranging from unscrupulous barbarian chieftains, via nobles in the capital, to wealthy individuals who have remained south of the mountains. She even has clients in the Realm of the Order and the City States, which means that her racket not only violates the laws of the Lawgiver – it also constitutes high treason.

7. THE WATCH TOWERS

The Queen's Rangers are responsible for maintaining order and security at the camp south of Prios Pass. They have three watch towers at their disposal, each usually manned by four guards, including the scouts posted at the top of the towers. The central tower has an annex where the Legation staff conducts their interviews and physical examinations, always with at least one ranger present.

The guard force is commanded by Field Marshal Beniam Starak, with the help of his subordinate officers: Captains Elan, Domio, and Egusta. One captain can always be found in the main tower, but when larger caravans are on the way all of them are in place, while the number of ordinary rangers is doubled. Captain Egusta, easily recognized by the scar which runs across her left eye and continues over her mouth and chin, is the most verbal and authoritarian of the three.

8. THE SOUP KITCHENS

The two soup kitchens providing the camp's residents with three meals a day are managed by the Legation and financed by the Queen. The food is good, nutritious, and free of charge. Those who desire beverages other than water can often find something else to buy, but no more than one bottle or jar per meal – partly because of the meager supply, partly because the rangers wish to avoid any drunken disorder.

The cook Arela served as an army chef during the war and knows how to make good food in large quantities. But she is not as cheery as she once was; the tunes she used to hum among the pots of the field kitchen have been replaced by a constant grumbling and swearing. This is partly due to old age, but also to her infuriating assistants: while the Legate does not skimp on ingredients, he is quite cheap when it comes to paying for labor, which explains why Arela is currently in charge of more than a dozen messy, constantly chattering goblins scurrying about her kitchen.

THE TWILIGHT MONASTERY

That the headquarters of the Black Cloaks ended up in the mountains was something of a coincidence. The ruin in which the monastery is located was already there, and in such great condition that it must have been built by some lord from Lindaros, possibly as a pleasure palace. In any case, the structure suited their purpose perfectly, not least because of the many, vast cellar levels where the Black Cloaks now keep their prisoners (and test subjects). The ruin's proximity to Alberetor was also advantageous as it eased the relocation of books, relics, and already captured victims of corruption from the monastery outside Berendoria.

Visitors are not allowed to see much of the building's interior; even many of those who live and work at the monastery are denied access to certain floors and wings. Behind the imposing gate is a hall where guests are greeted and registered by a clerk. Those who seek shelter from the cold or just want to have a look around are immediately turned away, politely at first, whereupon a squad of Black Cloaks is summoned to eject the persistent guest. Should the clerk deem the matter serious enough, the visitor is shown to the adjacent audience hall to await a more senior brother or sister. Most people will never see more than that, as whoever



The Twilight Monastery in snow-laden splendor, echoing with sublime hymns, retaining the darkness of the Eternal Night.

they meet next will most likely be acting as an intermediary between them and the leaders of the monastery.

As one of the Sun God Prios' strongholds on earth, the monastery is surprisingly dominated by darkness. Of course, it is the Black Cloaks' job to study and understand the dark. In halls deep within the mountain, behind massive iron gates, hideously disfigured humanoids are imprisoned: captive elves, trolls, and ogres in different stages of blight; strange, sentient natural phenomena seemingly teeming with hatred and aggression; even a primal blight beast which the Curia calls the Dragon.

Other parts of the halls contain corrupted artifacts; parchment scrolls and stone tablet describing dark practices or written with symbols which corrupt whoever lays eyes on them; and chambers where the Whip of Prios extracts truths from heretics and tainted wretches. The contrast between all this and the magnificent, almost shimmering, hymns heard each day from the chapel is truly breathtaking.

Silent Night

The first act of the adventure addresses the player characters' arrival at Prios Pass and the panic that arises as one person, and then another and even more, are blight-born right in the middle of the refugee camp. The characters can do nothing to change the course of events, but must obviously decide whether to get involved, and if so, in what way. In order to have the slightest chance of helping the residents, they must first make their way through the South Gate.

Game Opening

AS THE SUN is setting, the player characters arrive on the northern shore of the Veloma River. It has just stopped snowing, and the crisp, cold air has been replaced by a clammy fog. The ground is muddy beneath the melting snow; the wind has turned south-east, but its gusts are still strong enough to make the flags flap and the oil lanterns flicker.

There is not much of a line by the shore, and the characters may immediately board the barge-like ferry, along with a dozen other passengers (cost: one shilling per person, double for horses and the like, and double again for carts and wagons). The youngsters working the winch look exhausted. They have probably been hauling the vessel back and forth across the river all day, full of people who have come to meet the awaited caravan.

As they finally reach the other side of the river, they learn that the so-called South Gate of Ambria has been closed off. Whether they go there and talk to one of the ten guards, or ask some villager for more information, the situation is explained to them: a caravan is arriving at the refugee camp, and whenever that happens, the gate is sealed until the Rangers have made sure that there is no danger. None are allowed to pass, for their own safety as much as the village's. Besides, it is impossible to find specific people or supply transports before things have calmed down.

The player characters are politely told to wait in one of the inns or taverns. The person they are talking to believes that it may be up to six hours before the gates are opened, which will then be announced by three strokes of the gatehouse bell. All establishments are packed with customers, so the characters must be prepared to share a table with someone.

If the Gamemaster thinks it appropriate, there could be some empty seats by Brother Huberdo's table. There will not be any in-depth conversations, of course; mostly small talk about the weather, life in the village, and the journey through the Titans. But in case there will be any future encounters with Huberdo (see page 144), it could be good for them to have met him once before.

Meeting with Huberdo

If the player characters should end up at Huberdo's table, it is important that the Gamemaster portray him as any other visitor – he is just one of many travelers who have come to meet the arriving caravan. He introduces himself as Huberdo and claims to be a notary from Yndaros, sent by Lord Manselm to collect a bundle of legal documents from his relatives in Alberetor. He also complains about the weather and recalls with horror his own perilous journey northward when he fled Alberetor – that was almost ten years ago, and they suffered everything from avalanches and predators to murderous bandits.

Outbreak!

WHENEVER THE GAMEMASTER thinks it appropriate, the high-pitched roar of a woman cuts through the noise: *"Silence!"* A woman is standing by the open door, and when everyone has gone quiet, they can all hear the reason for her shouting. A bell tolls in the distance. But not three times; it tolls frantically and relentlessly.

TO THE RESCUE

The player characters are obviously free to do whatever they like. However, they will probably start with trying to find out what is going on.

None of the civilians know anything about it, but the somewhat inebriated Captain Turgal of the village guard and the rangers who have gathered around the bolted South Gate can tell them the following: *"An abomination came with the caravan; it is on the loose, attacking anyone in sight; the gate must remain sealed until the situation is under control!"*

In order to acquire this information, the characters must first make their way to Turgal, and then persuade him to reveal what he knows – a **DC 11 Charisma (Persuasion) check**. Note that his information is not entirely accurate, as the abomination did not in fact come with the caravan.

No matter what the characters say, the gate will remain shut. To get past it they must get in touch with the rangers' ranking officer on site, Lieutenant Androna. Collected and poised, she tells the characters to calm down, ensuring them that her fellow rangers are used to dealing with situations like this. The characters must pass a **DC 14 Charisma (Persuasion) check** to gain her permission, or Androna will adopt a harsher tone: if they try to cross the bridge, she will order her men to shoot them down, for disobeying a direct order and to stop them from getting in the way of her brothers and sisters in arms!

Characters who fail the check but still want to get to the refugee camp have two options. One is to disobey Androna's order, in which case she will let them go (while hurling a few loud profanities their way). However, this could cause problems later on, as they will be wanted for insubordination – if the characters ever return to Prios Pass, they will risk being thrown in jail and sentenced to twenty lashes each (this does not apply to nobles, who get off with paying a 10 thaler fine).

A second option is to procure a boat of some kind and row across the strait, or go where the wall ends and swim to the other side (likely without weapons or armor). Either way, the characters will not reach the camp until the abominations have been killed (see below).

THE ABOMINATIONS

As mentioned previously, the chaos south of the bridge is the result of the Order's agents' plan – to make the Black Cloaks and their prisoner flee to the Twilight Monastery by causing mayhem at the camp. Knowing that many of the Alberian refugees are on the verge of becoming blight-born, they tricked two of the cook Arela's goblins into pouring large quantities of crushed krusean berries into the soup. The effect was almost instantaneous.

First an abomination is born near the eastern soup kitchen. It causes great damage before people start to flee and the creature can be surrounded by rangers who stay on the defensive while waiting for the captains to join them. The relative/colleague is one of those who cannot escape the abomination's fury and is fatally injured by its claws.

Player characters who persuade Lieutenant Androna to lower them onto the bridge (or simply ignore her order) can reach the camp just as the two captains who are still alive (Domio and Egusta) manage to flank and decapitate the beast. But the danger, it seems, is far from over: screams of panic and blood-curdling roars are heard from the west.

Should the characters choose to accompany the two captains to the western soup kitchen, the terrified cries of fleeing people will soon indicate that more abominations are running amok at the camp. And sure enough – the battered ranger squads are each fighting a humanoid abomination. The captains rush to aid their soldiers; what the characters do is up to them. If they decide to help, we recommend that they face a number of abominations equal to half again as many as the characters; i,e, 4 characters should face 6 blight-born humans.) and that the outcome of their fight also determines the fate of the captains and their rangers.

Some gaming groups may want to ignore the abominations entirely and try to locate the relative/colleague instead. If so, they will find him or her dying on the ground near the eastern soup kitchen, beyond saving, but strong enough to utter a few last words: *"My dear. Beware! It is her! I saw her. Shackled. The darkness enchained. The darkness, the darkneee..."*

If the characters choose not to fight the abomination, or if they should all fall in battle, others will rush forth to slay it – war veterans, hunters, and others who realize that the horrid creatures must be fought. It will be a long and bloody affair; one of the worst massacres of Alberians/Ambrians since The Great War.

Blight-born Human

Those who suffer the tainting effect of the krusean berries were already blight-marked when they arrived – they had stayed too long in Alberetor's darkness. As they are blight-born, they grow exceptionally tall and are deformed beyond recognition.

Note: Since these abominations are just 'hatched', they do not yet understand their power and are very hungry for



Even the Queen's Rangers struggle when facing newborn, famished abominations.

raw flesh. These **blight-born humans** (page 122 of the *Bestiary*) won't use their **Innate Spellcasting** in the fight but do gain the **Aggressive** feature. Should any survive the fight (by fleeing the camp in order to attack the characters later) then this will not apply.

If you need descriptions for the blight-born humans, you can uses these as inspiration:

- Bloodshot skin with large, black blisters; cleft, flickering snake tongue; long claws.
- Skin that blackens and falls off in large pieces; bare cranium with horn-like growths; right forearm transformed into a curved bone sword.
- White skin with throbbing, black veins; bright red eyes; abnormally long arms/legs; foot-long, razor-sharp bull horns.

THE FIRE

Regardless of whether it happens during the fight against the abomination or as the player characters are kneeling around the dead relative/colleague, they may all make a **DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check**. Those who succeed can smell the smoke of a fire, and with another successful check they see tiny sparks dancing into the sky from a place further south among the wagons and tents.

It is the prison escort's pavilion that is on fire, set ablaze by the fallen Templars after their failed attempt to secure the prisoner (two of the Black Cloaks had already left with Elsana). Guests at the camp hasten to extinguish the fire. Beneath the scorched canvas are a number of clues which the player characters may discover as they start to investigate what has caused all this mayhem, and hopefully learn who is responsible for the relative's/colleague's death.

Out of the Ashes

The second act of the adventure starts when the abominations are defeated and things are settling down at the refugee camp. Now it is time for the player characters/players to take the reins, either on their own initiative or on behalf of Captain Egusta.

Investigations

WHEN THERE IS no longer any immediate threat, the player characters are given a chance to look around and assess the situation, possibly after having seen to their own wounds. The scene of the battle now seems eerily desolate. Apart from those who helped fight the abominations and are now more or less wounded, all guests at the camp have fled south in sheer panic, leaving behind half-raised tents and scattered belongings. A few rangers stagger to their feet to help their battered comrades; the two captains who killed the abomination by the eastern soup kitchen falter slowly towards the central watch tower, the woman practically carrying the man.

Ten people lie wounded or dead around the fallen abominations, with very few to help them. This could be an opportunity for the player characters to make themselves useful while at the same time gathering clues about what happened. If they do, use the information listed under the Soup Kitchens heading below.



Captain Egusta does not show much of the grief and fear she feels, not until all is under control.

THE WATCH TOWER

Player characters who want to get to the bottom of what happened will probably start by trying to find people who might have some answers. They will not learn much from the surviving rangers who are now busy helping the wounded, comforting the mourning, and soothing those in shock: no one seems to know what caused the massacre. If they persist, the characters are told to ask the commanders, who can most likely be found at the central watch tower.

Sure enough: Captain Egusta is standing outside the tower gate, grunting at the few junior officers who are still fit for duty; Domio is inside, hovering between life and death due to severe acid burns. A successful **DC 14 Wisdom (Medicine or Perception) check** reveals that Egusta is pale, in a cold sweat, and probably more badly wounded than she would like to admit.

When the last of the junior officers have left, the characters can take their place. The Captain is definitely not in a talkative mood, but if the characters helped kill the abominations or if one of them explicitly offers their services, she can spare a moment – she too is wounded, and her fellow captains are incapacitated, as are many of their rangers; she could certainly use a helping hand.

With trembling voice, occasionally swaying with dizziness, Egusta is able to reveal the following information:

- It appears that the abominations did not come with the caravan. Several unrelated guests were blight-born almost simultaneously; only one of them came with the latest caravan.
- More than twenty people died; twice as many were wounded.
- Apparently there was a fire somewhere in the camp, but the damage to tents, wagons, and property was otherwise negligible.
- Nothing like this has ever happened at Prios Pass. It cannot be a coincidence; someone is responsible for the abominations' emergence!
- Should the player characters request or demand compensation for their services, she is prepared to pay each of them the standard wage of a ranger: 5 shillings a day. The sum can be doubled with compelling arguments and a successful **DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check**.

Shortly after the fight has been won, more people will gather at the central watch tower. Among these are Father Koramei, Loria Argom, and Field Marshal Beniam Starak; all of them willing to speak with the player characters and ask for their help in a) shedding light on the current situation and b) bringing the culprits to justice. Furthermore, Egusta will demand that all newly-arrived caravan leaders gather in the building next to the tower, to be thoroughly questioned about who came with them on the journey.

In other words, the central watch tower becomes a place to which the characters may return as they conduct their investigations, to ask questions about matters they do not understand or request help with things they cannot do themselves (performing certain rituals, for example).

THE SOUP KITCHENS

If the player characters start to question or interrogate the camp's residents about what happened, the chance that the interviewee has had some of the poisoned soup is 1–3 on a d6. If so, a character with the Medicus or Poisoner feature can make a **DC 10 Intelligence check** to reveal that the interviewee seems to be under the influence of some drug. Characters without a relevant feature can make a **DC 15 Intelligence check** instead. A character that succeeds by 5 or more identifies the drug in question: *Krusean berries* (see below).

People's accounts of what happened just before the massacre also suggest a link between the recent calamity and the evening soup. Everyone the characters talk to mention the following points, though not in the same order:

- The wagons of a large caravan started to arrive at nightfall.
- A group of jesters was performing outside the central tower.
- The soup lines were long; everyone looked forward to the carrot and mushroom soup.
- The newcomers had begun to park their wagons, raise their tents, and make themselves comfortable.
- Those who witnessed the blight-births also add: *"Suddenly he/she just started screaming, threw the bowl to the ground and... transformed, dar– darkened... like a nightmare..."*

A character who tastes or smells the soup can make a check (as above) to identify a) that the food has been poisoned, and b) what poison was used.

If any accusations are hurled her way, Arela responds with a severe tongue-lashing: the cook is livid, calling the characters everything from idiots to shameless worms; how can they be so stupid as to think that she poisoned her own soup?! When asked if she has any suspects, it does not take long before she turns her hateful gaze to a couple of **goblin boys** standing nearby. They act innocent, but not very convincingly – constantly looking around, their eyes flickering, while unsuccessfully trying to whistle. As soon as Arela raises her voice, they immediately spin around and start running.

If the players decide to pursue them, use the rules for chases on page 159 in the *Gamemaster's Guide*. You can use a combination of the common obstacles and city obstacles to represent the various elements of the refugee camp that the boys will use to try and escape. If nothing else, they can eventually be caught at their hideout – an abandoned wagon at the southern end of the camp.

Even if they are found, the goblins have little to say:

- *"It was just a prank; he said it wasn't dangerous, like swallowing itching powder."*
- *"He looked perfectly normal, a bearded human. Brown or black clothes, no weapons."*
- *"He came up to us in the middle of the day. We've never seen him before, or since."*

Krusean Berries

The berries from the krusean bush can be eaten both fresh and dried. Fresh berries cause a long-lasting buzz, which may be compared to that of alcohol consumption, along with 1d4 points of temporary Corruption. For this reason, the berries have become popular among people who are charmed by Davokar's darkness and the powers of The Eternal Night. According to rumor, they are also used during torture – the buzz combined with the amassing blackness can get just about anyone to talk...

But the dried berries are much worse. They are foul-tasting and difficult to consume, unless dissolved into more pleasant fare. Those who consume a meal's worth gain 1 point of permanent Corruption. For some of those who had experienced too much darkness in Alberetor this was enough to push them over the edge and awaken the blight-beast within.



Boa and Tott are terrified of Arela's ladle, but just as scared of being sent away from the camp.

THE COLLEAGUE'S TENT

If relevant, the characters might want to go through the relative's/colleague's equipment. Finding his or her tent is not very difficult: all newly-arrived caravan owners have been summoned for questioning at the central watch tower's annex, and characters who are on good terms with Captain Egusta or other authority figures will be allowed to ask them about the relative/colleague.

A woman named Ilva steps forward and says that the relative/colleague traveled with her caravan, but for some reason chose to set up their tent far away from the other passengers. The relative/ colleague stayed close to the eastern soup kitchen (see the explanation below) while Ilva and the others parked their wagons by the western one. She thinks she knows what the relative's/colleague's tent looks like, and with the rangers' permission she would be happy to take the characters to it.

Aside from one trunk of clothes and another filled with jewels, valuables, and a few family heirlooms such as rolled-up paintings, candlesticks, letters, journals and so on (total worth: 5d20 + 200 thaler), there is only one object of interest among the relative's/colleague's belongings: a logbook.

In it are accounts of both the preparations for the journey and the journey itself. The character who takes the time to look and passes a **DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) check** finds a passage written a few days earlier, in much shakier handwriting:

It is as I feared; the Master Weaver and his apprentices in the wagon behind Ilva's are lying. They are guards, escorting a prisoner. A woman. Old and hunched. Pale as sugar. And she saw me. She pierced me with her bloodshot eyes. Just for a second, like the stab of a knife. Or a cut. An intense expression, but what it meant I do not know. Perhaps it was hatred. Perhaps a warning, a threat. For a moment I thought she wanted to eat me. Or maybe it was a cry for help.

I will not get involved. Not tell anyone. Keep my distance. I do not want to know what her eyes were really saying. Death. That is the prevailing feeling: death.

THE PAVILION

Hopefully, the player characters will realize that they should investigate the fire which started during the abominations' rampage; if not, Captain Egusta or some other non-player character they speak to could bring it up.

The circular pavilion is about 15 feet in diameter and torn down, with most of the western side completely destroyed by the fire. By talking to people in the area, the characters can get an idea of what happened there.

- There were four people living in the pavilion: a Master Weaver and his aides. Some can recall that the master's name was Mogdas.
- No one knows what started the fire; there was too much chaos because of all the people trying to escape the abominations.
- When the fire started, some capable residents were quick to act. They took down the pavilion and smothered the fire with damp blankets.
- No one has entered the pavilion since the fire. But there seems to be at least one, possibly two bodies lying motionless beneath the canvas.

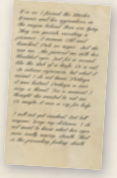
There are several discoveries to be made:

- A successful **DC 13 Wisdom (Survival) check** by someone examining the ground outside: Someone lost a lot of blood a few meters from the northern entrance; the ground is soaked and sticky. What could be the start of a blood trail is leading west.
- A successful **DC 13 Wisdom (Survival) check** by someone examining the ground outside: There is a small medallion trampled into the ground, and a ripped-off chain a bit further away. It is a simple, round plate of blackened iron. The Loremaster feature or a **DC 13 Intelligence (Religion) check** reveals it to be the symbol of Dead Prios, and of Templars who are convinced that the Lawgiver is already dead (regarded as a heretical belief by the Curia).
- A successful **DC 13 Wisdom (Medicine) check** directed at the corpses beneath the canvas: A man and a woman, both in their thirties, killed by sword blows to the neck and torso. Their bodies are muscular and scarred, as if they were warriors rather than weavers.
- A successful **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check** directed at the corpses beneath the canvas: Their clothes are actually armor; the kind of concealed armor that is very difficult/expensive to make and therefore only worn by three groups of people: wealthy sorcerers, spies of the Queen, and Black Cloaks on covert missions.
- A successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check** directed at the shackles by someone with Shadow-sight or *detect magic* active: They are filled with holy energy. A **DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana or Religion) check** determines *judging bonds* has been cast on the item.
- A successful **DC 18 Wisdom (Survival) check**, DC 13 for characters with Bushcraft: Marks on the ground suggest that two people have dragged a third one between them; they left through the southern exit; the trail cannot be followed more than a dozen feet, as it vanishes among countless others.

THE TEMPLARS

In a patched tent (10 feet wide, 15 feet long and just high enough for someone to stand upright) at the western end of the camp, the former **Templars** (page 170 of the *Bestiary*) Segri Elderra, Arlon Mirelda, and Jelia Oralak have set up base. The tent is also shared by the aged **squire** (page 177 of the *Bestiary*) Gromeo, who works very hard to serve the three nobles.

All four of them have been expelled from their order for persisting in their belief that Prios is already dead and



The colleague's journal can be found on page 209.

that all that remains is revenge. Their reason for disguising themselves as refugees has nothing to do with political discretion, however; the fallen sun knights could not care less about whether their actions will anger the Curia, the Queen, or any other faction – the heretic will die, everything else is secondary. No, they are disguised simply to improve their chances of getting close to the Night Lady without giving her escort time to prepare a defense or escape to some hideout.

It is fully possible for the player characters to follow the injured Templars' blood trail from the collapsed pavilion. A successful **DC 13 Wisdom (Survival) check** with the Bushcraft trait, or a **DC 18 Wisdom (Survival) check**, is all it takes to find the ragged tent in the west. Moreover, if the check succeeds by 5 or more, the tracker realizes that the blood must have come from more than one person.

The knights are in no condition to fight: Jelia has yet to regain consciousness, Arlon has lost too much blood, and Segri has deep stab wounds on her upper arms. In other words, the player characters have every opportunity to approach them, but they must do so on their own, as Captain Egusta cannot spare any men. One strategy could be to wait until the graying old Gromeo exits the tent to fetch some drinking water. If captured and interrogated, he will swear that "his friends" had nothing to do with the abominations, but that is all he will say on the matter – the characters will have to come with him and take their questions to the leader of the group.

Realizing that fighting is out of the question, Segri assumes a diplomatic approach; perhaps the player characters could even be of use to her. She invites them to sit by the fire pit in the middle of the tent, ready to answer their questions:

- Her name is Segri, and she is a servant of Prios; that is all she will say about herself and the people sharing her tent. If the characters show her the medallion they found trampled into the mud outside the pavilion, she just shrugs: *"it must have been dropped by someone else."*
- There was a prisoner and her escort in the burnt-down tent; and not just any prisoner, but a *"heretic with blood as black as tar; an enemy of the sun and an ally of darkness, who must not be allowed to live."* She does not mention the heretic's name, nor the offenses she has committed – *"The hag is the daughter of the Eternal Night, and that is all she is!"*
- When asked if she had something to do with the poisoned soup and the ensuing blight-births, she responds with a dark glare. She and her friends simply waited for the right moment to strike at the heretic; the abominations emerging, and the mayhem they caused, seemed like a golden opportunity.
- But the prisoner was already gone, as were parts of her escort. Segri and her comrades killed two guards after a brief but fierce battle; enraged by the heretic's absence she then smashed an oil lamp, hence the fire.
- If she had to guess, she would say that some other faction wants to free the heretic, and that they are the ones who poisoned the soup. If that is the case, there is a significant risk that one of the greatest apostles of The Eternal Night will soon be at large.
- Finally, she asks the characters to track down the heretic and report back to her (without intervening). With some rest and proper care, she expects that her wounded friends will be up and about within twenty-four hours, ready to resolve the matter.

TRACKING DOWN THE HERETIC

The players (and hence, their characters) will most likely be able to guess that the prisoner has been taken to the Twilight Monastery – where else would two threatened Black Cloaks escorting a dangerous heretic go in this part of the world? However, for players who are not fond of guessing, there is a way to verify this and determine exactly which route they took. Their tracks lead south from the tent, before vanishing amidst numerous boot, hoof, and wheel marks in the mud. If the characters follow the road to the southern parts of the camp and pass a **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check**, they can hear a child crying hysterically in the distance.

It is coming from a roofed wagon. A faint light shines through the gaps in the walls, and the wailing of a child is heard from inside, followed by a father's attempt to comfort the youngling.

The siblings Arnas and Anata, eight and four years old, saw the Black Cloaks dragging Elsana. Anata was terrified and ran straight home, convinced that she had just seen the notorious Arch Witch and that the witch would now come for her. Arnas was just as frightened, but paralyzed. He just stood there, watching, his gaze fixed on the strangers, until his mother came to fetch him. Arnas can therefore confirm that the Black Cloaks were following the road south-east, but then turned east, proceeding along a path by the river.

With this information, the characters are able to track the Black Cloaks and their prisoner without having to pass any checks. Without it, doing so requires two successful **DC 13 Wisdom (Survival) checks** with the Bushcraft trait (or a **DC 18 Wisdom (Survival) check** without) – first to rediscover their trail at the southern end of the camp, and then to notice where they suddenly left the road (see the map on page 142).

A Helping Hand

If the player characters fail to realize that they should try to pick up Elsana's trail by the southern edge of the camp, Egusta could come to their aid. It would obviously be more fun for them to figure it out on their own, but a little bit of help is better than being completely stuck.

In that case, Egusta (or some other quest giver) seeks out the characters to inform them that she has received some potentially significant information: a startled father came to the watchtower saying that his children were beside themselves with fright; they claimed to have seen the Arch Witch.

Into the Mountains

THE PRESUMABLY HUNGRY and exhausted characters now face the prospect of having to track their prey up into the Titans. They might head back to the central watchtower, to report their findings or hoping to pass the responsibility to someone else. Whatever their intentions are, whoever they talk to, the characters are encouraged to continue their pursuit – all rangers are needed at the camp, to restore order and assist the town watch in manning the South Gate of Ambria; there is great unrest among the refugees, and the guards fear that they might try to force their way into Prios Pass.

And so, the characters must leave the troubled refugee camp behind, right away or after a quick meal. Depending on what information they have, they will probably take one of two routes: either they follow the trail off the road, along a mountain path, or stick to the road all the way to the Twilight Monastery, convinced that the prisoner will be there.

In the latter (less likely) scenario, the characters learn that there are no newcomers at the monastery, but also that a *"smaller, quicker path will take them north toward the river."* Whether they follow the winding path from the monastery or come from the north, sooner or later, they are bound to come across the scene of an ambush.

WHAT HAPPENED?

Just as planned, Elsana's escort was attacked on the path between Prios Pass and the monastery. Aided by two fellow agents, one stationed in the village and the other at the refugee camp, the two warrior monks from the Realm of the Order had set up an ambush.

They overpowered the Black Cloaks, who put up a short fight before being restrained and strangled. Elsana's handcuffs were removed, and the warrior monks brought her along towards the agreed hideout at one of the Ice Witch's bandit camps. The other agents returned to Prios Pass. Knowing that someone could be trailing them, the monks did not stay to search the Black Cloaks' bodies or ensure that they were actually dead.

Now, the question is what conclusions the player characters will draw after having investigated the blood-soaked scene of the attack...

THE SCENE OF THE AMBUSH

In a place where the path is bordered by dense bushes lie two seemingly dead people; an older man (Mogdas) and a younger woman. And they are not alone: three female kotka cats whose pack is hunting nearby have been lured by the smell of blood, and are now feasting on the humans. From a distance, a successful **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check** reveals that the man is still alive (faint groans of pain and a chest that moves up and down with every panting breath).

The koktas will definitely not give up their prey without a fight! The player characters can back away and wait for them to leave, in which case both of the Black Cloaks will be killed and dragged into the wilderness. But the players would do better to take an offensive approach; if so, the mountain cats will keep fighting until two of them have fallen.

If the characters manage to defeat the beasts (or drive them off), Mogdas is able to wheeze a few last words before he dies: "The murderers ... The Trout ... at Prios Pass. You! The Night Lady, you must find her, take her to the monastery; by Prios, night falls ...". He cannot be saved; one of the koktas sank its fangs into his neck and took a few, large bites of his thigh and torso.

With a successful **DC 15 Intelligence (History or Religion) check**, the character recalls having heard about "the Night Lady" – who she was, and the yearly ritual in which she was given a chance to repent (see page 124). Moreover, the following discoveries can be made at the scene of the ambush:

- **A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check:** Handcuffs matching the shackles found in the pavilion have been thrown into the bushes. These too have been blessed with the *judging bonds* spell.
- **A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check:** Aside from the prisoner and the dead Black Cloaks, at least three people have recently passed this way; there are signs of fighting, or rather wrestling. Three people have continued east from here, most likely two victors of the fight along with the freed prisoner.
- **A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine) check, directed at the corpses:** Both were strangled with a garrote. Markings on the wrists indicate that the victims were also held in a tight grip, which means that there must have been at least four attackers.
- **A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check, directed at the piece of cloth found in the female Black Cloak's clenched fist:** It is a thick, cotton cloth, white but heavily bloodstained – probably not by the woman's blood, as she has no wounds near the hand. The amount of blood should be enough for a bloodhound or the spell *heretic's trail* to locate/identify the wounded.
- **A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check, directed at Mogdas:** A thin leather cylinder has been sown into the hem of the man's cloak; it contains a letter with instructions from Brother Eumenos, the leader of the Twilight Friars. However, note that he has not signed the document. A handout of the letter can be found on page 209.

On orders from the Curia
– The prisoner is to be taken to the Templewall cathedral
– Do not gaze into the heretic's eyes; avoid physical contact; do not speak to her
– Non-lethal use of force is authorized
– Our Queen and her administration have been informed; they will neither stop you, nor provide any assistance or support
– Avoid contact with the fallen knights, Sarvola's renegades, and the general public
– In the event of imminent peril, bring the heretic to safety; trust no one but the brothers and sisters of our order

THE MONASTERY

The player characters might decide to visit the Twilight Monastery. As long as they do not make a really bad impression (for example by accusing the monastery of having caused the blight-births) they may enter the audience hall. After an hour of waiting, Mother Dealia comes to answer their questions. She has very little to say, but listens attentively:

- She is not aware of any prisoner being transported, and sternly insists that no member of her order would ever use Corruption as a weapon, not even in the sacred battle against the darkness.
- She is, of course, familiar with the Night Lady, and can offer the same information as is revealed by the ability checks (as above).
- When told about the wounded Templars, she simply shrugs: *"the welfare of fallen knights is not our concern."*

If the characters tell her about the Night Lady and what has happened, Dealia will ask them for a favor. All capable Black Cloaks, except those needed to keep the monastery safe from external and internal threats, are out on assignments. If the Night Lady is indeed at large in the region, and the characters manage to track her down, Mother Dealia demands that the heretic be brought to the monastery.

She closes with an ill-concealed threat: *"Failure to comply will have consequences; we are the Black Cloaks, we see all, hear all, and sooner or later, we know all; and we never spare the agents of The Eternal Night."*

FOLLOWING THE TRAIL

The player characters may try to track the prisoner and her new escort through the mountains. Thanks to the snow, this is not particularly difficult. It takes three successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check**s to find the way to the bandit camp (characters with the Bushcraft trait have advantage on these checks). A failed check represents a wasted day of following the wrong trails and having to double back. The first two checks are each followed by a challenge, as described below:

The First Stop. The tracks lead past the cave of the solitary liege troll Raharax. The warrior monks snuck past undetected, about ten paces from the entrance, but the scent in their wake caused the furiously famished troll to go outside. Raharax is now crouching in the entrance of the cave, sulking over the wasted opportunity, rubbing the head of his powerful artifact: the long-hammer Thunder.

A successful **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check** is all it takes for the characters to detect the smell of his fire from a distance; a success by 5 or more also reveals a tinge of something acrid in the smoke (**Raharax**). A successful **DC 16 Dexterity (Stealth) check** allows someone to sneak close enough to see what awaits them – an enormous, curled-up, black shadow against the red glow of the fire.

The characters must make a decision. They can follow the trail, but unless they have plenty of food to offer in return for safe passage, the reckless, ravenous troll will attack. Another option is to simply go around the cave in a large circle. They will not have any problem rediscovering the tracks, but then again, the Gamemaster could choose not to reveal that beforehand.

AREA MAP

0 15 km

0 10 miles

1. Prios Pass
2. Path
3. The Twilight Monastery
4. Ford
5. Bandit camp

N





Raharax

"You give food, or you are food!"

Until thirteen days ago, Raharax was the master of four rage trolls, six goblins, and eight enslaved humans. It was a glorious time. His minions brought him food, instilled respect in the local beasts, and let themselves be dominated as all minions should. But one day everything was lost; an avalanche buried all of his followers, and Raharax was the sole survivor – not counting the two human slaves who have since lost their lives to still his terrible hunger.

The **liege troll** (page 208 of the *Bestiary*) is determined to rebuild his following, but cannot shake the feeling that the mountains want him to fail. Moreover, starvation has made him dizzy. He only fights when victory seems certain, or when he is completely overcome with rage.

Thunder

This magical weapon is a huge long hammer +2 with the massive and reach properties in addition to its ordinary versatile property. Raharax can use it in his multiattack instead of his claws. In his hands it has the following stats (also, see page 196):

- **Thunder.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d6 + 7) magical bludgeoning damage or 17 (2d8 + 7) magical bludgeoning damage if wielded with two hands. Massive: roll the damage die twice and take the better result (average damage is rounded up due to this property). Attuning to the weapon adds 2 permanent Corruption to a character.

The Second Stop. The trail continues north from the cave, and once the player characters have passed their second Survival check they reach the River Veloma. In the mountains, the river is narrower and its currents stronger, but luckily the trail leads to a ford where the characters can wade through calm, knee-deep water. What they do not know is that some of the Ice Witch's rebels are posted on the other side of the ford, to warn the camp up north of hostile bandit groups, ranger patrols, and packs of predators. The five guards are also capable of attacking (and defeating) smaller groups of threatening creatures.

Four of the five have the stats of a **Robber** (page 186 of the *Bestiary*), except these guards have 22 (4d8 + 4) hit points each and do 7 (2d6) extra damage for their sneak attacks. The fifth guard has the stats of a **Robber Chief** (page 187 of the *Bestiary*), except he has 39 (6d8 + 12) hit points and does 10 (3d6) extra damage for his sneak attack. If you have more than 4 players in your group, add more regular guards until the total number of guards outnumbers the player characters.

If the characters expressly state that they pause on the southern side of the river to scan the far riverbank, they may detect the threat. Those who pass a **DC 18 Wisdom (Perception) check** will notice a well-concealed hut in one of the trees forming a grove about ten paces from the river. There are several ways to overcome this challenge:

- **Sneaking:** Under cover of darkness it is possible to cross the river without being detected. If the characters do so they must pass a **DC 17 Dexterity (Stealth) group check**. If they are detected, the guards will shoot at the characters with their bows.
- **Attacking:** The players could of course let their characters attack the guard post. They might even find a way to shield themselves from enemy projectiles for the two turns it takes to reach the tree hut – allow them to be creative and reward all good ideas!
- **Running:** Another feasible (but possibly less attractive) alternative is to rush straight across the river and find shelter on the other side. It is a distance of roughly 120 feet, which means that most characters can make it in two turns. Each turn the guards will fire at them with their bows.

  Keep in mind that if the characters choose this option, and continue forth without neutralizing the guards, the people at the Ice Witch's camp will be warned of their arrival by signals from the guard's camp.
- **Swimming:** If the characters go a few hundred feet upstream, a person with the Bushcraft trait may swim across the 60-foot-wide river and attach a rope on the northern side, making it possible for the others to cross. Because of the currents, a successful **DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check** is required by both the swimmers and those using the rope. Those who fail are swept away by the currents and take 4 (1d8) bludgeoning damage, before they can clamber up on the northern riverbank.

THE TROUT

The Realm of the Order has long had a handful of secret agents stationed at Prios Pass. Their main objective is to seek out refugees and persuade them to travel west to *"the free Realm of the Order"* rather than becoming *"slaves to the will of the heretical House Kohinoor"* – preferably capable and vigorous individuals, but all whose applications for a Queen's Permit have been denied are welcome. They also stand ready to participate in other kinds of operations, armed or otherwise.

The agent who has been in the village the longest without being discovered or killed is a woman named Marella, working as a kitchen maid at Madam Flora's tavern, the *Trout*. The characters can trace her there thanks to the bloody cloth found at the scene of the ambush, in the female Black Cloak's clenched fist – it is a piece of the apron which Marella wore underneath her coat during the attack, bloodied from a cut on her thigh. For the next few days she will be limping in a way which is detectable with a successful **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check**.

There are two ways for the player characters to find Marella: either by using spells such as *heretic's trail* (note that she crossed water twice on her way back to the Trout from the scene of the ambush), or by borrowing one of the rangers' bloodhounds (with or without involving a ranger). A bloodhound that smells the cloth and is guided through the village will pick up Marella's scent, provided that it comes within twenty paces of the *Trout*. As for casting *heretic's trail*, the ritualist master Toreo is willing to lend his expertise for only 12 thaler.

If the characters can identify Marella and take her aside for questioning, she just might crack – her weakness, if anything, is that she really likes being alive and finds it difficult to withstand psychological pressure. With credible threats, an equally credible promise of safe passage, and a successful **DC 16 Charisma (Intimidation) check**, the whimpering agent divulges the following:

- She works for the Realm of the Order.
- Normally, her job is to persuade suitable people to choose the Realm as their new home, rather than Ambria.
- She is sometimes ordered to execute certain refugees from the homeland who try to enter Ambria.
- Two days ago she was contacted by Father Orun of the Order of the Executioner. He had a letter from the Theologist, asking for her cooperation.
- She, Orun, and two others she did not know set up an ambush for two Black Cloaks and their prisoner; the attack was successful, apart from the fact that she was stabbed in the leg.
- She does not know the identity of the prisoner, but knows where to find her and Orun; they have been allowed to hide at one of the Ice Witch's bandit camps, about a day's march east of Prios Pass. Orun told her how to get there, in case he felt the need to summon her (how he would do that he did not say, but probably by using the powers of the Executioner).

Brother Huberdo

If the player characters stop at the *Trout* before they head for the Ice Witch's camp, they will be contacted by Brother Huberdo. He simply walks up to them in the street, stops them, introduces himself as Huberdo, and asks if they have time to talk.

Being the only reformist operative on site, with his mission about to fail, Huberdo needs help. With faith in the grace and guidance of Prios, he turns to the people he saw rummaging around the burnt down tent after the abominations' attack, well aware that they could be his death. His trust in the Sun God does not stop him from looking nervously about as they talk – something that can be detected with a **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check**.

Unless the characters have other suggestions, he takes them to the village sun temple. He enters the antechamber, turns left into a corridor, and continues through the third door on the left. They reach a bare prayer alcove, no more than 10 × 10 feet, meant for two meditating people at the most. But there is room for more, as long as they remain standing. Worried that Mother Elsana will soon be out of



Brother Huberdo's face never reveals what he is thinking, except when he wants it to.

reach, or that her abductor means her harm, Huberdo tells the characters everything he knows:

- He starts with the background – the exaltation of Prios, the resulting protests, Elsana's imprisonment and the call for her public repentance.
- He then tells them about himself, and stresses that there are many others like him: people within the Church who fight to reestablish the old interpretation of Prios' will, and thereby let "the Prios of War" pass into oblivion.
- The only person he will mention by name is Father Sarvola.
- His mission is to make contact and secretly trace the prison transport. Using a magical device he reports back to his brothers and sisters in Yndaros; the plan was to have Mother Elsana freed near the capital and brought to safety until she is pardoned.
- Finally, Huberdo asks the characters to help him; to find and free the falsely accused heretic, and join him in escorting her to Yndaros.

The Night Lady

Whether the player characters rely on their ability to track the prisoner through the mountains or take the detour through Prios Pass, they will eventually arrive at the Ice Witch's camp where Elsana and the monks are hiding. How they proceed from there is completely up to them; as usual, the Gamemaster must be prepared to reward clever plans, and fairly adjudicate the foolish.

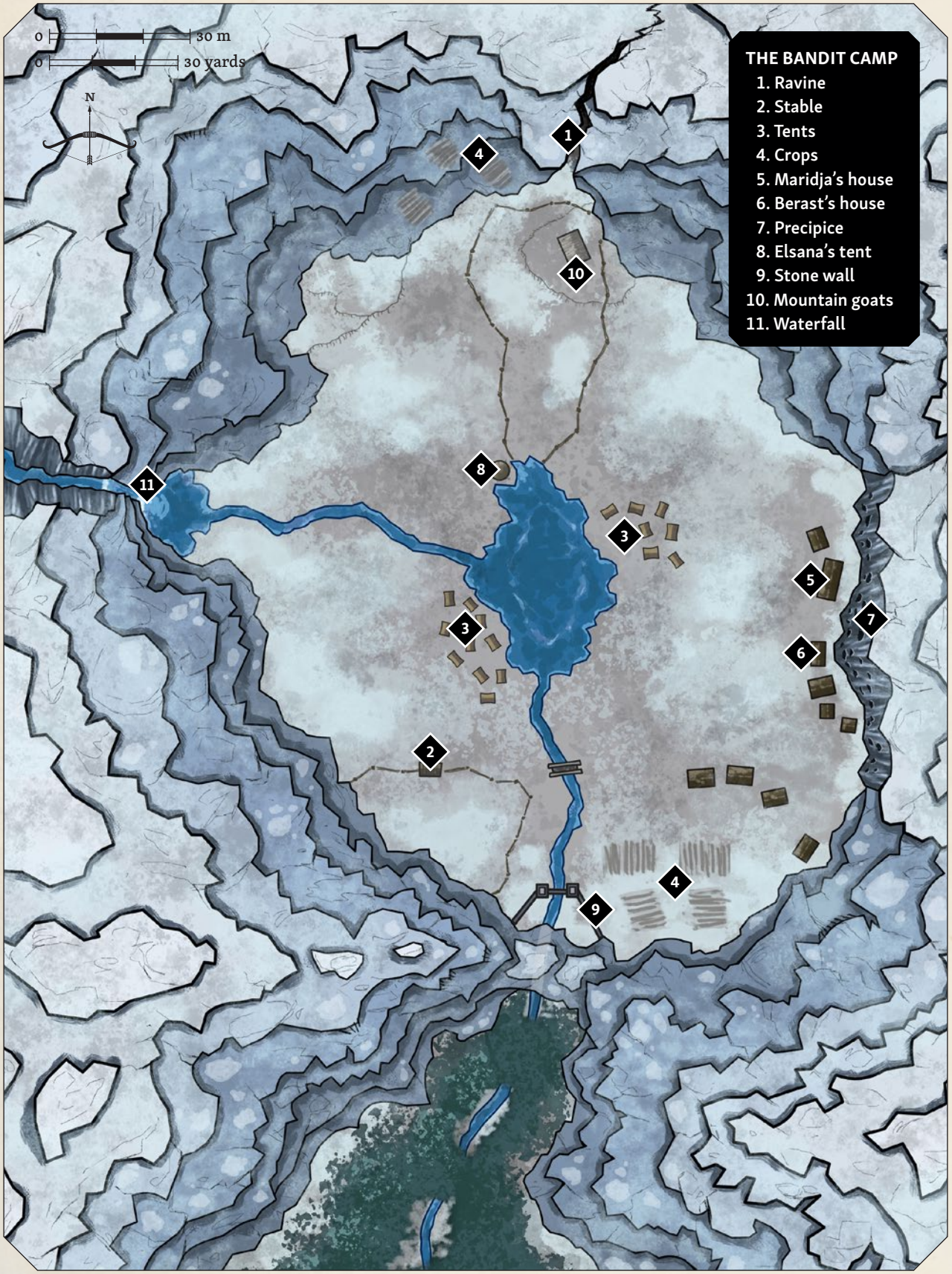
The Bandit Camp

THE ICE WITCH and her rebels have ten or so campsites, some larger than others, scattered across the mountains south of Ambria. This particular base is their most advanced one, actually established within the Queen's borders.

The camp is situated in a nearly round mountain basin, formed by a stream which, for hundreds of years, has eroded the limestone. The bottom is between 450 and 500 feet in diameter, and at ground level, the only way in is through the tree-laden ravine where the stream flows south toward the River Veloma. The surrounding cliffs are more or less steep, but can certainly be climbed. The only exceptions are the northern ravine and the practically vertical cliff to the east, in which caves were carved centuries ago, their entrances about 30 feet from the ground.

There are about twenty permanent residents, mainly old people who no longer have the energy to move between different campsites and prefer to live in actual houses rather than tents or huts. Mountain goats are kept in a large, fenced-in area in the north, and in summer smaller crops are grown in the basin, especially on its southern slopes.

Aside from the fortified posting by the ravine in the south, the camp is guarded by eight **battle-trained jakaars** (page 141 of the *Bestiary*) who roam free among people's homes and along the perimeter. Of course, they are particularly alert at night.


0 30 m
0 30 yards
N
THE BANDIT CAMP
1. Ravine
2. Stable
3. Tents
4. Crops
5. Maridja's house
6. Berast's house
7. Precipice
8. Elsana's tent
9. Stone wall
10. Mountain goats
11. Waterfall

1. RAVINE AND GUARD POST

The ravine in the bisected cliff which the locals call The Kid Horns is almost a third of a mile deep and overgrown with trees and underbrush, with flat slopes in both the east and the west. With a starting width of half a mile, the ravine narrows until it finally ends in a cliff – or so it seems. Down by the ground there is a 10-foot high (and equally wide) tunnel leading into the basin where the rebels are encamped.

On the far side of the tunnel is a stone wall, 10-foot high, with a sturdy, six-foot high double gate. The posting is manned at all times by five sentries, two of them up on the balustrade which runs along the inside of the wall. They have the same stats as the **guards** on page 143 (the header The Second Stop), including one **advanced guard** and four normal ones.

2. STABLE

A small stable and a pen where visiting rebels can leave their horses.

3. TENTS

Visiting rebels pitch their tents, made from hides and pelts, around the pond in the middle of the basin. Fires for cooking and social gatherings are lit spontaneously, depending on the current number of guests and where they make their provisional homes.

When the player characters arrive, 25 of the Ice Witch's followers are gathered there (along with 15 children and elderly people), with stats as described above.

4. CROPS

In summertime, crops are grown in the basin, mostly the kind that can survive in the shade – cabbage, onions, beets and turnips. Those that require more sunshine are instead planted on the northern slopes.

5–6. WOODEN HOUSES

At the eastern end of the camp are ten modestly sized houses, made from wood with roofs of turf. Most are inhabited by the basin's permanent residents, while the others are used entirely for storage.

The largest one is the longhouse where Maridja and her followers stay whenever they visit the camp (during the adventure they are busy elsewhere). The smaller building next to it is the home of the camp's chief, Berast, and his family.

7. THE PRECIPICE

There is a 200-foot long section in the east where the mountain wall is extremely steep and up to several hundred feet high. Roughly 30 feet from the ground are a number of cave openings, leading into a large network of tunnels and grottos – some created naturally, others with pickaxes and sledgehammers.



Chieftain Berast tries to maintain a stern facade; in reality he is tired. Dead tired.

Sturdy wooden ladders lean against the openings, to be used as an escape route in case of emergency. The caves are easily defended, with enough food and water supplies to withstand a longer siege. In truly dire situations it is possible to raze the entrances and flee downwards, into the Underworld – dangerous, precarious, and largely uncharted, but better than awaiting certain death.

No one knows who created the tunnels, or why, and the basin's current inhabitants do not care. Whoever they were, they left behind several mosaic walls and floors, now ravaged by time, and other walls with cuneiform symbols which would no doubt interest the wizards of Ordo Magica, not to mention treasure hunters in search of ancient riches and knowledge.

8. ELSANA'S TENT

As outsiders, the agents of the Realm of the Order are only welcome at the camp because Maridja has given them permission to hide there. They have been assigned a spot by the pond, near the goat enclosure; they keep to themselves and plan on doing so for their entire two-week stay. The tent is protected by the *hallow* spell, and the special effect is to prevent any sort of scrying magic inside the tent.

The round tent has a diameter of 15 feet, a single entrance (toward the pond), and inside a curtain divides its interior into two sections. Elsana lives in the one to the left from the entrance, and the warrior monks Orun and Adelena in the other. Their agreement with Maridja allows them to share the other residents' food and supplies; nevertheless, they try to make do with what they have to avoid unnecessary conflicts.

One monk is always on watch throughout the night, guarding the others while they sleep and keeping the fire alive inside the tent, in a pit just inside the entrance, before the curtains.

Elsana

Medium human (Ambrian)

Armor Class 12 (robes)
Hit Points 67 (9d8 + 27)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	18 (+4)	11 (+0)

Saving Throws Intelligence +3, Wisdom +6
Skills Arcana +3, Insight +6, Perception +6, Religion +3
Senses passive Perception 16
Languages Ambrian
Challenge 3 (700 XP, proficiency bonus +2)
Manner grim and suspicious
Shadow various shades of golden brown, like fire reflected in a gold nugget (Corruption: 3/12)
Equipment none

Dedicated Focus. When Elsana learns an evocation spell she can also learn another evocation spell of the same level or lower.

Spellcasting. Elsana (spell attack +6, save DC 14) knows the following spells:

Cantrips: *firebolt* (0), *guidance* (0), *ray of frost* (0), *sacred flame* (0), *spare the dying* (0), *thaumaturgy* (0)
1st-level spells: *bless* (1d4 + 1), *command* (1), *healing word* (1d4 + 1), *shield of faith* (1d4 + 1)
2nd-level spells: *hold person* (1d4 + 2), *enhance ability* (1d4 + 2), *spiritual weapon* (2)
3rd-level spells: *daylight* (1d4 + 3), *dispel magic* (1d4 + 3), *revivify* (1d4 + 3)
4th-level spells: *freedom of movement* (1d4 + 4), *guardian of faith* (4)
5th-level spells: *hallow* (1d4 + 5)
Rituals: *lifegiver*, *purging fire*

ACTIONS

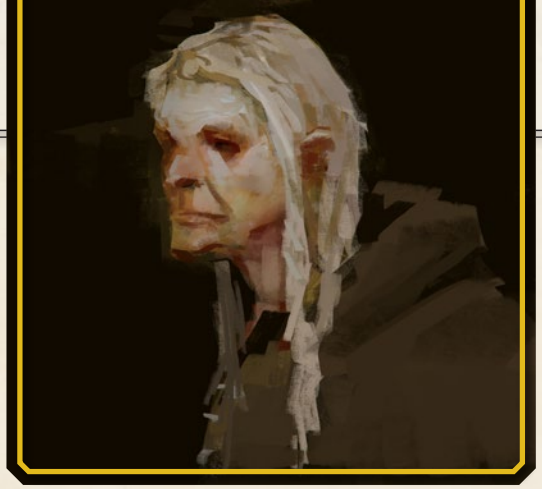
Dagger. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.

Elsana

"You reap what you sow."

After more than twenty years in the dark, one would expect Elsana to be a broken woman. But she is a daughter of the Earthmother, and as such, she spent her captivity in her mother's embrace. Sure, her body may be weak, her skin as pale as snow. But in her mind she is still the same – a priestess who, with unshakable faith, is ready to fight for the restoration of Prios. For that is her conviction: the sun priests and the theurgs of today are the true heretics; their interpretation of Prios is a false god and a breeder of evil.

Elsana wants to go with Orun to the Realm of the Order, but if someone convinces her that the Reformists exist and are working together with Queen Korinthia, she may be persuaded to stay in Ambria. Going back to prison is not an option; she would rather spend eternity in her mother's embrace.



Mother Elsana has a hard time trusting people, but she knows she must, to preserve her life and freedom.

The Warrior Monks

"Rest in peace."

Both Orun and Adelena belong to the Order of the Executioner and were sent by the leader of the Order's Land, the Theologist, to free Elsana. They are willing to die to complete their mission, convinced that Elsana's freedom will please all the Young Gods, including the Executioner, as well as the long-suffering population of their realm. The only person who could persuade them to lay down their axes is Elsana herself.

Strategies

HOW THE CHARACTERS approach the camp depends on whether they have tracked the fugitives through the wilderness or pressured Marella into revealing the camp's location. If they go through the ravine, those who sneak close enough to notice the tunnel and the guard post must pass a **DC 15 Dexterity (Stealth) check** to avoid being detected; if they come from up on the slopes a **DC 12 Dexterity (Stealth) check** will suffice, as long as they explicitly state that they are being careful.

Note that the latter alternative gives them a chance to do some reconnaissance before they act. If they watch the camp for at least an hour, they may all make a **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check**. For each character that succeeds, one of the following pieces of information is revealed:

- Watchdogs (Those proficient with Nature recognize them as Jaakars) are prowling the perimeter, two groups of two beasts each.
- A person (Orun) whose earth-brown robe differs from what everyone else is wearing, emerges from the isolated tent north-west of the pond, near the goat enclosure.
- Two young men are each carrying a crate of supplies from one of the wooden houses in the east toward the isolated tent. They spit repeatedly into the contents of the crates, smirking maliciously.

When the player characters have gained an overview of the camp's activities they must decide how to proceed. Below are four alternatives; should your gaming group come up with something else, you must try to keep up and adapt to whatever situation arises!

Warrior Monk

Medium human (The Order)

Armor Class 14 (blessed robes)
Hit Points 85 (10d8 + 40)
Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	13 (+1)	18 (+4)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)	8 (–1)

Skills Athletics +7, Insight +4, Perception +4, Persuasion +1
Senses passive Perception 14
Languages Ambrian
Challenge 4 (1,100 XP, proficiency bonus +2)
Manner serious, vigilant
Shadow a dull, pale yellow, like unpolished brass (Corruption: 3/8)
Equipment blessed robe, field equipment, food, 1d10 + 5 silver coins (equivalent to thaler but carrying the symbol of the Young Gods, the Aureola)

Relentless (Recharges after a Short or Longer Rest). If the warrior monk takes damage that would reduce it to 0 hit points, it is reduced to 1 hit point instead.

Ritualist. The warrior monk can cast purify food and drink and silence as rituals (it gains no temporary Corruption for casting).

Two-handed Force. If the warrior monk misses it with its double-axe, it may use its reaction to reroll that attack. It scores a critical hit on a 19 or 20 on the d20.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The warrior monk makes two attacks with its double-axe.

Double-axe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (1d12 + 5) slashing damage. Massive: roll the damage die twice and take the better result (average damage is rounded up due to this property).

REACTIONS

Evasion. If the warrior monk is subjected to an effect that allows it to make a Dexterity saving throw to take only half damage, the warrior monk instead takes no damage if it succeeds on the saving throw, and only half damage if it fails.

ATTACKING

Characters who appreciate a good fight may suggest an all-out attack against the camp. This could actually succeed – with the help of the enemy's enemy!

One option is to contact the Rangers and Captain Egusta at Prios Pass. Reinforcements have already arrived at the village in the form of returning patrols; a larger force is on its way from the capital's garrison. She may even let the characters decide the fugitive's fate, if she is given information regarding the Ice Witch's whereabouts and allowed to arrest the criminals who poisoned the soup with krusean berries.

The second obvious choice is the Twilight Monastery. Mother Dealia can, on short notice (24 hours), summon a force of forty **Black Cloaks** (page 168 of the *Bestiary*) and ten **theurgs** (page 171 in the *Bestiary*) to apprehend the fugitive. However, this would give the player characters very little control over what happens to Elsana.

The players might think of other suitable allies. For example, the three fallen Templars have recovered well enough and Segri Elderra can persuade 15 newly-arrived war veterans (**infantry soldiers**, page 198 of the *Bestiary*) to join her in battle against the heretics, by promising to vouch for them as they apply for a Queen's Permit. Given her status as a heretic this will hardly make any difference, but the veterans do not know that. They will do everything they can to earn the noblewoman's recommendation!

The veterans can create a diversion by charging through the ravine, while the player characters find another way in. But the knights have one condition: the heretic dies, or the characters will have made enemies for life.

We suggest that the allies, whoever they are, take on the robbers while the characters deal with Elsana and the warrior monks. The Gamemaster gives a summary of the larger battle, and the characters' failure or success determines the outcome of it all.

NEGOTIATING WITH THE CAMP CHIEF

Camp Chief Berast is not thrilled with having freeloaders around – they put further strain on the already scarce winter supplies, without pulling their weight at the camp. And while he himself finds it tolerable, many of his people do not, which could become a problem.

The clan may be led by Maridja, but it is certainly not a dictatorship; the camp chiefs are quite free to govern their settlements as they see fit. Moreover, Berast is already displeased with Maridja for having restricted their freedom to plunder along the River Noora and sending them less supplies than previous winters. But he is a greedy negotiator, which the player characters will soon learn.

If the characters approach the camp through the ravine without appearing threatening, the guards at the posting will seize their weapons and take them to Berast's house; if they also explain the reason for their visit and ask to be kept away from Elsana and the monks, the guards will lead them in a quarter circle along the mountain wall.

As long as they offer him something valuable in return, the Camp Chief will let the characters do whatever they want to Maridja's guests. He simply orders the rest of the camp not to interfere with what happens on the north-western shore of the pond. Their bargaining chips may include a large sum of thaler, an artifact, or information regarding (and help to attack) a place full of something he wants or needs.

Should Berast's stats become relevant, use those of an unmounted **Pansar** on page 199 in the *Bestiary*.

SNEAKING

People who are good at moving stealthily can enter the basin at night and head straight to Elsana's tent – perhaps by rappelling down the crack in the far north and subsequently sneaking through the goat enclosure. The Gamemaster will have to decide what Stealth (or other) checks the characters must pass depending on how they choose to approach the camp. As a suggestion, the example above would first require a successful **DC 15 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check** to not fall while climbing and then a **DC 13 Dexterity (Stealth) group check** not to agitate the goats into making noise and drawing the attention of the four **jaakars** roaming the area.

Should there be screams, turmoil or fighting as the characters enter the tent, it will take 1d4 + 1 turns for the **jaakars** to arrive, and another 1d4 + 1 turns for four **guards** to come running. 1d6 + 1 turns later, the tent is completely surrounded by the Camp Chief and his warriors.

WAITING

Another viable option (albeit a less epic one) is to sit back and wait for the fugitive and her escort to leave the camp site. This will take about ten days, and should not be entirely uneventful – although they are in Ambrian territory, the border regions are not without dangers, particularly in winter when packs of predators are sometimes seen as far north as on the southern shore of the River Doudram.

Face to Face

WHAT WILL HAPPEN if and when the player characters find themselves in a negotiation with Elsana and her escort?

Such a situation could arise regardless of the strategies described above: following a negotiation with Berast, after one or more player characters have snuck up to the tent, or in the area outside the basin where the characters are lying in wait. Conversation could even be an option during a full-scale attack, for example if one of the opposing parties is (for the most part) defeated.

THE NIGHT LADY

How the player characters' conversation with the Night Lady develops is largely up to them, but it is also important to keep in mind what Elsana hopes to accomplish and to what extent she is willing to compromise.

The Gamemaster may assume the following:

- Elsana wants to live; having been imprisoned for more than two decades she wants to spend her final years in freedom, doing everything she can to vindicate herself.
- Vindication means crushing the image of Prios which now dominates Ambria; the one she refused to accept and still considers a heretical distortion devised by warmongers and power-hungry nobles (especially House Kohinoor) to subdue the people.
- Going back to prison is not an option; she would rather fall into *"the Mother's embrace"* (i.e. die).
- She likes the idea of contributing to the development of the Realm of the Order, but more than anything she wants to see the Prios of War and all his apostles fall. This she will work towards, either through the agents of the Order or by working directly with Deseba the Old and, eventually, the Queen.

A FINAL BATTLE

If the player characters meet with Elsana under peaceful circumstances and allow the heretical priestess to choose her own fate, the Gamemaster should consider presenting the gaming group with a final challenge: a hostile military force that comes between Elsana and her freedom.

Whether this is even possible, and if so, who the attackers are, depends on the player characters' previous actions. If the characters attacked the bandit camp along with allies who have their own plans for the heretic, it is of course those very same allies that have come for her now. The Black Cloaks and the fallen Templars want her captured/killed, while the Rangers hold her and her escort responsible for the massacre at Prios Pass, or regard them as foreign spies (in other words, they will not honor any previous agreement).

Otherwise, the characters could have been trailed after having met with representatives of a certain faction and happened to arouse suspicion – the snow-covered ground makes it possible to track someone over long distances, thereby avoiding the risk of detection. For example, the Black Cloaks could have followed them after a visit to the Twilight Monastery or the Sun Temple. Other possibilities are that the cell of fallen Templars had Gromeo, the Rangers or some other scout, follow their trail; if so, they will be coming for the heretic determined to wipe out everyone living in the camp.

How such a scenario transpires and develops must be determined on a case-by-case basis, but as a suggestion, the characters and Elsana could receive a timely warning – Berast's scouts have spotted the approaching (or awaiting) threat, and are kind enough to notify them. In the battle that follows, the characters must fight the enemy leader and his/her closest warriors, and the outcome of their battle determines what happens to Elsana and the warrior monks.

Appropriate challenges for the characters could be (all page references are to the *Bestiary*):

- One **Templar** (page 170) and twice as many **Infantry Soldiers** (page 198) as the characters
- One **ranger captain** (page 191) and as many **Rangers** (page 190) as the characters
- As many **experienced Black Cloaks** (page 169) as the characters



Aftermath

The Howling of Damned Gods is an adventure where the player characters must take a stand on issues that concern many of Ambria's powerful and influential factions. It is up to the Gamemaster to decide what consequences their choices and actions will have, perhaps based on the rules for Scheming (page 172 of the *Gamemaster's Guide*).

We offer some suggestions on how different outcomes might affect the fates and future adventures of the player characters. Last but not least, we want to share some ideas for further adventures, based on the characters, locations, and events featured in *The Howling of Damned Gods*.

ELSANA'S FATE

As long as there are witnesses to spread the word, the characters' actions during this adventure will most likely affect their relations with many of Ambria's powerful factions. This mainly depends on what happens to Mother Elsana at the end of the story.

Killing the priestess will certainly please the Knights of Dead Prios, but anger almost everyone else, though for different reasons and to varying degrees. No one will be more outraged than the leaders and agents of the Realm of the Order, followed by the Reformists within the Sun Church (Deseba, Sarvola, and, by extension, the Queen). The Order will put a price on the characters' heads, while the other factions become significantly more difficult to deal with in future meetings and negotiations.

On the other hand, should the characters arrest the heretic and turn her over to one of the Ambrian factions, this will obviously evoke different reactions depending on who gets her (except for the Realm of the Order, which reacts as mentioned above). Leaving her with the Black Cloaks will infuriate the Templars and the Reformists, and vice versa. Note that characters who have encountered the fallen sun knights at the refugee camp, but still deliver Elsana to someone else, will become their mortal enemies for life.

Finally, the characters might choose to let Elsana go. Should this become known, it could make their future lives in Ambria much more complicated. The Sun Church will call them "the sons and daughters of the Night Lady" and brand them heretics. The Templars, fallen or not, agree with this judgment. The Reformists (including Korinthia) understand and accept the characters decision, but are still disappointed to have lost such an important ally. The only ones celebrating are the people of the distant Realm of the Order, which will probably be of little benefit to the characters.

FURTHER ADVENTURES

In the wake of the adventure, there are several seeds that can be cultivated into adventures of their own. The above-mentioned reactions to the characters' handling of Elsana could result in them being hunted or wanted in a way that forces them to act. Perhaps the Sun Church can be appeased into retracting their accusations of heresy if the characters perform some task "in the name of Prios" – for instance hunting down a wanted cult leader or a raging abomination.

The caves at the bandit camp can also be used as a basis for further adventures. The characters may want to head down and explore the Underworld, or interpret the paintings and mosaics on the mountain walls which could lead to an interesting treasure hunt, in the mountains or further north. Perhaps one painting describes the grand palace from which the lord of the region fled during the fall of Symbaroum?

Last but not least: if the player characters have come to Prios Pass to meet a relative/colleague, they could obviously dig deeper into the "grave misdeeds" he or she claims to have discovered. Perhaps a more thorough examination of his or her belongings reveals clues about the misdeeds in question? Perhaps the characters are approached by people who know that they were contacted by the relative/colleague – to ask for help, or to silence them? They could even travel across the mountains, to the relative's/colleague's former home in the withering Alberetor, in the hope of uncovering the mystery.



HERE THE TORRENTS of the rivers Doudram and Rava merge into a calm yet powerful stream which flows across the plains, lies Ravenia – the place in the Queen's realm which best embodies the joining of the Ambrian and barbarian people. But while the waters come together with no after-effects other than some foam and whirlpools, the unification of the two peoples creates more serious problems – between different clans, between Ambrians and clansfolk, and between the various factions of the Promised Land.

Not all Ambrians welcome the foreign elements; many feel worried, or even threatened, after having heard the priests and the authorities depict them as intruders or as evil creatures carrying the darkness of the Eternal Night in their flesh. It is unclear whether the murders which have now put a damper on the festive spirit of the Ravenian people can be attributed to the city's diverse nature, but it certainly seems like a reasonable conclusion – one victim being an Ambrian priest, the other a witch from the forest of Davokar, both murdered with fire and in great suffering...



What's Bred in the Bone

FOR LEVELS 7-8

Introduction

All Ambrians have their views on Ravenia, especially those who have never visited the Duke's seat in New Beretor. God-fearing people tend to take a negative position, ranging from suspicious aversion to hostile loathing. The reason for this is of course young Duke Ynedar's lenient (even welcoming!) attitude toward barbarians, and the fact that the local authorities seem to allow the strangers to practice their barbarian traditions without punishment or even the slightest reproach. The few people who dare to point out the positive effects of it all usually suffer a good beating, or at the very least a life-threatening warning, often ending with suggestions such as: "*If you love barbarians so much, why not move yourself to that shithole Ravenia!?*"

IN OTHER WORDS, the adventure *What's Bred in the Bone* is set on a stage which, to some extent, could be described as a meeting place between clansfolk and Ambrians. But Ravenia is not a melting pot whose ingredients are blended together. No, it is more like a cultural three-course meal, with stone walls separating the "barbarian" from the Ambrian, as well as from the culture and living standards of noble or affluent Ambrians. The city's social structures will mainly act as a background for *What's Bred in the Bone*, but may well be used by Gamemasters wishing to create their own adventures in the principal town of New Beretor.

This opening chapter focuses on the background and structure of the adventure, and describes how the player characters may be drawn into the story. Then follows the adventure's three acts, each in a separate chapter – a first chapter devoted to the prelude and the characters' initial investigations; a second about the hunt for a kidnapped prisoner; and finally, a third in which the characters, along with the local authorities, must defend the Duke and his city against the wrath of the Lawgiver.

The text, and hence this book, concludes with an appendix containing new rules, a number of handouts, and some player maps.

Background

THE YOUNG AND quite inexperienced Duke Ynedar of New Beretor has done something foolish, something very foolish. He acted in panic, but still had the calm to try and hide his own involvement. Now there is a serious risk of him taking a bad situation and making it worse; that the crisis he hoped to avert will not only happen, but cause he and his allies to slip off their wave of success and drown in a maelstrom of holy outrage. The situation is desperate; the Duke needs help.

What's Bred in the Bone is designed to be played in a time when the conflicts within the Ambrian Sun Church are escalating, and the strained relationship between the Church and Queen Korinthia reaches its breaking-point. The sections below present the history behind the situation that the characters will have to deal with. The adventure's central conflict is the one between the Sun Church's two factions: the Reformists and the Loyalists. The city of Ravenia and the duchy of New Beretor may seem rather remote, but maybe that is precisely why they have come to play such a pivotal role in the internal struggles within the church of Prios.

PAVE THE WAY...

Ynedar of Kohinoor is the son of Korinthia's twin brother, Korian, a war hero who met his demise during the offensive which resulted in the Queen's liberation. Ynedar was five years old when he was graced with the title of Duke; three years later he was forced to move to Ravenia, which at the time was little more than a military camp. He came with only his guardian Gadiro Brigo, the brother of his grandmother Abesina, and a caravan full of objects and furniture from the family residence in Alberetor. His mother died soon after his father, from (as they called it) a broken heart; meanwhile, his sister Korthena was put in a convent (where she would eventually join the still secret members of the Reformists).

For the first ten years, New Beretor was ruled by Korinthia and Field Marshal Eliana Nidel, while Gadiro, who had a keen interest in history and religion, took the Duke on trips in the woods and mountains. For long periods of time they stayed with Clan Chieftain Zoltar of Vajvod, and Ynedar made many friends among the youngsters at Vojvodar. The link between the barbarian religion and the one which

characterized Alberetor before the Exaltation of Prios soon became clear to the young nobleman, as did the link between the Curia's Prios and the competitive, war-mongering lifestyle of the Ambrian people. He secretly grew more and more disappointed and angry with his aunt's failure to recognize (or unwillingness to deal with) the clearly villainous deeds of the priests, theurgs, and Templars – feelings which were made darker still by the thought that both of his parents had died to put Korinthia on the throne.

Now Ynedar is all grown up, the same age as the Ambrian calendar, and has slowly but surely maneuvered his way to the considerable power vested in him as a Duke of the Ambrian kingdom. Before Gadiro passed away in year 18, the teacher introduced his protégé to Father Ombardo, a priest in Ravenia with secret sympathies for the heretic Sarvola, who in turn had recently established his mission house in Thistle Hold. Their relationship grew deeper with time, and Ynedar is now in constant contact with both Sarvola and his close friend and ally, Deseba the Old. It has not been articulated, but the Duke is sure that Deseba plans to overthrow the Prios of War in favor of the pantheon of the Young Gods, and that she also wants to see the ambitious Korinthia dethroned, and replaced, by him.

But roughly a month before the start of the adventure, something happened that shook Ynedar's world. During an audience at the Duke's fortress, First Theurg Armanda – Curia Loyalist and high priest at Ravenia's sun temple – claimed to have irrefutable evidence of Ynedar's heretical connections, with Sarvola as well as local "cultists" in the form of barbarian priests and the leaders of the Young Gods' chapel. She threatened to send her proof to the Curia and the Queen if he did not immediately and publicly declare himself faithful to the Curia. She also had a more personal demand: that she would receive a donation of ten thousand thaler and the Duke's help to legally (albeit with fabricated evidence) dispose of two liturgs, whom she suspected of sympathizing with the heretic Sarvola – including Father Ombardo.

Suddenly, Ynedar's dreams of dethroning his aunt and leading his country toward a future of peace and collaboration, rather than conflict and competition, were seriously threatened. Something must be done, quickly and without risk of compromising his allies within the Sun Church, who, by the way, would never approve of the strategy which Ynedar thought absolutely necessary.

THE DEATH OF THE THEURG

First Theurg Armanda fought with the Knights of the Dying Sun during The Great War, and kept swinging the glistening sword of Prios even after arriving in the Promised Land – aimed at barbarians, heretical settlers, and the region's untamed wilderness. She would never betray the Curia and its interpretation of the Lawgiver's ordinance; the only way to avert the threat she posed to Ynedar was to eliminate her. But the operation had to be conducted in a way that directed suspicion to someone other than himself, particularly because Sarvola and Deseba would seriously disapprove of him choosing the path of violence.

Five months earlier the Duke had been contacted, through friends in Barbarian Town, by the witch Algaya who was on the run from a local Karit chieftain. Her only crime was having communicated with the witch of another part of the fragmented clan Karohar, but the chieftain suspected a hostile conspiracy. Algaya asked for the Duke's protection and offered her services, contacts, and knowledge in return – something Ynedar did not hesitate to accept. Thus, the witch became the perfect tool to get rid of Armanda: she had personally experienced the ruthless sun warrior's ravages in southern Davokar, and welcomed the chance to avenge her slaughtered kin.

Algaya assumed her bird form, landed outside the wall to Armanda's bedchamber, and thanks to her magic was soon standing inside the house by the foot of her target's bed. She filled the theurg's body with starving larvae and watched as the victim died a loud, writhing death. When people started banging on the bolted door she got out the same way she came in.

THE WHIP CRACKS

Had Armanda not been so greedy and conspiratorial she would have shared her evidence against the Duke with the Black Cloaks, especially with Brother Galdam, leader of the group responsible for investigating and reporting the heretical activities which have been allowed to continue in Ravenia. Then Ynedar would have had no chance to escape the claws of the Curia.

That New Beretor's tolerance of heretics was due to the young Duke's diplomatic genius is something the Curia's

The News Spreads

Player characters who are interested in what is happening in Ambria could very well have heard of Armanda's murder shortly after it occurred. The Sun Church's representatives claimed that she was killed by *"apostles of The Eternal Night"* (i.e. the witches of Davokar) for being one of Prios' most prominent champions; rumor had it that she was even about to be elevated to Lightbringer at the Curia's next gathering. Other sources are more explicit in their assessments. They also blame the witches, but with the addition that the murderer was most likely a Karit, considering Armanda's participation in the cleansing of their clan's territory.

Adventure Timeline

5 months ago
Algaya arrives in Ravenia and gains the Duke's protection.

5 weeks ago
Armanda threatens Duke Ynedar.

2 weeks ago
Algaya murders First Theurg Armanda at the Duke's request.

10 days ago
Brother Eumenos gives Sister Malina secret orders to punish the High Priest's killer.

7 days ago
The Black Cloaks break into Father Ombardo's study and find evidence of heretical activity.

6 days ago
Sister Malina initiates talks with Ervano Vearra; Father Ombardo is interrogated and burned to death.

4 days ago
The witch Yarmar is interrogated and burned to death; the new High Priest Leandro is suspected by the exasperated populace, and subsequently arrested and brought to the Duke's fortress (actually into protective custody, neither suspected or accused).

2 days ago
Sister Malina and Ervano reach an agreement; Malina heads for Ravenia.

1 day ago
The Black Cloaks break into the home of clan Vajvod's envoy, Molgara.

agents have long found difficult to believe. Instead, they have become increasingly convinced that Ynedar is in fact a heretic himself. The purpose of their systematic intelligence operations in Ravenia is to find proof of this; proof so strong that the Queen will no longer be able to protect her nephew without incurring the wrath of the people.

When Prios' chief representative in New Beretor, First Theurg Armanda, was murdered, many priests and Black Cloaks refused to believe that the incident was not related to the Church's internal conflicts. But the head of the Twilight Monastery, Brother Eumenos, glossed over the incident and asked his subordinates to trust in Ravenia's law enforcement and the Queen's agents in the region. Everyone knew it was a political decision, that he feared offending the Queen who was already on the warpath, and just about everyone bowed to his authority.

But behind closed doors another strategy was formed. Eumenos ordered Sister Malina of the Whip of Prios to investigate the murder and discover the truth of it all. He also gave her an unofficial mandate to contact a splinter cell of former Templars, led by Commander Iakobo Vearra's son and pledged to the belief that the sun god is already dead. He pointed out that these Knights of Dead Prios could be somewhat difficult to deal with, but that they were known as ruthlessly efficient and would hardly tolerate heretical beliefs and deeds among Ambria's earthly elite.

Sister Malina immediately sent word to the Black Cloaks lurking in the shadows of Ravenia, ordering them to bolster their efforts to search for proof of the Duke's association with cultists and heretics. Malina herself traveled to a secret campsite in the woods south of Kastor, where she, after a long wait, initiated talks with Ervano Vearra. At first Ervano was not interested; he was convinced that Prios' killers and the greatest supporters of The Eternal Night were to be found in Davokar, Thistle Hold, and Yndaros. Malina walked a tightrope. She saw that he weighed her every word carefully, searching for a hidden agenda. But finally, he agreed that a heretical duke should be a priority target for the Knights of Dead Prios.

THE FIRES OF PRIOS

Brother Galdam of the Twilight Friars received Sister Malina's message with a big smile on his face. He too is convinced that the heresy in Ravenia can be traced all the way to Duke Ynedar's private chambers, and he has longed for a chance to crack down on the sinners.

His theory is that someone within the duchy's top leadership, most likely the Duke himself, had ordered the murder of the former High Priest and that it was later carried out by an allied witch or Ambrian cultist. He is equally confident that there is a heretical traitor among the city's priests; one who sympathized with Sarvola and others who have chosen to turn their backs on the Lawgiver. The already existing suspicions about Ynedar's spiritual adviser – due to his forgiving attitude and friendliness toward Ravenia's barbarian population – made him Galdam's first target.

An initial break-in into the solitary Father Ombardo's study provided clear evidence that he regularly visited the Young Gods' chapel in Barbarian Town, and that a "friend" usually accompanied him. They returned the following night to extract the friend's identity from him – an interrogation which due to the priest's unbreakable resolve led to increasingly brutal, fruitless methods, and ended with the cleansing fire of Prios.

The next person to be interrogated was the witch Yarmar, as he had previously been seen visiting said chapel and, moreover, had friends among the Ambrian locals. They lured his sister away and could then spend hours extorting a confession, which still never came. This interrogation also ended with the heretic being set on fire.

Growing more and more desperate to achieve results before Sister Malina's arrival, they decided to get a better picture of Barbarian Town's population, in their hunt for other suspects. They did so by breaking into the home of clan Vajvod's envoy in Ravenia, the chieftain's daughter Molgara, the day before the player characters arrive in town.

So, when the characters become involved in the story, Brother Galdam and his Black Cloaks have committed murder twice, along with two break-ins. Moreover, Sister Malina is on her way, determined to punish the person or people responsible for First Theurg Armanda's death. In other words, they are about to find themselves in boiling hot water...

The Player Characters

THIS ADVENTURE SHOULD be playable with any player characters, possibly after a few adjustments or additions by the Gamemaster. Theurgs and others with strong ties to the Sun Church may seem like inappropriate members of the gaming group, but as long as they are not adamantly loyal to the Curia and what has become known as the Prios of War, their participation will probably be more interesting than problematic.

In any case, the characters are caught right in the middle of the two opposing factions within the Sun Church – the Reformists who are personified by Duke Ynedar, and the Curia, represented by Sister Malina and the Black Cloaks. Before the adventure is over, they will have to choose sides, or at least decide whether or not to aid the Duke when the wrath of Dead Prios appears in the form of an advancing troop of fallen sun knights.

INCENTIVES

Obviously, no one knows what will motivate the players and their characters to engage in the story better than their Gamemaster. Below is a list of suggestions to choose from, but you may think of an entirely different entry point that would suit your gaming group even better.

Friends of the Priest

One possibility is that a player character is already acquainted with Father Ombardo. In that case, he could be a relative, or perhaps a former teacher or spiritual counselor. Another option is that Ombardo and the character crossed the Titans together and had adventures during which a lifelong bond was forged between them; maybe the character saved the priest's life, or maybe it was the other way around?

Regardless, this character receives the following letter a few days prior to the start of the adventure (the Gamemaster decides the number of days based on where the characters are currently situated). What the recipient fails to realize is that, by the time he or she reads the message, Father Ombardo has already fallen victim to the shadows of which he speaks...

Dear friend,

Sorry for being so brief, but if my fears are true, time is short. Hopefully I will see you soon, so that I can tell you about all the fantastic things about to happen, with my beloved Ravenia as the source of goodness.

No change ever comes without resistance, and neither will this one. You once said that I can always count on your help. Or was it your protection? Anyway, I'm afraid my time of need has come. Shadows follow my every step; shadows that I am sure mean me harm. Duke Ynedar is doing everything he can, but I would prefer to keep him out of this, for reasons best discussed eye to eye.

If you cannot help me, I understand completely, but if you are willing and able I hope that you will come to Ravenia as soon as possible. And if you have any reliable friends with hearts in the right place, please bring them along. I have the means to pay your expenses, and more, should it be needed.

In the light of the Lifegiver,
Father Ombardo

A member of the Sun Church or someone who passes a **DC 15 Intelligence (Religion) check** recognizes the Lifegiver as an older name for Prios, from the time when he was but one of many gods. According to the Curia, the Lawgiver is the correct designation, while mentioning the Lifegiver is considered an act of blasphemy. The fact that the writer dares to end his letter with that phrase is, in other words, most remarkable.

PROBLEM SOLVERS

If none of the player characters could possibly be acquainted with Father Ombardo, there are other people who could call for aid. Depending on who the characters are and which faction or factions they are aligned with, they may have contacts within Ordo Magica, the Ambrian Army, the Sun Church, or some barbarian clan that knows them to be capable problem solvers.

If so, the person who contacts the characters is concerned about what the two murders (Ombardo and Yarmar) mean, and fears that they are merely the beginning of a violent



The Whip of Prios arrives in Ravenia to find convincing proof of the Duke's heresy.

offensive against Ravenia's barbarian population and the Ambrians who associate with them. The person also has little to no faith in the local authorities' ability to resolve the situation, especially after the Duke had the newly appointed High Priest Leandro arrested without further explanation.

In any case, the characters are offered a reward in the form of thaler, favors, or information if they can identify the murderers and stop them from striking again.

MOVING UP THE LADDER

Of course, both of the above-mentioned suggestions could instead be linked to the player characters' desire for advancement within one of the game world's factions. Perhaps it is not one of the characters but a senior representative of the Sun Church (Reformist or Loyalist), Ordo Magica, the Ambrian nobility, or even the Iron Pact, who is acquainted with Father Ombardo and receives his plea for help (i.e. the letter)? Or maybe the old priest is kept out of the incentive structure, and one of the character's contacts within some faction is sent a similar plea from a fellow faction member in Ravenia?

Either way, the characters are summoned to the leading representative's office (or equivalent), where they are offered the job of answering the call for help in exchange for something the faction is able to provide. It could be something as simple as a promotion within the faction's hierarchy, or the task may be a test for possible future missions.

FRIENDS AND FAMILY

When it comes to stirring player characters into action, one should never rule out utilizing personal relations. If Ombardo and Yarmar do not make appropriate potential relatives, friends, or former partners of a character, the Gamemaster is welcome to introduce additional victims – such as a completely innocent Ravenian bystander who just happened to see the Black Cloaks leave the scene of a murder and got stabbed to death as a result?

It is also conceivable that the characters, for one reason or another, have already spent a few months in Ravenia and during that time have gotten to know both the city and several of the adventure's central characters. In that scenario, it could even be the Commander of the City Watch who requests their assistance, provided that they have already made a name for themselves as capable problem solvers.

The Structure of the Adventure

***WHAT'S BRED IN** the Bone* takes place at a time when Duke Ynedar has not yet come forth as the earthly figurehead of the Reformists within the Sun Church, and when relations within the Church as well as between it and the crown are very strained indeed.

To save his own skin, and as a side-effect prepare his duchy for the new spiritual order, the Duke has Ravenia's Loyalist High Priest murdered. This causes the already suspicious Black Cloaks to react, but neither the First Father nor Brother Eumenos dare to openly challenge Queen Korinthia and her nephew, the Duke.

However, Sister Malina of the Whip of Prios is given a secret mission to solve the murder. She orders the Black Cloaks stationed in Ravenia to investigate the incident and find evidence of the Duke's involvement. Meanwhile, Malina contacts the Knights of Dead Prios in the hope that they can be persuaded to act where the Curia cannot...

ACT 1: THE SHADOWS OF THE FLAMES

The characters are hired, or take it upon themselves, to uncover the truth behind the recent murders in Ravenia – the victims being the liturg Ombardo and the witch Yarmar. An initial talk with the city's Commander can give them a clear enough picture of the victims and murders.

After their initial investigation, three insights can be uncovered, together leading to the end of the first act – the murdered priest had made secret visits to "the chapel" along with a nameless "friend"; the burned man-witch was busy discussing the differences/ similarities between the barbarian gods and the pantheon worshiped by the Ambrians before Prios was declared the One; after a break-in into the archives at the home of clan Vajvod's envoy in Ravenia, three books are missing, one of them being a report of activities in the Chapel of the Young Gods.

Thus, the player characters head for the chapel, where they eventually meet Algaya – the witch who killed the former High Priest (after making a deal with the Duke). She confesses unequivocally, but does not mention the Duke's involvement. The conversation is interrupted when Brother Galdam and his Black Cloaks come to punish Algaya. The witch immediately sinks into a Beast Shape and escapes; the characters are left to fight the Black Cloaks, who assume everyone in the chapel to be heretics and allies of the late High Priest's killer.

ACT 2: THE HERETIC'S PLEA

The player characters have barely caught their breath after the fight when they hear a disconcerting rumor: Duke Ynedar is missing. A servant can reveal that Sister Malina of the Whip of Prios visited the Duke, demanding to see the arrested High Priest. It was agreed that the Duke and two bodyguards were to take the prisoner to a storehouse in Barbarian Town.

When the characters arrive at the storehouse, they find no one but the Duke's murdered escort. Further investigation suggests that a wounded person has fled the scene. The trail leads toward the edge of the district, to an abandoned ruin from the days of Symbaroum. The characters can choose to immediately attack the members of the Whip of Prios who are also following the trail, or wait until they find the Duke. Either way, combat ensues.

If the characters manage to save him, the Duke collapses in tears of relief and decides to trust them. They now have a choice to make: will they side with the Reformists or with the Curia, or simply walk away? If they choose the first option, they must track Sister Malina and the abducted High Priest to a farm roughly an hour's walk east of the city. Sister Malina will of course fight to defend herself if the characters attack, but otherwise she surrenders the prisoner without causing any trouble. She says they are too late anyway: the information extracted from the High Priest was enough to convince Ervano Vearra that Ravenia deserves the retribution of Prios!

ACT 3: LOVED BY THE SUN

The third act is really all about what the player characters will do with the knowledge that a group of 20–30 murderous Templars are about to attack Duke Ynedar and his supporters.

As they return to Ravenia, it is revealed that the witch Algaya is with the Duke. Ever since her flight from the chapel, she has followed the developments in her bird form. She helped the Duke escape from the storehouse; she then followed Sister Malina to the farm where Ervano Vearra was waiting for evidence, after which she tailed Ervano to his camp.

There seems to be four feasible approaches, all with certain complications. Unwise players/ characters may think it a good idea to negotiate with Ervano; if so, they should be strongly advised to reconsider, but not prevented from giving it a try.

Defense. The player characters, the Duke, and their allies lure the enemy onto the Mound and fight them there, between the Fortress walls and the district walls.

Open Battle. The city's defenders line up on the rolling fields north of Barbarian Town, hoping that their elevated position will take the edge off the knights' initial cavalry charge.

Ambush. The player characters and their allies discreetly try to position themselves in an ambush, either by the edge of Barbarian Town or somewhere else on the road between Ravenia and the knights' camp.

Attack. Led by the player characters and the Duke, the defenders of Ravenia march north to take the fight to the enemy, preferably surprising them.

Whichever strategy they choose, the player characters will have to fight the leader of the Knights of Dead Prios, Ervano Vearra, and possibly Sister Malina, if she is still alive and free – other opponents are dealt with by their allies. The selected strategy could make their part of the battle easier or harder, which they must weigh against the potential risks for the people of Ravenia.

Ravenia

The principal city of New Beretor was built around a restored castle ruin, situated on a hill where the river Rava merges with the thundering Doudram. Scholars say that the fortress has been there since the days of Symbaroum, and that it seems to have been razed, rebuilt, and expanded many times. The latest renovations were completed in year 8, shortly after Duke Ynedar's arrival. Since then, Ravenia has undergone a remarkable transformation.

WHEN THE DUKE arrived, the city consisted of the fortress and a few permanent structures on the flat slope known as the Mound, which at the time lacked outer walls. The rest was little more than a large army camp for the soldiers who constituted the Queen's eastern army division in the war against clans Jezora and Karohar. Today's Ravenia really started to emerge when Chieftain Haloban was defeated and the river Doudram's importance to the realm became clear, for trade and transportation of resources from the woods and mountains.

The collaboration between New Beretor and clan Vajvod has grown over the years, slowly but surely. Clansfolk are, of course, present in all major Ambrian settlements, but not in the numbers and with the natural integration which characterizes Ravenia. There might be some truth to the claim that large parts of the refugee camp in Yndaros could be emptied, if only Ravenia's barbarians would return to the woods and make room for honest, hard-working Ambrians. But neither the Queen nor her nephew seem to agree – the permit barbarians need to rent or buy property inside Ravenia's outer walls is likely nothing more than an attempt to appease the critics – not least the Church's representatives, who claim that *"the evil of the wilds is taking over New Beretor."*

Overview

RAVENIA IS ONE of the Ambrian settlements that has grown the most in the last decade, if Barbarian Town is also taken into account. And it should be – the individuals living and working in the area do so without any particular restrictions. There are plenty of Ambrians there as well, especially after working hours, when it is time for people to eat, drink and socialize.

The rapid growth could for the most part be described as harmonic, but everyone who has been part of the effort can point to one shining exception. During High Priest Armanda's eight years of service, the population grew increasingly divided in their views of the Sun Church in general and the local sun temple in particular. She was quite open about detesting *"the Duke's indulgence toward barbarian cults and heretical idolatry,"* and her rhetoric hardened over time. It became more and more common for her sermons to focus on *"the contagious evil bred in barbarian bones, infecting the Ambrian spirit"* – a message that soon spread throughout the city and sparked anger in the populace; anger due to discontent in some cases, or self-righteous agreement in others.

But now Armanda's time has passed, and she left behind a city which in other respects is relatively well-off. Most of its inhabitants are employed, the crime rates are low, and the sun-priest who replaced her is much more tolerant of things that in other parts of the realm would immediately be considered heretical. Sure, there is some grumbling here and there, and yes, the districts inside the wall are characterized by a lifestyle much like the one in other Ambrian settlements, but overall Ravenia seems to be headed toward a bright future.

BARBARIAN TOWN

The district north of Ravenia's city walls currently has about five thousand permanent residents, living in log houses with one or, in rare cases, two floors. Its streets and alleys form a muddled maze, having emerged naturally as new buildings were constructed rather than as a result of careful planning. Also, there are plenty of public squares both large and small, all with their own fire pit around which people tend to gather after dark. The northernmost section comprises a campsite where guests can park their wagons or pitch their tents. This area is often occupied by up to a thousand people of the more adventurous professions – mostly merchants, explorers, and treasure hunters on their way to or from Davokar.

Newcomers will find that there always seems to be a reason to party, and should the reason not be so obvious, the residents simply come up with one. It should be noted that the feasts in Barbarian Town are different from those in Yndaros, Agrella or Thistle Hold. Sure, a lot of drink is

consumed, mostly in the form of softbrew and berry juice, but here the festivities are dominated by singing, music, wild tales, and the stilt dance practiced by clan Vajvod, which today can also be seen in other parts of the realm. And then, there is of course the food. Every other fire pit north of the wall is equipped with some form of stationary grilling apparatus, either grates or skewers. It is often the tavern owners who take turns managing the nearest fire pit, which gives rise to comparisons and discussions that sometimes go on for days. The Zarekian tavern known as the *Wild Game Grotto* near the West Gate and the Vajvod-run *Tharaban's Cellar* on Karvosti Plaza usually emerge victorious from such comparisons, even if the cook at the inn of the Enchanted Glade also has plenty of admirers.

Also worth mentioning are the ten ruins which over time have become part of the district's residential area, probably belonging to a larger settlement located here when the fortress was first raised. Most of them are no more than a wall section or a cellar that has been incorporated into the district's current buildings, such as the dungeons under the local City Watch station. However, there are two striking exceptions: a robust, quarter-spherical bleacher section which has been retrofitted and incorporated into what is now simply known as the Arena, and the towering ruin called the Daemon Temple.

NORTH TOWN

The buildings between the outer and inner walls are in many ways similar to those in other Ambrian cities. Roughly three thousand people are huddled together north of Ynedar Street, in houses whose lowest stories are made of stone, with one or two wooden ones stacked atop, often with bay windows or balconies casting shadows over the district's narrow streets.

Storage buildings line the riverbank. Most of the goods passing through the city are headed for Yndaros or Agrella, which is why the storage buildings mostly contain wares and materials produced in New Beretor. While moored boats are being loaded or unloaded, their crews take the opportunity to visit popular entertainment facilities such as the Masquerade and the River Hunter, both located just east of the storage buildings; some also spend the night at one of the district's inns, of which the Owl and Night and the Promised Land are thought to offer the best value for the money.

In North Town one also finds the Oval Plaza, where a market is held around the statue of the boy duke Ynedar in full armor, his sword raised in a victory gesture and his face turned toward the heavens of Prios. The plaza is surrounded by taverns and gambling dens, except for its south-western side which is dominated by the Great Sun Temple.

The area east of the plaza is the city's most important artisan district. It is also the home of many of the barbarians who have been granted residency inside the outer wall, or who settled there before the permit application system was implemented. It is said that among these barbarian residents, two of the city's most infamous criminal elements are hiding: the smuggler known as Black Bear, and the members of the blood cult which, at monthly intervals, leave behind blood-drained bodies in public places.

The existence of Black Bear and the cult – commonly known as the Midnight Men, the Bloodsuckers, or the Starved – has not yet been proven; to outsiders they can easily be perceived as tall tales and delusional fantasies, rather than actual people. But then again, the highly corrupted smuggled goods sometimes encountered in the city or on passing vessels, and the nine bloodless bodies with ripped-off tongues that so far have been found, are all painfully real...

SOUTH TOWN

The districts west of the Mound are occupied by a thousand of the city's wealthier residents. Many of them have come from other parts of the realm, often lowborn nobles aiming to profit from Ravenia's advantageous position on the trade routes between the mountains and eastern Davokar on the one hand, and cities like Yndaros, Agrella and Mergile on the other.

Another group is composed of successful, retired explorers who feel at home among Ravenia's relatively tolerant and diverse population. The explorer of Bargoalg's burial ground, Anelea Boldheart, and Orleo the Plunderer who first discovered Haganor, even found their spouses among the clansfolk; others simply seem to prefer the barbarian way of life over the Ambrian one.

The Octagon, the district's public square, is where one finds the city's finest taverns. The owner of the *Crab and Shrimp*, Master Alsgalm, is renowned, even in Yndaros, for his traditional Ambrian seafood dishes; the same can be said of Chefs Pero and Larso at *Tandem* – a tavern specializing in finger food such as cheeses, sausages, canapés and (allegedly) sixty-three types of cold cuts. The Octagon is also where Master Tailor Norlio has his workshop, known for making the most exclusive explorer's apparel in the realm; highly durable and practical, to be sure, but nevertheless disliked by many explorers and fortune hunters, who associate such apparel with affluent individuals who, in their opinion, should never set foot in the forests.

THE MOUND

Roughly three hundred souls have the privilege of living inside the walls of the Mound, in what is also known as Old Ravenia, even though there is hardly a single building more than twelve years old. The nickname refers to the fact that the entirety of the Duke's city initially fit within the space. Since year 14, the city has grown explosively; a growth which in large part is due to migrant workers from Vajvod,



1. The Raft Camp
2. Old Sun Temple
3. Great Sun Temple
4. Chapel of the Young Gods
5. Barbarity
6. Vajvod's Envoy
7. Daemon Temple
8. Ordo Magica
9. The Enchanted Glade
10. The River Hunter
11. Light House
12. The Promised Land
13. The Chieftain's Axe
14. Karvosti
15. The Crab and Shrimp
16. The Masquerade
17. Master Tailor Norlio
18. The Octagon
19. The Oval Plaza
20. City Watch Offices
21. Tandem
22. Tharaban's Cellar
23. The Hawser
24. Weary Legs
25. The Owl and Night
26. The Wanderer's Staff
27. The Wild Game Grotto
28. Ynedar Street
29. High Priest Residence
30. Fortress

ADVENTURE LOCATIONS

A. Blue Moon Storage
B. Galeia's Trading House
C. Ombardo's home
D. The Ruin
E. City Watch HQ
F. Yarmar's home



Odaiova and Karohar, who decided to stay and thus formed the groundwork for what is today known as Barbarian Town.

The district closest to the fortress is home to the city's most influential individuals – in addition to the Duke himself, there is the highly regarded Commander Burlio of the City Watch, the aged but still very capable Field Marshal Eliana, Chapter Master Leviana of Ordo Magica, and a handful of wealthy merchants. The Sun Church also owns a villa in the area, intended for the city's High Priest, while another two houses are available for nobles who for one reason or another have decided to visit the duchy's principal city. Last, but far from least, is the large, enclosed property which the Duke has allocated to clan Vajvod's envoy and her aides. The envoy is none other than Molgara, daughter of Chieftain Zoltar, and hardly a day goes by without one overhearing, or partaking in, a discussion about the probability of her soon becoming the duchess of New Beretor.

The Mound is guarded by a force of thirty battle-hardened soldiers (former **officers**, page 198 of the *Bestiary*) who, in three shifts, take turns patrolling the area, manning walls and gates, and resting. There is also Ynedar's personal bodyguard, consisting of four minor nobles (**lord or lady**, page 177 of the *Bestiary*), each with a lowborn girl or boy acting as **squire** (same page). Aside from all this (and the forty or so men and women of the City Watch), the duchy's standing army, including the Duke's personal regiment commanded by Elna Parfas, are garrisoned in Melion and Starak. This is because it is assumed that any future threats to New Beretor will arrive from the forest.

The Murder at Cliff

The competition between Tona and Anabelora has driven them to lower their prices to such an extent that Cliff is starting to have a negative effect on trade in Ravenia. The murder of Karal was orchestrated by a secret society of merchants from the Duke's city, to fuel the conflict between the two families. An assassin called the Noose was hired to kill the victim and plant false evidence to frame Tona's goons.

SURROUNDINGS

Almost a hundred and fifty thousand citizens can call Ynedar Kohinoor their duke, a fifth of whom are based in the royally controlled region surrounding Ravenia. Like in the rest of the realm, an overwhelming majority of the population are farmers, stockbreeders, or both.

Three larger villages are worth mentioning. Aram's Isthmus is located on the bank of the river Rava, about halfway between Ravenia and the barony of Parfas. The village strongman, fisherman Romar, also known as the Whopper, stands accused of supporting, harboring and possibly even leading the robbers who sporadically attack transports along, and on, the river. But since he has not yet been arrested, it is probably a lie; unless he is extremely good at hiding the truth from the Duke's agents.

About the same distance north along the Doudram lies Cliff. The village is controlled by two merchant families, led by matriarchs Tona and Anabelora. Each family runs its own inn, brothel, and trading house – each attempting to lure travelers from the river who would prefer to avoid Ravenia's crowded berths. The competition between the

families is ruthless and manifests itself in sabotage, public allegations, and sometimes outright fist fights. The situation could be getting out of hand, since Anabelora's oldest son has been found murdered. Aunt Tona swears that her family is innocent, but unless another perpetrator can be identified, such assurances will probably fall on deaf, furiously blushing ears.

Last but not least, there is the village which has formed near the Duke's own estate, located a slow three-hour ride from Ravenia, on the way to Baroness Eloria Mirelgo's seat. The village is called Ynedar's Legacy and is really only known for one thing: the largest mass burning in Ambria's brief history. It was the Black Cloaks (along with the Royal Sekretorium, according to some) who three years ago uncovered an underground temple dedicated to the Hostess, or more specifically, one of her forms known as the Lover. Nearly fifty people were caught committing *"unspeakable acts in a sickening manner for three days,"* most of them having come from Ynedar's Legacy, others from Ravenia or its surrounding countryside.

Rumor even has it that the Duke himself was there, but that he managed to escape before the Black Cloak's cultist hunters, the Whip of Prios, raided the temple, or that he was captured but spared the fire because of his rank.

Adventure Locations

THE PLACES, PEOPLE, and establishments described below are all likely to appear in the adventure *What's Bred in the Bone*. As Gamemaster, you have every right to come up with additional locations and develop Ravenia into a dynamic city, full of color and contrast. Of course, you must also be prepared to improvise based on the players' whims and the resulting choices and strategies of their characters.

1. THE RAFT CAMP

No bridge has yet been built over the almost hundred-meter-wide Rivers Doudram or Rava. Plans have been made, and bridgeheads are currently being installed where Doudram narrows, roughly a kilometer north of Ravenia, but for now, the two raft-like, hand-pulled ferries passing back and forth across the river will have to suffice.

People must often wait in line, at least those traveling with one or two wagons, and many pass the time at one of the two nearby taverns: the Hawser and the Wanderer's Staff – the former located at the western raft camp, the latter on the city side. On the west side one also finds an inn called Weary Legs and a growing number of storage buildings, for those who do not need to store their goods on the east side.

The trip across the river is a slow one; even though the operators work themselves into a soaking sweat, it usually takes a quarter hour, at least when the currents of Doudram are strong. The fee is only meant to pay the wages of the twelve workers, and is therefore as low as an orteg per creature (person or animal) and a shilling per wagon (regardless of size).

2. THE OLD SUN TEMPLE

The small temple at the Mound is only ever visited by nobles, for social reasons as much as religious ones. It was completed in year 9, and its only liturg at the time is still the only priest there, elderly Father Manos. Old age makes it difficult for him to walk, and has recently started affecting his speech, memory, and his mental faculties in general, but the visitors do not mind. The current conflicts within the Sun Church do not bother him; all Father Manos cares about is the welfare of his flock.

3. THE GREAT SUN TEMPLE

The holy building which almost everyone simply calls the Temple has since year 13 been the Sun Church's seat in Ravenia – this is where the High Priest works and delegations and missionaries come from other parts of the realm to visit. Mass is held every night at sundown, but the doors are open throughout the day to those in need of advice, healing, or help to ease the pain of a tortured soul.

With Armanda dead, the Great Sun Temple is entirely dominated by priests and initiates aligned with the Reformists. High Priest Leandro, and liturgs Sondro and Torun (barbarian) are, along with their brothers and sisters, determined to regain the people's trust; they can still be met at the temple, but also spend lots of time among the residents of Barbarian Town. This is of course upsetting Loyalist worshipers of Prios all over the realm, but there is no indication that the Queen or her nephew have any intention of intervening. It may be that they are in fact silently supporting the Reformation. Perhaps a group of the Lawgiver's true believers will soon make reality of the loose assertion that when authorities are powerless to combat evil, the people must rise up against all who threaten to plunge the world into the darkness of the Eternal Night...

4. THE CHAPEL OF THE YOUNG GODS

The fact that the Chapel of the Young Gods exists and operates in Barbarian Town is an open secret. It was established four years ago by a group of Vajvods who had taken a liking to the Young Gods – a pantheon they could easily identify with after having lived in Davokar. What almost nobody knows is that this liking arose after a series of very secret prayer sessions with the sun priest Father Ombardo.

The former seamstress Torga is the informal head of the chapel, but it has no actual priests. Instead, everyone is regarded as equal when it comes to interpreting the message,

will, and desires of the Young Gods; the visitors help each other find ways to deal with the hardships and problems of everyday life, guided by the icons in the chapel's seven alcoves – paintings of the Lifegiver, Earthmother, Executioner, Pathfinder, Wildling, Guardian, and Hostess.

All are welcome to visit the Chapel. It is not difficult to find, even though the building lacks any outward signs of being a holy place. Everyone in Barbarian Town knows where the chapel is, as do most of the people living in Ravenia – including all the city's watchmen and sun priests. The building usually has between five and twenty visitors at any time, crouching in the alcoves of the gods or sitting at the chapel's table, talking and drinking honeyed herbal water.

5. BARBARITY

Rarely has an establishment had a more misleading name than the Barbarity Inn. Well, obviously that depends on who you are asking. Clanfolk may very well associate the word with the quiet conviviality which characterizes evenings at the tavern, but many Ambrian visitors are likely to expect something else entirely. In any case, the Ambrian owners, spouses, Doralg and Moira, and their motley crew of regulars are doing their best to make *Barbarity* feel friendly and welcoming, rather than drunkenly rowdy. Guests who do not act accordingly soon find themselves shoved into the streets by a very determined mob.

A night at *Barbarity* costs two shilling per person, regardless of whether it is spent in the dormitory or in one of the seven four-bed rooms, but then a steady breakfast of porridge is included in the price. The food is simple but well-cooked, and every day there are at least two traditional Ambrian dishes and two more rustic ones to choose from. Thirsty customers can also (besides berry juice and soft drinks) order stut as well as various forms of veloum and vesa.

BARBARITY PRICES

Menu Item	Price
Mutton pâté with yellow beets	5 shillings
Roasted muskrat with sauerkraut cream	6 shillings
Mix of roasted nuts	4 ortegs
Tankard Duke's Relief	1 shilling
Tankard of Veloum	2 shillings

6. CLAN VAJVOD'S ENVOY

The chieftain's daughter Molgara is the head of what the Ambrians would call a Legation – a diplomatic office representing Zoltar's interests in terms of trade, politics and security. But in this case the envoy has assumed a more important role, partly at the request of the High Chieftain, who is both informed about and interested in Ravenia's development. Molgara's staff keeps a record of all barbarians, regardless of clan affiliation, who choose to take up residence in the Duke's city. They also do their best to help everyone who comes to them with various problems, whether they are hunted, exiled or simply financially destitute.

In addition to the residence where the staff live and work, there are a number of buildings on the enclosed lot. The most notable of them is the Vajvod Tower which, at almost twenty meters tall, rivals the Fortress' battlements in height despite being positioned a bit downhill. From its top, one can see all the way to the edge of Davokar, but above all, one has a clear view of Barbarian Town and its inhabitants. On the lot there is also a stone house, where Chieftain Zoltar stays during his increasingly infrequent visits to Ravenia, as well as two smaller guest houses and a storage building. Persistent rumors suggest that the latter is full of valuables – among other things a collection of artifacts salvaged from Symbarian ruins, waiting to be presented as gifts to Ambrian dignitaries. Such tales have no doubt tempted many thieves through the years...

7. THE DAEMON TEMPLE

At almost the exact center of Barbarian Town lies an unusually well-preserved ruin with so many nicknames one might think that people hold it dear. They are not names of endearment, however, but of fear – names like the Daemon Temple, the Night Cradle, the Blight Gate, or simply the Abomination.

It is a 75 × 150 foot rectangle of thick, dark gray stone columns, standing on an equally gray-black, yard-high foundation which is shaded by a massive roof of the same material. The stone must once have been smooth and polished, and apart from certain cracks and cavities, it seems to have withstood the gnawing teeth of time quite well; perhaps unnaturally so. The floor between the columns is perpetually covered with trash and debris; peeking between the columns, one can also see a structure rising above the flat surface: a cube of what seems to be gray-streaked stone, polished to a shine and as tall as a grown goblin.

Anyone who sets foot on the elevated floor experiences a chilling shiver along with strong feelings of unease; the person must pass a **DC 10 Constitution saving throw** every minute, or suffer 1d4 temporary Corruption. Exactly what causes said effect is subject to Master Engurst's studies, but since he refuses to discuss the matter before having obtained *"irrefutable knowledge,"* everyone else must make do with speculation. What is clear, however, is that everyone keeps their distance from the ruin, and that it is assumed to be the source of all inexplicable sounds heard across Barbarian Town, especially if they are considered scary and occur at night. This, combined with the rumor that anyone who stares long enough at the cube of the Daemon Temple can see it quiver, is enough to haunt the dreams of children and adults alike...

8. ORDO MAGICA

Ordo Magica's chapter in Ravenia is small for being in the principal city of a duchy. The reason for this is a combination of the city being situated quite far away from both Davokar and interesting mountain regions, and the local nobles having other priorities than making donations to Ordo Magica. The largest chapter in New Beretor is actually found in Miel, the provincial capital of County Melion.

But this is of little concern to Ravenia's two Order Masters. Master Engurst receives funding from the Queen, the Duke, and Ordo Magica's leadership to study the Daemon Temple; enough to engage two adepts, two senior magistrates, five novices, and all the daythalers who are needed from time to time (for instance, if he decides to implement his plan to have a tunnel dug under the ruin's foundation).

Levania is usually so busy with her job as Chapter Master that she never has time for any research, but perhaps she will request to be transferred when she finally decides to go through with the expedition of her dreams – to the Cobalt Temple; the Azure Temple's legendary sister on the other side of the Ravens. Until then, she spends most of her time teaching basic pyromancy and fulfilling the chapter's duties toward the city's authorities and people in need.

Shadows of the Flame

The first act of the adventure deals with the player characters' initial investigations into the two murders by fire, and concludes with a surprise attack when they have entered the Chapel of the Young Gods. The players may choose what to investigate, and in what order, but all roads eventually lead to the chapel and the insight that the motives of the killer are most likely linked to conflicts within the Sun Church.

Game Opening

REGARDLESS OF WHAT entry point the Gamemaster chooses for the adventure (see *Incentives* on page 157), it should begin with the player characters trying to understand exactly what has happened. They arrive, or are already situated, in Ravenia, preparing to celebrate the founding of the duchy. It is clear that the inhabitants have mixed feelings – it is not unusual for people to die in the city, or be murdered, but the events of the past weeks have shaken visitors and residents alike.

The most widespread theory is that the three murders are linked and the two burnings were reprisals for High Priest Armanda's death. The great concern is primarily caused by two circumstances: that one of the burned victims was yet another sun priest, and the feeling that this is simply the beginning of something bigger, something related to conflicts that the people of Ravenia have not been affected by thus far – the conflict between Ambrians and barbarians, and the notorious schism within the Church of Prios.

Alternative Holiday

Depending on what time of year the Gamemaster wants the adventure to take place, the founding of the duchy may not seem like an appropriate holiday. In that case, it could be replaced by the Duke's birthday, the commemoration of an important battle against clans Jezora or Karohar, or the signing of a treaty between New Beretor and Chieftain Zoltar of Vajvod.

In other words, it is an unusually quiet and serious crowd that prepares the Oval Plaza, the Octagon, and Karvosti (the large plaza in Barbarian Town) for the day's festivities – long tables are brought and set out; pennant strings in yellow, green and red are put up between the buildings; song and dance groups are rehearsing, and scenes or podiums are being built for the evening's plays and speeches. Most people are especially looking forward to the Duke's speech, but not with their usual, unreservedly positive expectations. The question of the day is whether Ynedar Kohinoor will be able to dispel the growing fear, or simply make things worse.

The openings suggested below are based on the assumption that the player characters have come to Ravenia in response to a letter, addressed to them or to their quest giver/faction leader. If some other premise seems more appropriate for your particular gaming group, certain adjustments will have to be made; what matters is that the information the Commander has to offer somehow reaches the player characters.

THE DEATH OF THE HUNTED

The player characters reach Ravenia at dawn, along the river or some country road, depending on where they were when they decided to help Father Ombardo. Presumably, they begin by asking around for the priest's address, but whoever they ask, they are met with a surprised look and a question: *"Why do you ask? Have you not heard? He is dead. Burned to death."*

The characters might insist on knowing where the priest lived. If so, they are pointed toward a narrow, two-story building in the eastern part of North Town, right next to the wall. The window to the left of the door is boarded up, and its frame is scorched and sooty at the top, as if damaged by fire.

Getting in is not a problem, but there are lots of people moving around, so unless the characters are very careful someone will probably alert the City Watch – a patrol of four bold soldiers will then arrive within five minutes, demanding to know what is going on, and taking them to their headquarters by the Octagon.

An encounter with the city's law enforcement notwithstanding, there is little to see in the house. If they have time for a thorough investigation, the Gamemaster can have a look at the section titled *The Priest's Home* (page 169); if the City Watch is on its way, the characters do not have time to see more than the charred floor and window boards which reveal how the house's owner met his demise.

THE COMMANDER

Whether they are escorted by grim-faced watchmen or ask around for someone who knows more about Father Ombardo's death does not matter: they will soon end up at the City Watch's headquarters in South Town, where Commander Burlio is waiting.

First they meet Captain Ealna who refuses to answer any questions – she does not want, nor is she authorized, to share any information with outsiders, especially not in this case. It takes good arguments and a successful **DC 17 Charisma (Persuasion) check** to make her agree to bother the Commander. Ombardo's letter or Contacts within a suitable faction add +1 to the check, +3 if the group is in possession of both.

Shortly after the first murder, Commander Burlio was told that the Duke wished to assume personal control over the investigation; the City Watch was ordered to stay out of it or be ready to assist the Duke's agents if called for. Burlio has still not heard a thing about the progress of the investigation, which is why he begins to suspect that something is up, possibly a cover-up at work. He is very keen to keep digging into the case, but is prohibited from doing so himself. Perhaps the characters could do it for him?

The Commander greets them in his office; two characters are invited to sit on the chairs in front of the table, while the others must remain standing. At first he is rather quiet, and asks his guests to tell him about **a)** their errand, **b)** what they want, and **c)** what they plan to do. As long as they appear somewhat reasonable, he has the following to say about the murders:

- Formally he cannot talk about or investigate what happened to Ombardo and Yarmar; the case is handled directly by the Duke and his agents, due to its *"sensitive nature."*
- He does not know what progress has been made or what has been learned, which clearly irritates him: *"You would think that our duke would want to make good use of my Captain Ealna's expertise in cases such as this, but no. I haven't heard a word."*
- If the player characters want to help the Duke, neither Burlio nor his guards will stand in their way, but he does not have much information to offer.



Burlio thought life would be better if he rose through the ranks. It is dawning on him that he was wrong.

- Father Ombardo had long been Duke Ynedar's personal priest, and was liked by everyone. That someone first assaulted the man, and then burned him to death, makes absolutely no sense at all.
- Perhaps there is a connection with the burglary which Ombardo reported the day before his death. Nothing was stolen, but it is hardly a coincidence: perhaps the thieves returned because they had not found what they were looking for?
- The witch Yarmar does not seem to be a very likely murder victim either – nice, sociable and helpful, according to his neighbors and friends. Sure, a complaint was filed against him roughly a year ago; someone who claimed that he was selling useless, fake elixirs. But it could never be proven.
- Both were burned to death in their homes – Ombardo in the eastern part of North Town, Yarmar in a log house near Karvosti Plaza. There were clear signs (pinch marks, scratches, and cuts) that they had been tortured before being set ablaze, probably in search of information.

That is all the Commander has to say for now; he cannot write them a letter of safe conduct or anything like that, since he is not officially on the case. But if the player characters ask specific questions, they may be able to extract more interesting details regarding subjects related to the murders. This can happen at their first meeting or later on, based on what they discover over the course of the adventure.

Furthermore, both Burlio and Captain Ealna can be used to help the characters if their investigation flounders, either when they first meet at the headquarters or by having them seek out the characters to receive status updates.

Other recent reports of burglaries?

- After a trip to the archives, Burlio can inform the characters that ten burglaries have been reported during the past month, including the one at Father Ombardo's house. In five cases the culprits were caught (common thieves), in three of the unsolved ones only loose valuables were stolen, but the last two may be of interest.
- Three weeks ago, the trading house Galeia reported a burglary – nothing was stolen, and the only things touched were the accounting ledgers; perhaps they had been studied or copied?
- Only the day before the characters began their investigations, Molgara, Clan Vajvod's envoy in the city and daughter of Chieftain Zoltar, reported that her office wing had been robbed of valuables and its archives searched.

The murder of First Theurg Armanda

- Armanda's murder also ended up on the Duke's table, but Burlio had time to inspect the crime scene before the City Watch was ordered to focus on other matters.

The Whip of Prios

At some point during the initial investigations, the characters should witness the Whip of Prios' arrival in Ravenia, perhaps on their way between some of the places they are investigating. Sister Malina and the four agents who are always by her side arrive in a carriage, cross the River Doudram on a raft, and continue through the streets toward the fortress, via the Oval Plaza. The symbol of the Whip of Prios is seen on the carriage doors and on the coats of the driver and the two mounted agents, Theurg Aldoro and Sun Knight Emelia Dardall – the former's face covered by a golden sun mask, the latter's by a shining great helm.

- The High Priestess lay dead in her bed, in a bedroom where the door and all the windows were bolted from the inside.
- The corpse was not a pretty sight, partially devoured from within by gluttonous larvae.
- In the short time that Captain Ealna had to examine the room, she saw no damage to its door or windows; however, there were boot prints on the rug by the end of the bed – and only there.

AUDIENCE WITH THE DUKE

It is not entirely unlikely that the player characters will try to gain an audience with Duke Ynedar. To be allowed through the gates of the Mound, they must state their business in a way which the gatekeeper will accept – to seek an audience with the Duke or check into the famously exquisite inn of the Queen's Crown is acceptable; to "have a look around" is not.

They must then get past the fortress walls, which is not as easily done. The guard captain will not let anyone through who has not been invited. The characters are told to state their names and their purpose for wanting to meet with the duchy's regent, after which they are ordered to await a decision from the fortress. It might take a while, so unless they want to loiter by the gate, the answer can be sent to their inn or some similar establishment.

The response will most likely be a clear and unequivocal "*no*" – the Duke is busy, and it will be two or three weeks before he has time to see them. But if the characters explicitly state that they wish to contribute to the investigation of the two murders, and/or one of the characters is an influential person with contacts among the nobles or within the army, they are granted an audience. Not with Ynedar himself, however, but with his adjutant Belalia, former Captain in New Beretor's infantry.

The adjutant welcomes them into the building closest to the right just inside the gate, a simple building where simple



With time, Belalia has learned to unnoticeably control her Lord; in many respects, she is the true ruler.

visitors, with no errands to the fortress, are received. After going through a narrow hallway where guests are expected to leave their coats and weapons, they enter a salon dominated by a long, dark table flanked by bench seats and set with a tray of dried fruit, nuts and smoked meat. The adjutant will take the characters' drink orders as soon as they have seated themselves.

It soon turns out to be an interrogation, rather than a meeting. Belalia questions them about who they are, why they have come to Ravenia, and also wants to know why they have taken an interest in the "*deaths*" (she does not call them murders). She will not answer any questions. When she has been told all she needs to know, Belalia concludes the conversation with a request which, due to her tone of voice, sounds more like an order:

"*The two* (possibly "*three*" if the High Priestess is also mentioned) *deaths we are now discussing must be handled with great discretion, in light of the unique circumstances which exist here in New Beretor. I must therefore ask you to leave the investigation to the Duke, who is doing everything in his power to shed light on what happened – this I assure you. Stay in Ravenia, by all means, but engage in entertainment, rest and other activities which do not risk exacerbating an already difficult situation. Farewell.*"

Murders & Burglary

BASED ON WHAT is learned about the murders during the game opening, there are a handful of leads to follow up on. To progress to the second act of the adventure, the characters only need information from three of these, while inquiries into the burglary at the trading house Galeia and the death of the former High Priest merely add to the intrigue.

THE PRIEST'S HOME

As mentioned earlier, Ombardo's house is located near the wall in the eastern district of North Town. The narrow two-story building has a single room on the bottom floor (library and study), with a bed chamber and a kitchen/dining hall on the second.

There is nothing to find up there, and the bottom floor also seems more or less cleaned out after someone (the Duke's agents) emptied all the bookshelves, drawers and filing cabinets. But if the player characters keep at it, they may uncover the following information:

A successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check** with the Shadow-sight feature by someone entering the room on the bottom floor produces the following vision: "*The shadow of a man sits tied to a simple armchair in the spot where the floor and walls are now charred and black; a silver-shimmering liquid flows over him, soon covering him from head to toe; the shadow remains defiantly motionless, even as the liquid flares up with a blinding light.*"

If the check succeeds with a difference of 5 or more, the psychic can also detect a chanting song surrounding the scene. It is a well-known hymn to Prios called *The Apostles of Light*, composed by First Father Jeseebegai himself when he first arrived in Ambria. But whether the song comes from the victim or the killers remains unclear.

The spell *tale of ashes* performed at the place where Ombardo was burned: The vision starts just as an oil-drenched Ombardo catches fire; four figures dressed in inconspicuous gray and brown clothes pause to watch the fire blaze – three with their faces covered by hoods, the forth a grim man in his fifties with grizzled hair and a large, hooked nose. The latter (Brother Galdam) makes the sun sign before they all leave the scene with great haste.

A successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation) check** aimed at the pile of blank paper sheets lying on the pulpit: Indentations in the top sheet should make it possible to recreate the last text written by Ombardo, by scraping a bit of charcoal back and forth across the surface. If the characters do just that, the following passage appears, ending abruptly with the arrival of the murderers (a handout of Ombardos notes can be found on page 210):

The Sun Sign

The gesture known as the sun sign, with which all worshipers of Prios end their prayers, salute senior priests and theurgs, and bolster themselves in times of danger, has remained unchanged for centuries: an open hand with extended fingers is held straight up toward the sky and then moved to one's face, then to the heart with the palm facing inwards. The same sign is used by the Church of Dead Prios, but with a closed fist.

"Yet another beautiful day under the radiant face of the Lifegiver. Perhaps my fears are unfounded? A day like this, when the light of life shines strong and bright, should expose all shadows in Sola's pastures, even those made flesh and set into action. But I have seen nothing, except the darkness I already know.

We ventured a visit to the chapel again, both my friend and I disguised as wanderers, our faces hidden in deep hoods. We received a warm welcome from the congregation, who undoubtedly know us by name and position but nevertheless play along with our charade. We are both delighted to see the warmth of the chapel spread thro"

THE WITCH'S SISTER

The man-witch Yarmar lived with his sister in a newly built log house in the northernmost part of Barbarian Town. Their home was so ravaged by fire that only its framework remains; the sister, Yara, is still in a state of paralyzed shock and grief, and has been taken in by a neighboring family – something the characters can easily find out by asking around.

At first the neighbors are suspicious and defensive, but if the characters seem honest and say that they wish to investigate Yarmar's death using a **DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) check**; the family may let one of them in, provided that any weapons are left outside. Yara is curled up in the fetal position on the kitchen couch, under several layers of blankets, motionless and mute.

It takes a delicate touch and a fair bit of patience to wake the woman from her apathetic state. But Yara really wants to see justice done, and if the player characters manage to convince her that the Duke might have political reasons for not wanting to dig too deep into the torture and burning of her brother, she will start to listen, and soon answer questions as well – but without ever moving or taking her eyes off the wall behind the backrest of the couch.

This is what Yara has to say, though not necessarily in the following order, as her information is governed by what questions the player characters are asking.

- Her brother was a witch, but also young, and had not been taught very long before their settlement on the border between clans Vajvod and Karohar was destroyed – *"by a huge, many-armed, terrifying creature of ice and darkness, devouring everything and everyone, except myself and Yarmar."* (i.e. a **primal blight beast**).
- Yarmar was a decent and well-liked man; no one had reason to hate him, let alone kill him. He offered his services where he was needed, sometimes for money, sometimes just to help. Mostly physical labor, but he was a competent healer as well.
- He had long felt a yearning to return to Davokar, but less than a moon ago his mood changed. He claimed to have met a Greenweaver who was willing to lead him further down the green path.
- Since then he was consumed by religious questions, almost euphorically so. He constantly wanted to discuss the similarities between the gods which Ambrians venerated before their Great War, and the gods worshiped by the clanfolk. Yara let him talk, but never paid much attention, which she now regrets.

That is all Yara has to offer, and if the player characters perform the spell *tale of ashes* inside her burnt-down home, it produces a vision very similar to the one in Ombardo's library.

VAJVOD'S ENVOY

On an enclosed plot of land just east of the Old Sun Temple stands the buildings belonging to Clan Vajvod and its envoy, the chieftain's daughter Molgara. The main villa is of Ambrian design, except that it consists of one elongated floor rather than several smaller ones. The other buildings are all log houses with sod roofs, except for the tower south of the residence, which rises roughly twenty meters into the air – tall enough to see, weather permitting, all the way to the edge of Davokar.

Since the Duke and his underlings have not yet found any connection between the burglary of the envoy's home and the recent murders, no one has so far put a gag on Molgara. The player characters may therefore be granted an audience, as long as they present their errand in a way that stirs the envoy's curiosity – either that they know something about the burglary or suspect there is a connection between the burglary and the recent murders.

In such a case, the axe-and-shield-wielding soldiers of the envoy's personal guard will escort them to the residence's southern entrance, where Molgara is already waiting. She offers them something to drink and invites them to sit down on the beamon pelts laid out on the floor. Naturally, she wants to know who they are and what they are up to, but understands if there are certain questions they cannot, or will not, answer. She is happy to help them in any way she can, if it could ultimately lead to the burglars being caught and her three missing books returned.

This is what she has to say:

- The night before the start of the adventure, someone (or several people) got over the fence and into her residence. Neither the City Watch nor her own people have found any trace or leads.
- The thieves ran off with a lot of valuables – mostly trinkets of silver and gold – but also left many valuable items behind, probably because they were in a hurry.
- They also raided her archives, pulling books and scrolls from the shelves, many of which were knocked down.
- At first she assumed the thieves had thought that her archives contained some kind of hidden compartment for precious items, but now that the room has been cleaned and its content listed, three books seem to be missing:

1. The latest report on the trade in Vajvod goods on the markets of Ravenia.
2. A report on the number of people visiting the Chapel of the Young Gods in Barbarian Town.
3. A record of members from other clans who have moved to Ravenia, on a more or less permanent basis, in the past three years.

The second of these is obviously interesting to the characters, since it can make other pieces of information fall into place. But it was the third one that the Black Cloaks wanted the most, as it (among other things) lists Algaya's arrival and that she is a witch of clan Karohar...

GALEIA'S TRADING HOUSE

The manager Eberio and his staff of four occupy the third floor of a building near the South Harbor. That is also where they were burgled, roughly three weeks ago. The business is run from the capital, which makes Eberio more of a steward and administrator than a captain of industry. But whenever he introduces himself, it sounds more like he is the man who both owns and runs Master Laguboi's company.

The City Watch dropped the investigation long ago, which is why the manager is very happy to see the player characters, if only to complain about Captain Ealna's incompetence and Commander Burlio's lenience toward the local trading houses. Eberio is convinced that a coalition of minor competitors are bent on outdoing Galeia in terms of trade along the river Doudram, particularly trade in pelts, antlers and meat from clan Vajvod. The truth, however, is something quite different (see the text box *The Curse of Greed*).

Anyway, it should become clear that this burglary has nothing to do with the murders. If the player characters give a competent impression, Eberio might offer them the job of investigating the incident, but that becomes a whole different story (which must be created entirely by the Gamemaster).

THE HIGH PRIESTESS' DEATH

The murder of Armanda is not easily investigated. However, there are two people who knew her well and can provide some illuminating information.

Armanda lived in one of the Mound's most beautiful residences, which is now being inventoried. Some of the inventory will be sold, some shipped to the High Priestess' sister in Kurun. One of the people doing the cataloging and appraising is an elegant lady named Joral – the late High Priestess' chambermaid. She does not mind sharing the observations she has made on her mistress' death:

- Lady Armanda was as pious as one can be; she loved Prios more than anything, and was zealous about making the most of His gifts – something she demanded from her servants as well. It was important to take pleasure in life, but also to show gratitude while doing so.
- A successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check** reveals that she is holding back. If the characters then pass a **DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check**, she tells them the whole truth: *"Well, the Mistress may have had a... less charming side; she could be cruel as well as ruthless, even greedy at times, but only because she knew better than anybody how the gifts of Prios must be managed and... enjoyed."*
- In recent times, Armanda had been unusually cheerful, humorous even, especially during the week leading up to her death. She did not say why, but often insinuated that her future and that of her staff was looking very bright indeed; that she had won a great victory for the Lawgiver, and that he would surely grace her with his favor.
- On the night of the murder, Joral awoke to terrible screams, or rather howls of pain, coming from the Mistress' bedchamber. She rushed over there, but the door was (for once) bolted from the inside. The screams continued, but she heard something else as well – a deep, coarse chuckle, followed by what sounded like a short hymn sung in the barbarian tongue.
- When other servants came to help, and they finally got the door open, the screams had long since stopped. There was an awful stench inside. Moreover, Joral can confirm the Commander's description of the corpse and the scene.

The Curse of Greed

Count Arnon Melion already controls more than half the trade on both the Doudram and the Rava, but that is not enough to satisfy him. He is the richest person in Ambria, but his greed compels him to seek more – especially as he believes that his immense wealth will soon make him powerful enough to buy complete control over the entire kingdom, to remove all political leaders he does not like, dictate treaties and agreements, and even determine Ambria's relations with other realms. It was his agents who broke into the office building, precisely to study Galeia's ledgers in preparation of his pending rise to power.

The player characters do not really have time for this right now, but maybe the escalating conflict between New Beretor's trading houses (including the two at Cliff) could be the basis for future adventures? If so, three factions are bound to emerge: the Duke of Melion with his private army of sellswords; an alliance of Yndaros-based trading houses, aided by houses like Galeia, Vereo and Harl; and a coalition of less influential locals, supported by robber gangs and individual barbarian chieftains.

The player characters could also go to the Great Sun Temple to speak with its liturgs and initiates. As already stated, the new High Priest, Leandro, has been arrested by the Duke, allegedly for his suspected involvement in the two murders and the murder of his predecessor. Neither his deputy, liturg Sondro, nor the others at the temple (all of them aligned with the Reformists) think that Leandro was involved, though none of them mourn the former High Priestess' passing. Sondro is secretly convinced that the Duke also believes in Leandro's innocence, but keeps quiet about it so as not to expose Duke Ynedar's strong ties to the so-called "heretical" faction within the Sun Church.

The following information can be obtained by characters visiting the Great Sun Temple:

- First Theurg Armanda struggled with a dark past. She was always a servant of Prios, but war and violence left their mark on her soul.
- Her past deeds are presumably also the reason why she is now kneeling by the Sun God's side – the dark forces she had once fought finally caught up with her, and took their black revenge.
- Leandro is innocent, no doubt about it. It was the former High Priestess' attitude toward the clanfolk and their religion that caused tensions between Ambrians and barbarians. With Leandro in charge, Sondro hopes that relations between the Church and the two peoples will improve significantly – not that the new High Priest has any particular love for the clans in general, but because he understands that conversion can never be achieved by force.

The Chapel of the Young Gods

ON THE BASIS of the leads above (Ombardo mentioning a chapel, Yarmar's interest in the Ambrian and barbarian gods, and the stolen report on the Chapel of the Young Gods), the player characters surely have a clear idea of where they must go to learn more about the murders.

In addition to the earlier description (see page 164), it should be said that the chapel, as one of few buildings north of the outer wall, has an underground level that can be reached by a ground level stairway and an exterior cellar entrance. The cellar was dug mainly to provide an alternative route of escape, in case the authorities should decide to crack down on the "heretical cultists." But it has also served other purposes through the years, such as hiding fugitives whom the chapel-goers believe to be innocent. This is currently the case with the witch Algaya.

Chapel manager Torga and Algaya have both been warned by the Duke that a group of hostile Curia agents seems to be operating in town. Their intentions are not entirely clear, but most likely they have come to avenge First Theurg Armanda, and there is a significant risk that they will turn their attention to the Chapel. Torga does not know that Algaya did in fact commit the murder, but understands that the guest is in danger since she is a witch.

ARRIVING AT THE CHAPEL

This feast day, there are few visitors at the chapel. Torga is there of course, talking to a tall and handsome barbarian crying and sniffling himself into a shaking mess. There are also a couple of people squatting in the alcoves of the Hostess and the Executioner.

Torga looks up, visibly frightened. Provided that the player characters do not look like a group of heretic-hunting Black Cloaks, she soon relaxes and welcomes them with a nod. However, she does not abandon her attempt to comfort the sobbing visitor, at least not until the characters make it clear that they need to talk. At first she simply shakes her head, but if they insist, she leads the handsome young man, almost half a meter taller than her, to the Executioner's alcove and asks the woman sitting there to take care of him.

Exactly what the player characters will ask or tell her is hard to say, as it depends on what conclusions they think can be drawn from previous leads.

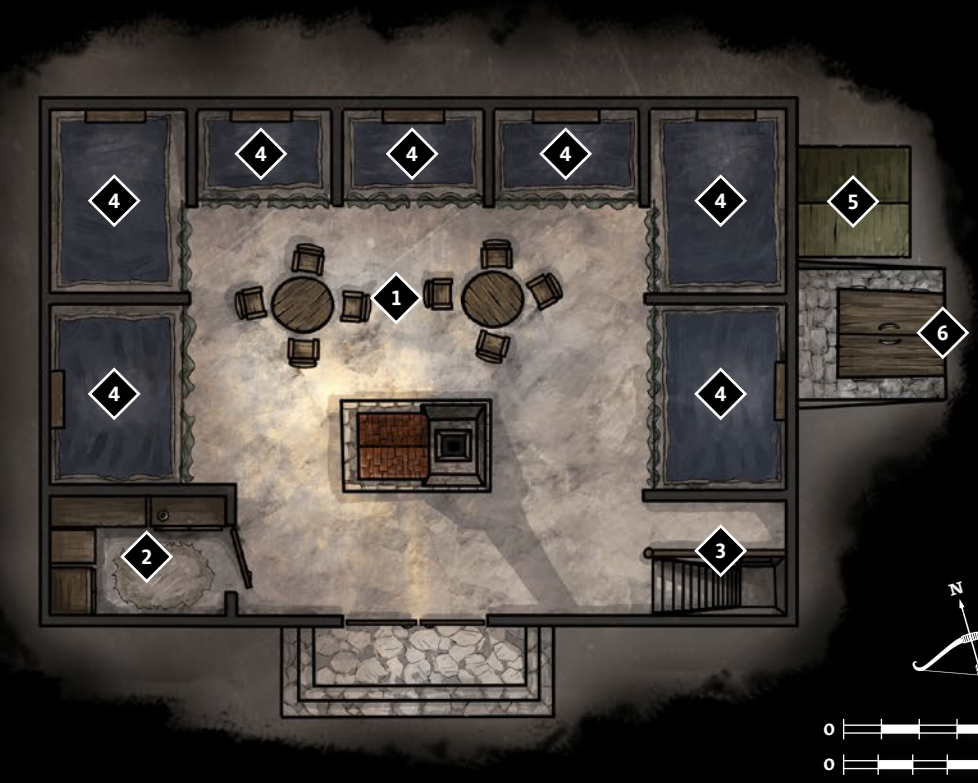
Torga does not know anything about the murders; she is happy to answer whatever questions she can, except that she does not comment on Ombardo and the Duke's frequent visits, or the guest in the cellar. To proceed, the characters must tell Torga enough for her to understand that there is a connection between the murders and the chapel, and possibly that the people responsible for the deaths could very well be a threat to her congregation.

The Gamemaster decides whether they manage to really alarm her. If they do, she asks them to wait and heads down into the cellar to inform (and question) Algaya about what she just heard.

CONVERSATION WITH ALGAYA

According to Algaya's agreement with the Duke, the witch is to protect her accomplice in the event that someone tracks her down, by simply never mentioning his involvement. She has no problem with this: the High Priestess was a vicious murderer, evil to the core of her being, and Algaya believes it was nothing less than her duty to avenge the friends and relatives Armanda helped slaughter. She is ready to face the consequences of her actions, should she ever be caught by the people chasing her.

When Torga tells her about the player characters, their questions and assertions, Algaya immediately asks her to fetch them. Her plan is, first and foremost, to confess to the murder of Armanda, so that these snoops will not





THE CHAPEL

1. Tables & chairs
2. Storeroom
3. Stairs down
4. Alcoves
5. Shed
6. Cellar Stairs
7. Stairs outside
8. Stair up
9. Secret Door
10. Algaya

investigate the matter any further. She then hopes they will prove to be reasonable people who can be convinced that the High Priestess deserved to die, and that her elimination was really a favor to Ravenia and the entire duchy. Should she succeed in convincing them, she also hopes that the characters will help her stop the avengers' advance; or possibly escort her to a new hideout in the city. On the other hand, if they cannot be convinced, she will try to escape, despite the risk of encountering the person (or people) pursuing her after leaving the hiding place.

The player characters are led down the stairs, through the desolate cellar, to what seems to be a brick wall. Their guide knocks hard on the wall, and before long the outline of a secret door emerges; Torga pauses for a moment before she pushes it open, steps aside, and gestures for the characters to enter.

The only light in the cramped, dark den behind the hidden door comes from an oil lamp, with a short, flickering wick, standing on a simple table just inside the doorway. At the far end of the room is a chair, on which a stooped, cloaked figure is sitting. The face is partially hidden behind pearl and feather decorated braids, hanging like a sparse drape from an embroidered headband. Before the characters have even lined up before her, the clear and steady voice of a woman says, in broken Ambrian: *"It was I who took the priestess' life."*

Depending on the player characters' questions, she can relate the following information:

- Until eight winters ago, Armanda took part in several massacres on Karits, Jezites, and other barbarians, in the hunt for people whom her Sun God had declared heretics and evildoers – that is, even after the Queen had won dominion over the plains.
- Algaya came to Ravenia five months ago. Two months have passed since she first saw the priestess and concluded she had to pay for her crimes against the clans.
- On the night of the murder, Algaya landed inside the bedroom wall in her raven form, bolted the door, and filled the sleeping victim's body with ravenous larvae. She left the same way she entered.
- She has heard of the other murders and admits that they might have been committed by someone looking for her – Yarmar was a witch and had recently (after much badgering) been accepted as her apprentice; Ombardo was a particularly clear-sighted sun priest who often visited the chapel, but whom she met only once, quite briefly.

When the characters have no more questions, she asks them what they intend to do with their newly acquired knowledge, but before they have time to reach a decision, the silence is interrupted by an outcry from the level above – a shriek that ends as suddenly as it started.



Algaya longs for home, for Davokar. The knowledge that she may never be able to return pains her to the bone.

Algaya, Karit Witch

"Your law, my law... Not the same."

The greenweaver Algaya is close to sixty years old, and has seen her people transform from proud and free humans to divided, hunted beasts, which she blames entirely on the Ambrians and their Queen. They brought war, greed and ruthlessness with them from the south; they coerced the clans, and spread doubt and selfishness among the people of Davokar.

Until six months ago she strived to reunite the Karits, and make Clan Karohar whole and strong again. But her chieftain saw her mediation efforts as an act of treason, and she lost everything. But when she came to Ravenia, her hope was reignited. She sees in Duke Ynedar a leader seeking unity rather than division, reconciliation rather than war. That he is an Ambrian is irrelevant; Algaya is determined to protect him against all who mean him harm.

THE BLACK CLOAKS ARRIVE

The group of Black Cloaks who are responsible for the murders, and now think they have traced the root of evil to the Chapel of the Young Gods, are led by Brother Galdam and his squire, Sister Miela. They have always been ruthless champions of Prios, and the schism within the Sun Church and the Curia's endangered position have scarcely improved their attitude toward idolaters and other forms of heretics.

As far as they are concerned, all who visit the Young Gods' Chapel are heretics, or even cultists – allies of the Eternal Night. After knocking Torga unconscious, they quickly do the same to the visitors; the sad youngster puts up a bit of a fight, keeping two of the Experienced Black Cloaks occupied for two turns. The others head straight down the cellar stairs, searching for the murderous witch they expect to be hiding inside. Note that the Black Cloaks locked the exterior door

Algaya

Medium human (Barbarian)

Armor Class 14 (thorn cloak, see below)
Hit Points 58 (9d8 + 18)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	13 (+1)	20 (+5)	11 (+0)

Saving Throws Int +4, Wis +8
Skills Arcana +4, Insight +8, Perception +8
Senses passive Perception 18
Languages Ambrian, Barbarian, Goblin
Challenge 6 (2,300 XP, proficiency bonus +3)
Manner taciturn, monotonous voice
Shadow kaleidoscopic, glossy green, like sunlit foliage with waxy leaves. (Corruption: 4/16)
Equipment component pouch, elixir of life, witch braid

Lay on Hands (3/day). The witch can touch a creature and restore 6 hit points to them as an action.

Nature's Lullaby (3/day). The witch can use this feature to bypass an abomination.

Shapeshifter (3/day). The witch can become a creature (see page 122 of the Player's Guide) for up to four hours.

Spellcasting. The witch (+8 to hit, spell save DC 16) knows the following spells:

Cantrips: *accurate strike* (0), *chill touch* (0), *mage hand* (0), *minor illusion* (0), *poison spray* (0), *prestidigitation* (0)
1st-level spells: *comprehend languages* (1), *expeditious retreat* (1d4 + 1), *find familiar* (1d4 + 1)
2nd-level spells: *borrow beast* (2), *misty step* (1d4 + 2)
3rd-level spells: *counterspell* (1d4 + 3), *hypnotic pattern* (3)
4th-level spells: *dimension door* (1d4 + 4), *hallucinatory terrain* (4)
5th-level spells: *scrying* (1d4 + 5), *turn weather* (5)
Rituals: *blood bond*, *illusory script*, *unseen servant*

Thorn Cloak. At the start of her turn, Algaya's cloak can make an attack against a creature within 5 feet of it. +8 to hit, damage: 4 (1d8) piercing damage. Before the end of her turn, Algaya can use her bonus action to make another attack with the cloak. If she does so, she gains 1 temporary Corruption. See page 196.

Witch Braid. Algaya has advantage on death saving throws.

ACTIONS

Dagger. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.

to the cellar with chains and padlocks before they entered; however, it is so weak that it can be forced open by someone who passes a **DC 13 Strength (Athletics) check**.

Algaya flinches as the scream is heard from the ground level, but soon pulls herself together, looks into the eyes of the person she is talking to, and says: *"May the spirits favor you."* She then uses either *misty step* or *dimension door* to reach the ground level outside the chapel, shifts into her raven form, and flies away.

The player characters are left to deal with the vengeful Black Cloaks. They may choose to bolt the secret door and hide; it cannot be opened from the outside unless the entire wall is razed. It takes a few minutes for Galdam to locate the hideout; he presses his hands against the wall, testing it, but soon decides on a different approach: he fetches the unconscious Torga and threatens to cut her throat unless *"the gutless heretics cowering in their lair come out, unarmed!"*

The Gamemaster must decide how the situation develops based on the player characters' actions, but Galdam's plan is to slay everyone who does not look like a witch or a heretical priest. People who do match that description are instead to be captured and taken to Sister Malina.

Avoiding Combat

Even if Brother Galdam and Sister Miela are frustrated and would rather condemn than forgive (especially in order to prove their worth to the Whip of Prios), it should always be possible to avoid combat. The characters may for instance flee the place, before the Black Cloaks get to them or by trying to sprint past them while accepting any incoming free attacks. Skillful liars should also be rewarded, even if the situation calls for an added negative modification to the check.

If the Black Cloaks survive the encounter in the chapel, they will likely appear later on – maybe with Sister Malina in her provisional headquarters...

The Heretic's Plea

The structure of the second act is more linear and straightforward. The player characters hear that the Duke is missing, and that is not all: the newly appointed High Priest Leandro has disappeared from his prison cell. The pair are fairly easy to find, but rescuing the terrified Ynedar from the Whip of Prios, and then tracking Sister Malina and her prisoner, are rather more difficult. The second act concludes with the knowledge that a large troop of the Knights of Dead Prios has decided to "clean up" Ravenia.

Missing

TO FULLY GRASP what has happened, you must understand that the Whip of Prios and Duke Ynedar are both keen to keep their activities secret – the former because their actions have not been sanctioned by the Queen or the Curia, the latter out of fear of being exposed as a heretic and murderer in front of his people, both allies and enemies.

Soon after she arrived in Ravenia, Sister Malina visited the fortress. Ynedar dared not deny her an audience, but had his valet, the unswervingly loyal Elam, oversee the meeting from a hidden alcove, with orders to summon the Duke's guard if the situation turned hostile. Malina calmly explained that she had come to find First Theurg Armanda's murderer, and that she was sure the killer (or the person who ordered the murder) could be found among the heretics within the Sun Church's own ranks. She therefore demanded the right to question the victim's successor, Liturg Leandro; not in his cell at the fortress, however, as the public could never know about the interrogation.

Relieved that he was not a suspect himself, and terrified of appearing suspicious in any way, the Duke agreed to arrange a meeting at the Blue Moon trading house's storage building on the outskirts of Barbarian Town – a venue he had often used for informal meetings of both a private and commercial nature. But first he made Sister Malina swear to come alone, and to allow both the Duke and his bodyguards to attend the interrogation, which she was happy to do.

Thus, the young duke put himself in a very dangerous position. In guilt-ridden desperation, combined with his belief that the Sun Church's representatives would never dare to harm the Queen's nephew, he let the Whip of Prios manipulate him into a deadly ambush.

THE FORTRESS

When the player characters in one way or another have left the Chapel of the Young Gods, they soon hear a rumor that is spreading through the city and putting a damper on the festive atmosphere: for the first time in twelve years, Duke Ynedar has canceled his speech to the people! The rumormongers also have many ideas about the underlying cause. Some think he has fallen ill, others that he has started to become like other nobles and stopped caring about his subjects, but according to an equally prevalent theory, *"based on information from the fortress staff,"* the Duke has disappeared without a trace.

Given that the player characters have just fought (or possibly negotiated with) the people most likely responsible for the murders, they might want to inform the Duke of this, since he oversees the investigation of said crimes. Perhaps they have even managed to take Galdam, Miela, or one of the Black Cloaks alive? Another possibility is of course that they will take their information and any prisoners they might have to Commander Burlio – who in that case directs them to the fortress.

As with previous visits to the fortress (if any), the player characters must wait outside the wall while their request for an audience is passed on to Adjutant Belalia. Provided that they have said something about the purpose of their visit, they will not have to wait long; the page quickly returns, after which two guards escort the characters to the building just inside the gate (see page 168). When they have stated their business (and possibly turned over a prisoner or two), she has the following to say:

- Both the Duke and the new High Priest Leandro are missing; the latter was never suspected of the murders, but stayed at the fortress as Duke Ynedar's guest to wait while the situation in the city calmed down.
- The disappearance was discovered a few hourglasses ago, and it has recently been revealed that the Duke's valet, Elam, knows where they have gone. Elam had been sworn to silence, but his fear for their safety made him break his promise to the Duke.
- The Duke and Leandro went to a storage building in Barbarian Town to attend a secret meeting with the Whip of Prios, about two hourglasses ago.

- Belalia immediately sent a troop of soldiers to the area, but according to the report she received just before the characters' arrival, there was no one there except for the corpses of two of Ynedar's bodyguards.
- The adjutant fears the worst. If the characters give a competent impression, she offers them the job of helping the soldiers find Ynedar – she promises them a reward of twenty thaler each, and guarantees that the Duke will be even more generous if they contribute to his safe return. A successful **DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check** doubles the amount.

She will not agree to answering any questions at this point, but stresses that the situation is urgent and that she would never speak about Duke Ynedar in his absence. If they want information they will have to ask the Duke himself, once he has been found.

THE BLUE MOON'S WAREHOUSE

The Yndaros-based Blue Moon trading house has in recent years concentrated much of its business in Thistle Hold, which is why their storage building by the bank of the River Doudram has long stood empty – something the Duke has exploited by using it for romantic encounters as well as secret business dealings.

The somewhat secluded building is located by the partially wooded riverbank – a simple one-story structure of stone, with its own berth. Its two entrances are both facing the river. One is a simple wooden door, the other a double gate; both are normally locked with metal bars and padlocks. When the characters arrive, the smaller door is unlocked and the larger one broken open by the ten soldiers who are still there. Provided that the characters have spoken to Belalia, they also have a letter to show the commander on site as proof they can be trusted.

Inside the building there is very little of interest, at least at first glance. It consists of a single large room that is completely empty, except for the furniture in the inner north corner. On what is clearly an expensive rug stands an oval dining table with room for four, draped with a white lace tablecloth underneath a four-armed silver candlestick with lit candles. Beyond the table, against the wall, stands a simple but elegant feather bed. Near the table, the lifeless bodies of Ynedar's bodyguards are lying, face down.

A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine) check aimed at the corpses: Both appear to have been attacked from behind; one killed with a garrote, the other stabbed four times in the back.

A successful DC 17 Intelligence (Investigation) check while searching the room: Three black feathers are found on the ground. A burn mark and an arrowhead (broken shaft) can also be found, lodged in the wall to the right inside the smaller doorway.

A DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) check aimed at the black feathers: They were shed recently (by Algaya, who distracted the kidnappers so that the Duke could escape).

A successful DC 20 Intelligence (Investigation) check aimed at the burn mark and arrow head: People standing by the dining table clearly fired arrows at someone by the door. Examination reveals tracks on the dirt floor, suggesting that someone skidded and hurried through the doorway – someone who managed to escape!

By now, tracking the escapee through Barbarian Town will not be easy, and requires two successful **DC 20 Wisdom (Survival) check**s in the places where Ynedar passed along busy walking and riding paths. But there is another way to find the Duke's new hiding place, in one of the area's most well-preserved ruins.

A bird caws repeatedly (if any character has the Beast Lore or Loremaster features they know it is a raven). If a character looks up at the tree where it is sitting, the raven beats its wings a few times before taking off and flying to a tree further away, where it lands, looking at the characters. The raven is of course Algaya, trying to lead them to the ruin – something she would prefer to do without revealing who she is, since she still wants to protect the Duke from being linked to the witch who killed Armanda.

Should the characters bring the bird to the soldiers' attention, the commander will answer that he would rather rely on physical tracks than some winged fiend (ravens are often depicted as the messengers of the Eternal Night). And what is more: if the bird is not just an ordinary raven, it might belong to the enemy and be trying to lure them into a trap!

In other words, if the characters want to follow the raven, they must do so on their own. It flies ahead of them, between trees, rooftops and chimneys, until it finally lands on the ruin. Also note that when the characters seem to have realized that they have come to the right place, Algaya takes off into the sky (more details below).

The Time of the Speech

The Gamemaster has every right to determine exactly when the Duke was supposed to make his speech, and to adjust the time so that it coincides with the player characters' visit to the chapel. Another option is to let rumors about the canceled event begin to spread before the characters go to the chapel, or to announce that the speech has been postponed to later in the afternoon/evening/night. The Gamemaster decides, based on what they believe will have the most dramatic effect.

Tracking the Horses

Should the player characters dawdle about for so long that the Duke is found, and if they then hesitate to intervene as the agents mount their horses, their only remaining option will be to follow their trail east. How such a situation develops is for the Gamemaster to decide, but perhaps the characters will reach the farm while Ervano and other fallen Templars are still on site.

In that case, the characters will be facing an enemy too strong for them to handle, but perhaps they have time to bring reinforcements, since the Whip of Prios and the Knights of Dead Prios now have two people to interrogate. One thing is certain: unless the characters intervene, Ynedar Kohinoor will die on that farm, decapitated by Ervano Vearra.

THE RUIN

The ruin's facade is so well-preserved because it was buried inside a hill until five years ago. When Ordo Magica first started excavating it, the only thing protruding from the ground was part of the second-story walls; the roof is long gone. Now, fully excavated, the building is between ten and twelve meters tall depending on where the measurement is taken, as the second-floor walls are partially collapsed. In the middle of the ground-level floor is a hole from a cave-in a few months ago, and in the cellar can be found rubble as well as several deep cavities.

When the ruin comes into view, the player characters immediately notice the horses tethered outside its gaping entrance. Six members of Sister Malina's hand-picked task force have been there for a little while – four **experienced Black Cloaks** (*Bestiary*, page 169) in addition to the two characters described below. Aldoro and three of the Black Cloaks are currently in the cellar, looking for secret doors or other nooks and crannies where the escapee may be hiding; the remaining two keep watch from the damaged upper floor. As for the Duke, he knows the ruin well and has crawled through one of the cracks in the cellar floor, into a chamber that is hard (but not impossible) to detect from above.

It takes a successful **DC 17 Wisdom (Perception) check** to notice the former Templar Emelia Dardall peering through a crack in the western wall of the second floor; detecting the Black Cloak overlooking the south side requires only a **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check**. Player characters who attempt to sneak into the building from either of these sides must pass a Dexterity (Stealth) check – **DC 16 for Emelia, DC 13 for the Black Cloak, but if they choose to close in from somewhere else no Stealth check** is needed until they enter the ruin.

If detected, the characters hear a quiet, high-pitched whistle, and all enemies will be prepared for their arrival. Bringing reinforcements is of course possible, but hardly advisable – from the moment the characters arrive at the scene, they have about two minutes before Sister Malina's underlings find the Duke and ride off with him toward a farm temporarily occupied by the Whip of Prios.

No, if the characters want to stop the agents from getting their hands on Ynedar Kohinoor, they must attack with haste! Let them gain an overview of the situation and plan their attack, and when they strike, good ideas should (as always) be rewarded and bad ones punished.

Aldoro

"Confess, sinner, and receive your punishment."

Not even thirty years of age, Aldoro was chosen to join the Whip of Prios as much for his ruthless stance against heretics as for his talents. He received the news with great joy; nothing could be more important than destroying the diseased pests threatening to bring the kingdom and its people to ruin. After only two years he was awarded a place in the legendary Sister Malina's unit, and they have now spent three successful years together.

Aldaro has stats as an agent for the **Whip of Prios** (*Bestiary*, page 171).

Emelia Dardall

"For Prios, the living, the One!"

Because of the escalating conflict within the ranks of the Knights of the Dying Sun, Emelia chose to leave the organization; her faith tells her that the flame of the Lawgiver still flickers with life – that it is not too late. This decision was never due to any general religious doubts or any kind of love for the Lifegiver praised by the Reformists. No, she still wants to fight for the Curia, convinced that the Lawgiver can still be saved.

She applied for a position with the Whip of Prios, where she was welcomed and immediately given a place in Sister Malina's unit. To not only put obvious idolaters to the sword, but also help expose the ones hiding behind seemingly virtuous facades, suits her perfectly – it requires conviction, but also great faith in the Sun God's ability to unmask darkness.

Emelia has stats as a **Templar** (*Bestiary*, page 170).

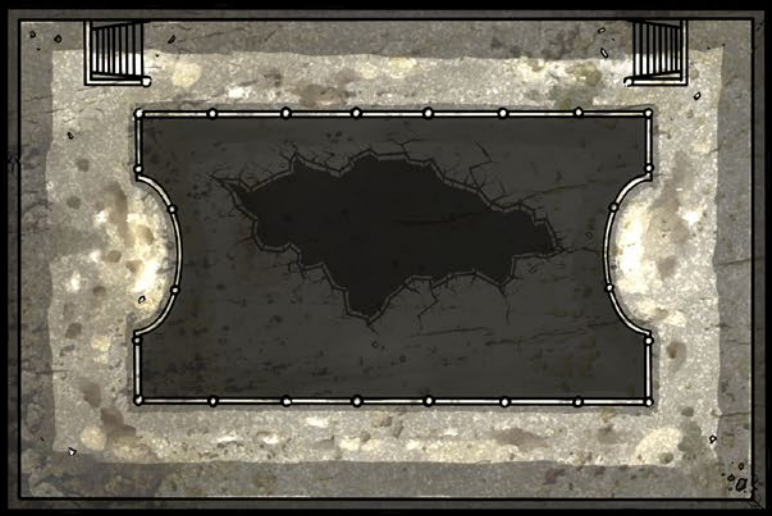
BASEMENT WITH RUBBLE AND SINKHOLES



GROUND LEVEL WITH THE HOLE IN THE FLOOR



UPPER LEVEL WITH BALUSTRADE



Kidnapped

SHOULD THE CHARACTERS defeat Malina's agents, they may rightly call themselves the saviors of Duke Ynedar Kohinoor. When the dust has settled, they hear a trembling voice cautiously calling *"Hello,"* from inside one of the cracks, *"who... who's there?"*

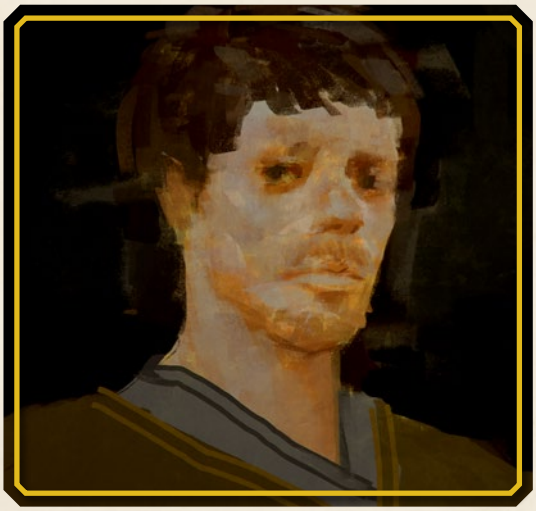
CONVERSATION WITH YNEDAR

If the player characters respond in a reassuring manner, the Duke will soon come crawling over the steep edge of the hole. He is cold and dirty, and judging by the lines in his otherwise grimy face he has recently been crying. Once on his feet, he soon gets his act together – straightening his back, raising his chin, and letting his eyes harden while inspecting his saviors. He then begins the conversation with three, for him, important questions:

- *"So, to whom do I owe my life?"*
- *"What is your interest in this matter; what do you want?"*
- *"What is your position with regards to the schism within the Sun Church?"* (If they do not give a clear answer, he rephrases the question: *"The First Father or Father Sarvola, whom do you choose?"*)

If the Duke is to confide in the characters, the last two questions are both important – either they declare themselves completely uninterested in the Church's internal conflicts and the Duke's predicament (all they want is the reward), or place themselves in the same camp as him. If the Gamemaster judges that the rather anxious nobleman dares to trust in their morals, capabilities and discretion, he presents the following pieces of information:

- The former High Priestess, Armanda, was a Loyalist fanatic. He does not quite admit to having ordered the murder, but stresses that her death was necessary to pave the way for *"the Lifegiver, the true Prios."*
- The successor, Leandro, is a Reformist, but was not involved in Armanda's death; he was arrested to protect him from the angry atmosphere which had started to spread through the city, aimed at the Sun Church in general.
- The Black Cloaks, and the Whip of Prios in particular, seem to suspect that he opposes the Curia and its interpretation of the Sun God's laws; if they manage to break the kidnapped Leandro, they will *know* so, and other things that could make his situation very difficult.
- He believes however, just as Malina pointed out when they met, that the agents' deeds are not sanctioned by the Curia – for that would harm their already poor relations with the Queen. In other words, there is now a chance to stop the course of events!
- The Duke asks the characters to track down Sister Malina and her prisoner, Leandro. What they do with Malina is up to them; the important thing is that the High Priest is returned safely and that any written confessions (or similar documents) are destroyed.



Duke Ynedar is both proud and ashamed of what he has done.

The player characters must make a decision, and make it fast! If they hesitate, the Duke stresses that he has vast resources at his disposal, and that both his welfare and that of the realm depend on Leandro's safe return and the Curia's agents being denied the opportunity to publicly accuse the Duke of being a heretic. In other words, he can offer a princely reward if they contribute to such an outcome.

TRACKING THE HIGH PRIEST

After having helped Ynedar escape, Algaya stayed long enough to hear Sister Malina order her agents to track down the escapee while she herself returned to the "farm" with Leandro; from high above she could then follow the Duke's movements and at the same time see how Malina steered her horse east. So, it is to locate this farm that Algaya flies off as soon as the characters have reached the ruin.

And once she manages to identify the temporary headquarters of the Whip of Prios, she finds another trail to follow (see below), which means that the characters must locate the farm on their own. There are essentially three ways to do so.

It would be easiest if the characters managed to take one of the agents alive. None of them would normally divulge anything to the creatures of the Eternal Night (i.e. anyone who opposes the Curia). But perhaps a successful **DC 15 Charisma (Deception or Persuasion) check** can provoke them into giving something away, by using the Reformist rhetoric: for example, the characters could argue that the Prios of War

The Curia's Faithful

If your gaming group's characters are loyal to the Curia, or think they have more to gain from turning Ynedar over to the Whip of Prios, they are of course free to do whatever they want. As Gamemaster you must try to keep up and think about how the Duke's death may come to affect the game world's other people and factions. That being said, Korinthia (Reformist sympathizer, as she is) will in all likelihood appoint a new duke/duchess who shares her and Ynedar's views on religious matters, so that when "Ynedar" is mentioned in future adventures/modules the situation can easily be remedied by simply changing the character's name.

was invented by Alberetor's elite to subjugate and motivate the people during The Great War; that the Prios which the Curia represents is a delusion, that it emerged because of the Dark Lords' aggression and was hence created by darkness; and that this is confirmed by the fact that the Curia and its followers do not have the Lifegiver's support – they are losing! After such a tirade, the roaring prisoner may very well challenge the characters to seek out Sister Malina – *"and you will see whom Prios loves!"* A quick follow-up question makes the agent defiantly point out the whereabouts of their leader.

Another possible way forward is to use rituals or elixirs on one of Malina's agents. For example, a clever use of *charm person*, *detect thoughts* or *dominate person* might do the trick; likewise, the use of a Truth Serum (see page 197) can allow for a more conventional interrogation. If the player characters do not have such an elixir or rituals at their disposal, perhaps the Duke could requisition help/items from Ordo Magica or elsewhere?

Finally, it may be possible to track Sister Malina's horse from the Blue Moon's warehouse. After the Duke's escape, she rounded the north corner of the building with the tied-up Leandro in tow, draped across the back of a mule. Following the trail through Barbarian Town and further along the smaller country roads requires three successful **Wisdom (Survival) checks**, the first of them at **DC 18**, the second two at **DC 13**. Should the first check fail, the Duke could lend them his bloodhounds, which provide advantage on the checks.

MALINA OF THE WHIP OF PRIOS

No matter what they do, the player characters will not reach the farm in time – Father Leandro has cracked under Malina's and Ervano Vearra's concerted interrogation, which means that the latter has finally acquired the proof he needs to take action: Ravenia must be baptized with the cleansing fire of Dead Prios!

As the characters arrive they are greeted by Sister Malina, standing in the doorway like a silhouette, leaning casually against the doorpost. She waves for them to come inside, turns around, and leaves the door open behind her. When the characters enter the building, she has already taken a seat by the dining table; Leandro is sitting on another chair, tied-up and unconscious, in the middle of the room.

"Of course, I had hoped to welcome Aldoro and Emelia," she sighs, *"but I suppose I will have to celebrate with you instead."* She looks up at them, smiling, her eyes stone cold. *"The dark blight which the Duke of New Beretor carries in his bones has been exposed; soon Ravenia will burn!"*

Sister Malina will not engage the characters in combat other than to defend herself, in which case she fights with a smile that does not fade even after she is killed. As long as the characters do not attack, she will respond contemptuously to all their questions, without trying to stop them from freeing the High Priest – *"his days are numbered anyway, his life forfeit..."*

Regarding the threat against the Duke and Ravenia, she has the following to say:

- When the Curia and the Twilight Friars' leadership do not have the backbone to stand up for the light against the worldly authorities, one must find other ways to vanquish the darkness.
- The Church of Dead Prios may be fallen and degenerate, but its knights still regard the hordes of the Eternal Night as their main target.
- Deputy Commander Ervano Vearra leads the second largest of Dead Prios' suns (i.e. combat units); he is now preparing an assault on Ravenia, aimed at eradicating the black disease which has been allowed to fester and spread in the city.
- She does not know their exact number, but each sun she has previously seen in action consisted of ten or so knights, and was capable of laying waste to an entire barbarian settlement.
- In terms of tactics, she thinks they will first strike at the heart of the darkness, i.e. the Duke and his fortress, but they will no doubt cause great damage even on their way to its gates.

If the player characters ask other kinds of questions, Malina is quite happy to answer; the longer they stay with her, the less time they will have to prepare for Ervano's attack. The Gamemaster is free to improvise her answers – always with Sister Malina's supercilious and contemptuous attitude in mind.



Sister Malina

"Prios dictates my faith, and it condemns you."

Malina has devoted her life to the hunt for the Lawgiver's enemies. In the final stages of The Great War, she assisted in the interrogation of suspected collaborators and learned all about the Eternal Night – how it can hide within anyone, even those who do not know their own darkness; and how it can always be exposed, brought to light, and if not banished then at least burned from the flesh.

Now, at forty years of age, despite her modest background, she has emerged as the undisputed leader of the Whip of Prios. No one has exposed more heretics or darkness-worshiping cults than she has. Her recipe for success is simple: to never let oneself be fooled by the deceptions of the Eternal Night; to trust in one's faith, regardless of desperate appeals, tears and pleas of innocence! And should one's faith be in error, it is a price worth paying – better an innocent sent to Prios than a deceitful heretic living under His heaven.

Malina as Arch Enemy

Should Malina survive the events in Ravenia, she may very well become one of the characters' most persistent arch enemies. She will probably remain within the Whip of Prios, meaning that she has access to vast resources in the form of contacts and allies. Another alternative is that she is ousted because of her failure – which would reduce her assets, but increase her vindictiveness to the point of insanity.

Another thrilling thought is to have a killed Malina awaken as undead. In this case, she will hardly be welcomed back into the Sun Church, even if she herself regards the rebirth as evidence of her saintliness: Prios has given her life anew, so that she will be able to strike down on all who contributed to her death.

Sister Malina

Medium human (Ambrian)

Armor Class 14 (studded leather)
Hit Points 68 (8d8 + 32)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	15 (+2)	19 (+4)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)	8 (–1)

Skills Athletics +8, Insight +5, Perception +5, Persuasion +2
Senses passive Perception 15
Languages Ambrian
Challenge 5 (1,800 XP, proficiency bonus +3)
Manner contemptuous, self-righteous
Shadow Glaring white like annealed steel (Corruption: 5/10)
Equipment sun symbol, copy of the Lightbringer, interrogation tools (advantage on Persuasion during interrogations), pipe and tobacco, (1d4 + 8) thaler and (2d4 + 2) shillings.

Corruption Sense. If a creature has one or more points of permanent Corruption, Malina has advantage on Perception checks to find or notice it.

Relentless (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). If Malina takes damage that would reduce her to 0 hit points, she is reduced to 1 hit point instead.

Ritualist. Malina can cast *holy smoke*, *judging bonds* and *lifegiver* as rituals (she gains no temporary Corruption for casting).

Whip Fighter. If Malina successfully strikes with her whip, she can use her bonus action to make an attack with her flail if the target is in reach.

ACTIONS

Flail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8 + 5) bludgeoning damage. On a critical hit if the target is a creature it is knocked prone in addition to taking damage.

Whip. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d4 + 5) slashing damage.

REACTIONS

Subdue. If Malina successfully hits a Medium or smaller creature with her flail, she can cause that creature to become prone.

Loved by the Sun

The only thing that can be said beforehand about the adventure's third act is that there will be some form of battle, with the Knights of Dead Prios on one side, and the Duke and his allies on the other. When, where and how this fight takes place depends largely on the player characters, as advisers to the indecisive Duke.

Preparations

REGARDLESS OF HOW their meeting with Sister Malina ended, the player characters will not have much choice but to return to the Duke and explain what is about to happen. Perhaps they will try to pick up Ervano's trail, hoping that it will lead them to his camp, but they will have no such luck. Sure, there are fresh hoof prints in the farmyard, but many of them were made at roughly the same time and they spread in all directions. A successful **DC 13 Wisdom (Survival) check** indicates that the most promising trail leads north, but it cannot be followed far before it is lost among other tracks on the country road. No, back to Ravenia they must go.

DELIBERATION

The fortress guards have orders to escort the player characters directly to the building they visited earlier and fetch the Duke, Adjutant Belalia, and the commander of the Mound's guard force, Colonel Morego. With Ynedar comes another person as well: Algaya.

The Duke was just informed of the meeting between the Whip of Prios and Ervano Vearra, and the latter's troop of almost thirty well-armed, well-trained and, in all likelihood, utterly fanatical knights. But he does not know everything, and has not had time to brief the adjutant and the colonel, which is why he begins by asking the characters to explain the situation. Meanwhile he rolls out a city map on the table.

When the situation is as clear as it can be, Duke Ynedar establishes the following:

- Algaya knows where the knights are encamped: less than an hour's ride north of Barbarian Town. According to her assessment, they are ready to move out at any time, if they have not already.
- He will call in reinforcements from the garrisons in Melion and Starak, but the chance of Colonel Elna Parfas and the others making it to Ravenia in time for the battle is practically non-existent.
- The forty men and women of the City Watch will not stand a chance against such a foe, and the same can of course be said for most of the population. This means that the city's armed forces consist of the thirty soldiers of the Mound Guard, each of them far inferior to a Templar. The only exceptions are the two surviving members of the Duke's personal guard, who together might be able to match one of the enemy's knights.

The matters that must be resolved are therefore what strategies are available, and what potential allies, if any, might be found closer to home. The characters are welcome to contribute on both of these issues. Regarding strategies, Colonel Morego can present additional alternatives if the characters should overlook some of those mentioned below under the heading Strategies. As for potential allies, Belalia has a good understanding of the city's inhabitants and their capabilities.

Described below are five possible allies and what is required for them to aid in Ravenia's defense. The Gamemaster decides whether the characters will deal with one, two, or all of these contacts – the others are handled by Morego, Belalia, or the Duke himself.

ORDO MAGICA

Persuading the two Masters at the local Ordo Magica chapter to put aside their personal projects is a challenge, especially if the argument is that they must participate in open battle against a group of fanatical fallen Templars.

Player characters who themselves are members of the Order or have contacts within the organization can quickly gain an audience with Chapter Master Leviana; others must present credible arguments and pass a **DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) check** to convince the officious novice in the entrance hall to bother her.

The Chapter Master listens with a grave face, and then asks in what way their predicament would be Ordo Magica's concern. The argument that the knights threaten the city's inhabitants will probably not be very effective; it is the Duke's job to protect the people, especially from threats he himself helped create. The only way to secure the chapter's help is to offer something valuable in return, and sign a contract to that effect. Leviana's suggestion is that the Duke



The Knights of Dead Prios welcome death, but want to punish as many beasts of the Eternal Night as possible before the final breath.

promises to finance an expedition to the Cobalt Temple – the Azure Temple's famous sister that is said to be located somewhere east of the Ravens – and that the player characters will commit to come along as escorts.

If an agreement is reached, both Masters, two adepts, and a few able novices will join the Duke's (and the player characters') defending forces.

CLAN VAJVOD

Ravenia's barbarian population does of course include a large number of able-bodied warriors and witches. A player character descended from one of Davokar's clans is quickly granted an audience with Envoy Molgara; others must present credible arguments and pass a **DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) check** in order to convince the guards at the residence's gates to relay their urgent request for a meeting.

Listening to their account of the current circumstances, Molgara realizes that an attack by the knights would affect large parts of Barbarian Town's population, and that the Duke is in dire need of her help. She can assemble a fighting force, but only under the condition that Molgara herself is given a permanent position on the Duke's council and that a third wall is built around Barbarian Town. In addition, she demands that Ravenia's barbarian migrants are taken into consideration when planning the city's defense, as much as possible. Perhaps she also needs the characters to assist in some matter in Davokar (something clan Vajvod's taboos stop her own people from accomplishing)?

If her demands are met, it takes Molgara one hour to place thirty-three experienced clan warriors and two young but competent witches at the Duke's disposal.

THE SUN CHURCH

The representatives of the city's crestfallen Sun Temple can be invited to participate in the battle against their fallen brothers and sisters. If High Priest Leandro has been freed from Malina's clutches, it is him the characters (or someone else) must talk to; if he has not, they must turn to the acting High Priest, the liturg Sondro.

After Armanda's time as their leader, the local congregation has every reason to prove themselves helpful, especially to the people of Barbarian Town. Like Molgara, the church's negotiator would like to see a strategy that explicitly seeks to reduce civilian casualties and suffering as much as possible; even asking for a written contract which clearly shows that this is what the congregation demands. Other than that,

they have no further conditions – on the contrary, the new head of the Sun Temple sees the coming battle as a chance to regain the people's trust.

After Armanda's death, Ravenia's Sun Temple cannot boast any battle-ready theurgs, but they are all competent healers, with or without mystical powers. With Leandro alive they can contribute eight healers to be distributed amongst the defenders (e.g. the characters), otherwise there are only seven.

THE FORTUNE HUNTERS

Unless the characters come up with the idea themselves, Belalia could mention the city's fortune hunters as a potential group of allies. Most of these live in Barbarian Town, as lodgers or at one of the smaller inns – the *Chieftain's Axe*, the *Enchanted Glade*, or the *Barbarity Inn*. The latter is the largest of them, and its tavern is something of a focal point for the region's most hardened explorers, treasure hunters and monster slayers. A character with contacts within one of these groups is aware of this; otherwise Belalia or someone else could inform them.

The informal leader of the city's fortune hunters is the retired monster slayer Othelda. Given the opposition that awaits them, she knows a dozen people who could assist in the fight – a mix of mystics, archers and warriors, as well as the rugged ogre Nogood who (despite the name) could certainly match a knight on his own. But of course, her help does not come for free. She demands fifty thaler for herself, twenty each for the others, and a one-year Treasure Hunting License for everyone involved. She also takes a liking to an artifact or item carried by one of the characters; the object must be handed over immediately, or any agreement is out of the question!

Giving and Taking

If the player characters agree to hand over the artifact Othelda desires, the Gamemaster should sooner or later give them a chance to retrieve it, or perhaps to get it back in exchange for something else. The old fortune hunter knows a great deal about the treasure grounds of Davokar, and if only she could ride on someone's back (or be otherwise carried) she would love to go on a final treasure hunt in Davokar!

THE TRADING HOUSES

Finally, one must not forget Ravenia's many trading houses. They are rich, and their owners always keep a competent group of bodyguards on hand. If the player characters take it upon themselves, as advised by the Duke, to persuade the city's merchants to contribute to the defense effort, he suggests that they first seek out Eberio at the Galeia trading house. Otherwise the Duke could handle this negotiation himself.

Whoever he speaks with, Eberio claims that he could muster between fifteen and twenty-five competent warriors and archers, but his price is high: duty-free status for goods which Galeia and other participating trading houses transport through (but do not sell in) Ravenia for the next five years. And he requests a personal favor as well. A barge will soon leave Ravenia and sail for Vojvodar to collect a precious cargo, which will then be shipped all the way to Agrella – the shipment needs the additional protection of a group of reliable (and therefore expensive) sellswords. If it is the player characters who conduct the negotiation or if he has met them before, Eberio demands their assistance; otherwise the Duke will ask whether they could be of service, for a reasonable fee. Exactly what is to be transported and what happens on the journey is entirely for the Gamemaster to decide.

Strategies

EXACTLY HOW MUCH time the player characters and their allies have before Ervano Vearra and his group of fully armored Enforcers arrive is up to the Gamemaster, with the aim of making the final act as dramatic as possible. However, it is important that they can receive an early warning that the enemy is coming, for example by Algaya using her Shapeshifter feature and circling north of the city in the form of some fast-flying bird.

Below is a presentation of the four main strategies available to the characters and how they may be portrayed, but first a few words about how the Gamemaster could approach the upcoming battle.

THE SETUP OF THE BATTLE

While *Ruins of Symbaroum* does provide basic rules for resolving mass combats, this adventure chooses to focus on the characters' part in the fight, and let their success or failure determine the outcome of the battle as a whole. In this case, the stakes are high. The player characters have a lot to gain – friendship with the Queen's nephew, who might also become one of the leading figures of the reformed Sun Church. But there is much to lose, too, besides the fact that they are putting their very lives on the line.

Regarding the battle against Ervano Vearra and his sun of fallen Templars, we suggest that the characters must face Ervano himself and one of his Enforcers, regardless of what strategy they choose (see next page). It is also recommended that said Enforcer is replaced by Sister Malina, if she was not killed or incarcerated by the characters.

Furthermore, the characters' fight should be affected by how many groups of allies the characters and the Duke managed to recruit in time. This is symbolized by Ervano and his side-kick being joined by additional Enforcers during the course of the battle, as the other groups on the characters'

side are not strong enough to keep all enemies occupied. For every group the characters did *not* recruit, another Enforcer will join the fray; the first one arrives at the scene after 1d4 turns, the second after yet another 1d4, and so on (let the players roll the die, preferably without revealing the meaning of the outcome).

Finally, we recommend that Duke Ynedar stays close to the characters during the battle. He sticks to the background, but has two Herbal Cures which could be of use if a character is badly injured. In short: if the characters win their part of the battle and kill Ervano Vearra, their side will also win the entire battle, having suffered severe casualties but with the Duke still alive. If the characters should fall, the rest of their force, including Ynedar Kohinoor, will also die by the flaming sword of Dead Prios.

DEFENSE

The Duke is reluctant to leave the protective walls of the Mound. It is easy to see why, but it also means that large parts of the city would be left vulnerable to the attacking knights – something clan Vajvod's envoy and the Sun Church do not appreciate.

Two measures must be taken if this proposal is to be approved. First of all, they must immediately issue a warning so that the defenseless residents of Barbarian Town have time to leave and seek shelter south of Ravenia. Many may still not be able to go, or simply choose to stay, but the important thing is that they are not taken completely by surprise.

Secondly, the outer gates of the Mound must be left open – something the attackers would be able to see from far away, coming from the north. This way it might be possible to lure the enemy inside the walls, to trap and fight them there, with archers and mystics posted up on the inner balustrade.

In that case, the knights' strategy will first be to clear out all enemies on the ground and, if they are victorious, reach the top of the inner wall. Even if the characters' part of the battle takes place on the ground, we encourage the Gamemaster to let a few knights ascend into the air, toward the archers up on the wall – if only for effect. By combining the spells *invisibility* and *levitate*, a couple of knights could also show up among the mystics and archers completely without warning.

Compensation

The people and groups who can help the Duke defend the city will all demand something in return. As Gamemaster, you are welcome to adjust these demands. Perhaps Chapter Master Leviana's future expedition is bound for some other destination than the Cobalt Temple? Or maybe she is not interested in such support at all, but wants a significant donation to the chapter's general operations, if that seems more appropriate for your story and gaming group.

Blight Birth

The Knights of Dead Prios are set on vengeance at any cost, which means that they are no longer afraid of contracting corruption; all means are permitted in the struggle to avenge the Dead One. If the Gamemaster so desires, this could be portrayed by one of the Enforcers being blight-born in the midst of battle. If the characters are very experienced and the odds are in their favor, this could happen to one of their enemies; otherwise we suggest that it occurs on another part of the battlefield or somewhere among the buildings. Gamemasters who find this idea appealing should prepare values for the blight-born Templar before the gaming session begins (see **blight born template** on page 120 of the *Bestiary*).

PITCHED BATTLE

Provided that at least three allied groups have been recruited, Colonel Morego suggests that they confront the knights on the rolling fields north of Barbarian Town. Sure, even with the advantage of higher ground the defenders will suffer heavy casualties during the initial cavalry charge, but to him it is a price worth paying to keep the civilian population safe.

Should the player characters agree, the Duke will also let himself be persuaded. As an effect, the characters' part of the battle will include an additional Enforcer, who shows up after 1d4 turns according to the model described above. If the gaming group uses the rules for Reputation or Scheming, their heroic choice of strategy should also bring some appropriate social rewards.

Perhaps the battle ends with the characters (after having won their part of the fight) finding the Duke on his back, injured and terrified, flanked by two Enforcers with their flaming swords raised? This final fight should be quite easy to handle – maybe because the enemy is severely injured – and added mainly to ensure an exciting and epic end to the battle.

AMBUSH

Another alternative is to stage an ambush, either in some grove or crevice on the route between the knight's camp and Ravenia, or among the houses in the north part of Barbarian



Town. This becomes a more complicated affair, since one must assume that the Knights of Dead Prios have agents stationed in the city. Which they do.

The characters and Colonel Morego must devise a strategy for moving their troops (e.g. in disguise, hidden on boats from the South Harbor, or by riding in a long, eastern semicircle), after which the character with the highest Intelligence score must pass a check – **DC 18** (we suggest that the Gamemaster does not reveal the difficulty and keeps the outcome secret). The advantage of this is that the characters and their allies might take the enemy by surprise. On the other hand, if the above-mentioned Intelligence check fails, the fallen knights are alerted and will choose another route – forcing the would-be defenders to hurry and catch up before the knights have time to do great damage in Barbarian Town.

If the game group is using the rules for Reputation or Scheming, the latter should probably result in significant punishment, especially if it was the characters who advocated this strategy...

ATTACK

Then there is of course the option of taking the fight to the enemy. However, this approach requires the same discretion as above in order to avoid alerting the enemy and consequently face a thundering cavalry charge, without having the high ground. If that should happen, the characters must defeat two additional Enforcers to win their part of the battle.

On the other hand, if the characters and their allies manage to surprise the knights, the strategy will not affect the characters' battle in any way – it becomes the same as if the forces collide inside the Mound.

Ervano Vearra

"I am your death, apostate!"

As the son of Commander Iakobo Vearra and brother of Alisabeta, Ervano has been molded into a fierce champion of the Lawgiver since he was a toddler. He wears his scars, both spiritual and physical, with overflowing pride, and is of course extremely serious about avenging the death of Prios. Barbarians, goblins, ogres and other non-Ambrians who worship the darkness out of ignorance must be punished; those of the Queen's subjects who deliberately contributed to the Lawgiver's death and the spread of The Eternal Night deserve also to suffer!

Ervano will hear no pleas and show no mercy. He no longer cares about himself: all means are permitted in the quest for vengeance, even if they darken one's soul. Retribution is all that matters, and that is the path he will follow until the time comes for him to kneel by the dust of the murdered god.

Ervano Vearra

Medium human (Ambrian)

Armor Class 17 (scale mail)
Hit Points 114 (12d8 + 60)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	14 (+2)	21 (+5)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)

Skills Insight +4, Perception +4, Persuasion +4
Senses passive Perception 14
Languages Ambrian
Challenge 7 (2,900 XP, proficiency bonus +3)
Manner calmly furious
Shadow streaks of faint yellow against a darkening background, like the last rays of sunlight across the evening sky (Corruption 1/4)
Equipment —

Noisy. While wearing his armor Ervano has disadvantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Ervano makes three attacks with his sword while on foot.

Executioner's Sword. Magical *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (1d12 + 6) slashing damage plus 10 (3d6) fire damage.

REACTIONS

Parry. Ervano adds +3 to his AC against one melee attack that would hit him. To do so, Ervano must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon.

Enforcers

"Die, murderer!"

With few exceptions, the Enforcers in Ervano's sun are lowborn nobles. They know how to conduct themselves properly, but no longer care about manners or etiquette. Their eyes burn with a fire which is never seen in other nobles, possibly as a result of the corruption they have willingly contracted to be more effective in their quest for vengeance.

Enforcer (Knight)

Medium human (Ambrian)

Armor Class 19 (field armor, shield)
Hit Points 37 (5d8 + 15)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)	12 (+2)

Senses passive Perception 10
Languages Ambrian
Challenge 3 (700 XP, proficiency bonus +2)
Manner calmly fanatical
Shadow golden yellow with streaks and blemishes of dark red (3/6)
Equipment —

Cumbersome. The Enforcer's field armor is unwieldy and it has disadvantage on all Dexterity checks while wearing it.

Mystical Power. The Enforcer has been taught some magic. Its spellcasting ability score is Charisma (spell attack +4, saving throw DC 12) and it can cast *bless* (1d4 + 1), *invisibility* (1d4 + 2) or *levitate* (1d4 + 2) using an action.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The knight makes two attacks with either its whip or its flaming sword while on foot.

Whip. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) slashing damage. Ensnaring: if the enforcer scores a critical hit with this weapon, the target creature is made prone as well as taking damage.

Flaming Sword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) magical slashing damage plus 2 (1d4) fire damage.

REACTIONS

Two-handed Force. If the Enforcer misses an attack roll, it can reroll the attack.

Aftermath

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER the battle against the Knights of Dead Prios is quite an open question. It depends not only on how the battle transpires, but also on what the player characters decide to do with Ervano Vearra (dead or captured), as well as on their actions earlier in the scenario.

This chapter begins with suggestions for the development of the Ravenia region and the player characters' relations with the adventure's central figures. We also present a few ideas which the Gamemaster is welcome to develop into future adventures in Ravenia and its surrounding area.

DEVELOPMENTS

Regardless of what happens to Duke Ynedar, much will stay the same in Ravenia. If he should die, the Queen could persuade the Duke's sister, Korthena Kohinoor, to leave the Twilight Monastery in the Titans and take her late brother's place. Whoever is in charge, the construction of a third wall will begin immediately, since everyone in the city is convinced that Iakobo Vearra will never let his son's murderers go unpunished, just as he refuses to sit idly by as *"the Eternal Night descends upon Ravenia."* At the moment, Iakobo has other things on his mind, but if the gaming group happens to like it in Ravenia, the vengeance of Dead Prios could very well be developed into a series of future adventures.



The Whip of Prios

The Sun Church's various factions will of course react to, and be affected by, the events in Ravenia. The Curia (or the dwindling group of remaining Curia supporters) claims it was not involved, but does not officially denounce the Whip of Prios and its hunt for heretics – something that causes relations between Korinthia and the First Father and/or Brother Eumenos to deteriorate even further. All who appear to have helped the Duke, including the player characters, are formally branded as heretics and champions of darkness.

The Reformists also take notice of who was involved and on what side they fought, not least in the hope of identifying future allies. They use the Whip of Prios' advance to exert pressure in their communications with the Queen – the Curia should be dissolved as soon as possible!

FURTHER ADVENTURES

The adventure has already offered some hints of adventure seeds which the Gamemaster is welcome to develop and fill with whatever content suits the gaming group. Helping the Blue Moon transport sensitive goods from Vajvod to Agrella is one option; accompanying Chapter Master Leviana to the Cobalt Temple across the Ravens is another. But there may also be reason to delve into the story about Duke Ynedar's (or Duchess Korthena's) path toward being appointed the Reformist's alternative to Korinthia Nightbane.

Another interesting mission could involve being sent to a number of free settlements in the Ravens, one whose inhabitants are said to worship the Young Gods, including the Lifegiver. The job is to invite their leaders to a meeting in Ravenia, but of course complications ensue: it turns out that one village has converted to daemon worshiping and tries to sacrifice the characters to their monstrous god; another village is caught up in a feud with a band of robbers that have kidnapped the village elder's son, who must be returned; a third is eerily deserted, and the characters must try to find its kidnapped/displaced/corrupted inhabitants.

Whatever the characters decide to do after *What's Bred in the Bone* reaches its conclusion, the outcome of the adventure will affect them, as well as Ravenia and the entire Ambrian kingdom, for the foreseeable future.

Heroes of the Curia

Some gaming groups may choose an entirely different path in this adventure, by siding with the Lawgiver/Curia and surrendering Duke Ynedar to the Whip of Prios, or putting the Duke in chains and taking him back to Yndaros with a report of his heretical treachery. This would be a terrible blow for the Reformists and an equally great victory for the Curia's supporters. While it seems very likely that the Duke quickly ends up with his aunt in the Sunrise Palace and that his deeds are covered up, if the Gamemaster so desires, it could actually lead to First Father Jeseebegai and his allies winning greater support, while the people's regard for both Sarvola and the Queen diminishes.

Appendix

Spells

THE FOLLOWING SPELLS are referenced in the adventures.

BLOOD SHROUDING

3rd-level necromancy, ritual

Casting Time: 1 hour
Range: Touch
Components: V, S, M (the target's flayed flesh)
Duration: 24 hours

The mystic flays a dead person and dresses in that person's skin, one sliver at a time. After that, the mystic looks exactly like the dead person but has their own voice and eyes, which limits its uses. During this process, the mystic learns the surface thoughts and memories of the victim, aiding them in deceiving others. To trick an individual who was acquainted with the deceased and who talks to the mystic, requires a Charisma (Deception) check against the individual's passive Perception. The effect lasts for 24 hours, then the dead skin falls off.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell at 4th level or higher, the effect lasts for an additional 24 hours for each additional level.

BORROW BEAST

2nd-level enchantment, ritual

Casting Time: 10 minutes
Range: 10 feet
Components: V, S, M (a morsel of food)
Duration: 1 hour (see below)

By performing this ritual the mystic can possess the body of a small beast and have full control over it for a period of time. The mystic's body is in a trance during the duration of the ritual. The mystic's mind is thrown back to its own body if the borrowed body is harmed. The same happens if the mystic's body is harmed or exposed to some kind of powerful interference (like being shoved, drenched in water or affected by heat and smoke).

A mystic that performs *Borrow Beast* inside a magic circle can extend the duration up to 8 hours as the circle focuses the magical bond.

DANCE OF DEATH

5th-level enchantment, ritual

Casting Time: 10 minutes
Range: 300 feet
Components: V, S, M (a hand-drum)
Duration: special, see below

The mystic creates a rhythm that compels creatures into deadly violence. Each creature in range (other than the mystic) must make a Wisdom saving throw or be drawn into the dance. The mystic's close allies and any direct enemies (e.g. those considering violence against the mystic) have advantage on their saving throws. The mystic can choose to gain a point of permanent Corruption in order to make creatures have disadvantage on their saving throws. A creature that succeeds on its saving throw is immune for 24 hours.

Affected creatures are not controlled by the mystic but highly inclined to obey their orders, especially if they concern violence against strangers or enemies. A creature ordered to attack a friend or who kills any creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of their turn.

Each dancing creature loses 1d4 hit points at the end of their turn. A creature that reaches 0 hit points becomes unconscious and prone and the effects of the spell end for them. When they awaken they are immune to the spell for 24 hours.

HERETIC'S TRAIL

2nd-level enchantment, ritual

Casting Time: 1 minute
Range: 1,000 feet
Components: V, S
Duration: Concentration, up to 1 hour

The mystic names an abomination or individual that they personally know and who has one or more points of permanent Corruption. If the individual fails a Wisdom saving throw, some information is provided to the mystic.

- If the target is within 1,000 feet of the mystic, they learn its precise location. Otherwise they know its direction of travel.
- If the individual crossed water, they know the location of the crossing and the target's original direction of travel but do not know anything about its travels on the other side of the water.

Should the saving throw succeed, the mystic learns no information. If the target is in a larger settlement (greater than 1,000 individuals) or in Davokar they have advantage on the saving throw.

Artifacts

THE BELL OF KASTOR (UNIQUE)

No one knows when the bell was brought to Kastor, or who forged it – only that it is mounted in a tower believed by scholars to be much younger than the bell itself. In any case, to those bold and knowledgeable enough to use it, the bell is a powerful weapon of defense. One could argue, with good reason, that a small and relatively undefended colony such as Kastor has the bell to thank for its very existence.

The ringing of the bell is said to strengthen the defenders, weaken their enemies, and even dispel corruption. The former is true; the latter is a slight misunderstanding – the bell does not in fact dispel corruption, but absorbs it. When it is completely filled with corruption, the next time it is rung, it will explode in a rain of darkness. The player characters' battle against Margumal might be what ultimately breaks the bell, showering the town with corruption. They must decide whether or not the lindworm poses a large enough threat for such a catastrophe to be worth the risk.

Today the bell holds such enormous amounts of corruption, should it absorb 10 or more Corruption, it will break. At dawn each day the Bell dissipates 1 point of temporary Corruption. This continues until its limit becomes 10 again. It will never go any lower than that.

The Bell of Kastor is extremely rare, if not unique, in that one may use its powers without binding oneself to it. Anyone may ring the bell and gain its mighty protection. What powers it possesses is revealed to the person ringing it.

Someone with the Loremaster feature must pass a **DC 13 Intelligence (Arcana) check** in order to analyze and fully understand the dangers of the bell – that it absorbs Corruption and will eventually break, resulting in catastrophe.

Chiming Courage

The person ringing the bell and all of their allies that can hear the bell gain the ability to reroll the d20 once on an upcoming ability check, attack roll or saving throw. If the bell is rung again for this purpose only those who have used their benefit receive it again.

Requires: action to ring the bell

Corruption: 1d6 temporary Corruption, absorbed by the Bell

Binding Clangor

A person ringing the bell may ask its help in harming a nearby enemy. They must name or otherwise identify the creature and the feature or trait to be bound. The creature must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw. Failure means it cannot use the identified feature or trait for one minute. Passive "always on" traits cannot be bound.

Wrong kind of Weapon?

Do the characters have features or a style demanding other weapons than the ones described here? If so, you should alter the artifacts to something they can use. The Souleater is described as a long hammer but can easily be any other kind of one-handed weapon, just like Burnreaper can be a spear instead of a handaxe – provided that the effects of the weapons stay the same. Davokar is dark and dangerous enough even if you as Gamemaster assist the players in order for them to be able to portray their characters the way they want.

Requires: action to ring the bell

Corruption: 1d6 temporary Corruption, absorbed by the Bell

Swallow Corruption

The bell may also swallow the temporary corruption of mystics in its immediate proximity, who will then receive no temporary Corruption whatsoever from casting spells, using magic items, etc. All mystics positioned in the Bell Tower (characters and non-player characters) may use this ability whenever they please.

Requires: an action to start the bell swinging gently

Corruption: absorbs all Corruption, which adds to the total

Black Rain

When the corruption inside the bell reaches its breaking point, it will – the next time it is rung – explode in a cascade of darkness; pure corruption will rain over Kastor, black and fuming like hot oil.

Use the table below to determine the amount of corruption a visitor to Kastor receives (the character gains the Corruption each day, either as soon as they enter the town or wake up within its environs).

Kastor will never be the same, but is now known as The Town of the Eternal Night; a place where children are born stigmatized, where the dead rise from their graves and ravenous beings prowl the streets in their hunt for warm-blooded prey. Few – except witch-hunters and fascinated mystics – will ever want to set foot in the town again.

CORRUPTION FROM THE BROKEN BELL

Permanent Corruption	Temporary Corruption From the Black Rain
0	1d4
1–3	1d6
4–6	1d8
7+	1d12

BURNREAPER (VERY RARE, HANDAXE +2, SPECIAL)

The handaxe aptly called Burnreaper holds wild spirits of fire and ash, allowing it to burst into flames and also fly through the air back to its master's hand. The legends are strangely quiet about its lineage, but it is probable that the weapon is the same as the one wielded by the monster hunter Ksandukha, who is said to be the slayer of Davokar's last dragon.

The head of the weapon glows and fumes and deals +1d4 additional fire damage. The master of the axe is unaffected by the heat and can use it as a regular handaxe.

The fiery weapon always returns to its master's hand, if they wish it to. If thrown or dropped it comes flying through the air as an object interaction, without any additional cost in Corruption.

Lava Knife

When the weapon is thrown, its edge glows like the burning blood of the mountains and will easily pass through any materials – the attack does 5 (2d4) fire damage.

Requires: bonus action
Corruption: 1d4 temporary Corruption

Fire Rain

Burnreaper strikes out against several enemies in a chain. If it hits the first designated target it flies on to the next and so on, until an attack roll fails or it has hit as many targets as your proficiency bonus. When that happens, the axe returns to its master's hand.

Requires: bonus action
Corruption: 1d6 temporary Corruption

THE ETERNAL HUNTER'S SPEAR (RARE, +1 SPEAR)

This weapon is stuck into Gylta's side. The shaft is broken about a yard from the spearhead, but it is still effective in combat. It will only come into the player characters' possession if Gylta is defeated in battle, or if an agreement is made with her where the player characters swear a blood oath to use it against the Eternal Hunter – in combat or negotiations.

Replacing the shaft requires high-quality wood and craftsmanship. If none of the characters can do it (which is likely), they can hire someone in the prospectors' camp to do it for them. The job costs them a thaler and takes one day to complete.

Finishing Blow

When the prey is seriously wounded (half or less of its hit points remaining), the wielder of the spear may summon the powers of death and finish the hunt with a mighty thrust. The wielder can make an extra attack on their turn against the wounded target. This power may only be used once per enemy and battle.

Requires: your object interaction
Corruption: 1d4 temporary Corruption

FULLANGRA (UNIQUE)

"Bury me standing, I've lived on my knees."

The crooked dwarf Fullangra – or Longenuff, as she calls herself – was caught by sorcerers long ago and bound to the carved wooden chest which carries her image. She has served many masters over the centuries, warlords and local kings, always loyally but never without whining and complaining. Her bad temper made the latest owner, King Hurian-Lo Apak, grow tired and put the chest in his treasury instead of making use of her services. Centuries of lonely sulking in the box have made Fullangra soften a bit and she will serve her next master with more mutterings and whispered complaints than loud disapprovals.

Fullangra speaks in an ancient Symbarian dialect and can neither read nor write. When someone attunes to the

Fullangra

Medium dwarf

Armor Class 15 (chain shirt)
Hit Points 49 (9d8 + 9, earthbound)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	20 (+5)	11 (+1)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)

Skills Athletics +3, Stealth +7
Senses passive Perception 10
Languages Symbarian
Challenge 1 (200 XP, proficiency bonus +2)
Manner muttering to herself
Shadow like fog over Davokar's ponds, with lonely soot flakes dancing in the mist (Corruption: 1/4)
Equipment none

Earthbound. Any Corruption that Fullangra receives reduces her current and maximum hit points by that amount.

Mystical Fate. If Fullangra drops to 0 hit points her body disappears, being teleported to the chest. She recovers in 7 days, and emerges with full hit points and no Corruption.

Strangle. If Fullangra is grappling a living creature her size or smaller she can use her garrote to choke the creature. After a number of consecutive turns equal to the target's Constitution modifier it becomes unconscious.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Fullangra can make two unarmed strikes per turn.

Grapple. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* the target is grappled (Escape DC 13).

Unarmed Strikes *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d6 + 5) bludgeoning damage.

Fullangra and Dwarven History

Player characters who treat Fullangra with respect can get the otherwise taciturn dwarf to share her view on the history of her people – as she remembers it after centuries in the chest. According to her, the dwarves' lot in life has been a long journey through misery, repression and forced assimilation.

"We were born as worms in the rotting flesh of the Worldserpent, and were granted wit by Symbar's princes to make us better slaves," she says about her people. But there was pride and a longing for liberty too: "We devised a language of our own, with codes and secret double-meanings, so complex that not even the masters could comprehend. We never wrote, because what's written can be read, interpreted, deciphered. Our dreams were our own, no one else's." About their home beneath the city of Dakovak she says: "We built nothing, created nothing, owned nothing so nothing could be taken from us. The masters could kill us, but with each corpse yet another secret was lost to them. Not even their death magic could touch us and for that they hated us – and with time they came to fear us as well."

artifact, a mystical bond appears between them and the dwarf, meaning that they can communicate telepathically. For anyone else it takes the Loremaster feature and a successful **DC 15 Intelligence (History) check** to converse. It must also be noted that she never uses her true name, not even with her master; instead she always calls herself Longenuff.

Fullangra has the following characteristics and powers, to be employed by her master:

Faithful Servant
Fullangra can be ordered to act as bodyguard, guard a place, fetch and deliver, handle a lever or be sent to the nearest town to sell or buy something. She performs the task dutifully and needs no sleep or food. She takes no initiative of her own – when the task is completed and she has no orders, she mystically teleports back to the chest to await the next command.

If Fullangra is more than 24 hours away from her master and her chest, roll a d20. On a natural 1, some ill fate has befallen her and she is now dead. If she remains closer she can be played as a non-player character assistant by the player.

Requires: action to issue command to Fullangra
Corruption: 1 temporary Corruption per day completing task

Elimination
It is also possible to ask Fullangra to perform grimmer deeds, but only in exchange for her freedom. If her master agrees to free her, she can make an assassination attempt as her final service – seeking out and trying to kill an enemy appointed by the master. The time it takes for her to do this is the same as it would take for the character to do it.

If Fullangra fails her mission she is killed or captured, and being free she will not teleport back to the chest. Should she survive she will immediately seek out the closest dwarven community, most likely in Yndaros or the small one in Thistle Hold.

Requires: action to make the request
Corruption: 1d4, one of them permanent

A Gift in Return
For the master who releases Fullangra from her service without asking anything in return the dwarf will call upon the ancient powers she remembers by name and reduce the master's permanent Corruption by 1d6 as thanks for her freedom.

What Fullangra does with her freedom is up to the Gamemaster. If the characters have treated her well and with respect she may stay with them for a while. But sooner or later she will likely leave to seek out her present-day relatives, probably starting in Yndaros.

THE HAGANOR SKIN

This rainbow-shimmering cloak of lindworm skin is said to come from a serpent slain near the Columns of Haganor, at the time when the columns still sparkled with gold and silver. The cloak still holds some mystical powers – it can lend the master a voice which enthralls the listener like the hypnotic powers of a lindworm; or a commanding, thundering voice turning even the most resilient of warriors into an obedient slave.

Aside from that the cloak provides its wearer a +2 bonus to Armor Class and can easily be worn on top of other protection without being extra impeding. This protective effect does not require the player character to attune to the artifact, but the powers described below do.

The Haganor Skin also comes with a negative effect: if a living lindworm sees the cloak it will remember the humiliating times when Symbaroum's princes hunted its ancestors for amusement, and immediately – on behalf of all proud lindworms – choose the master of the skin as its personal nemesis. In this context it should be mentioned that all lindworms are immune to the powers of the skin.

Dragon Whisper
The skin's master can let its voice play at the strings of the soul and enthrall all listeners who fail a **DC 10 Wisdom saving throw**. Enemies within earshot who are affected will do nothing on their next turn.

Requires: an action to speak
Corruption: 1 temporary Corruption

Commanding Voice
The master of the skin selects one creature, which must succeed at a **DC 13 Charisma saving throw**. If it fails, it is charmed by the skin-wearer for 1 minute and will try to aid them as much as possible. The effect requires concentration (as if it were a spell) and the creature can repeat the saving throw if it is attacked or ordered to attack any other creature.

Requires: an action to speak, concentration while in effect

Corruption: 1d4 temporary Corruption

THE IRON PACT RING

The rings of the Iron Pact were forged in dragon fire on troll-made anvils, as weapons against the corruption of Symbaroum. To the rings the Elder Folks bound the last remnants of the Pure Magic, before that too was corrupted. In the final battle against Symbaroum's darkness, the rings were carried by the leaders of the Iron Pact. Or so the story goes, when told by the elves to the few human members of the pact.

Now the dragons are gone, the trolls brutalized and not even all elves rally behind the age-old alliance. The true rings were never many and now they are fewer still. However, the power in those that still exist is evident to all who have sworn the Iron Oath and subjected themselves to the strict law of the rings.

It should be noted that all true Iron Sworn, be they elves or men, do not appreciate seeing an outsider carrying one of the original rings. In essence, if you want to be the master of an Iron Pact ring you must be prepared to join the faction or be hunted as if you were one of Davokar's abominations!

The Iron Pact Ring may only be attuned to an individual using a feat (see text box on page 197), not by accepting permanent corruption. It does not stop the character from willingly accepting corruption, but punishes it harshly (see *The Ring's Law*, to the right).

Corruption Shield
The ring fully protects its carrier from corruptive surroundings, like the taint in Davokar's darkest parts or the blight transferred through bites, blood or claws of certain beasts. The ring has no protective effect on corruption gained from the voluntary use of artifacts, casting spells or mystical powers. On the contrary, the ring punishes the carrier for such choices (see *The Ring's Law*).

Action: Free

Corruption: None

Dream Message
Once during each night's sleep, the one bound to the ring may send a dream message to someone else with a ring. They do not need to have met before, but the sender must know that the receiver exists. The message appears as a slideshow of images; no words may be communicated. The interpretation is up to the receiver.

Action: Free

Corruption: None

The Ring's Law
The ring punishes oath breakers. A character who has bound themself to the ring suffers physical damage from all Corruption they willingly accept: each point of temporary corruption causes 1d4 necrotic damage.

MAL-ROGAN'S MUMMIFIED HAND

The "amulet" of Mal-Rogan is in fact his own left hand, mummified and hung from a rusty chain. Mal-Rogan's soul is tied to the amulet and it can grant others the powers listed below. However, the hand comes with a severe negative effect: as long as the amulet exists, Mal-Rogan will respawn, irrespective of how he was slain or what was done to the corpse – and he will do anything to reclaim his corrupt soul!

The amulet requires attunement and the bearer gains 2 points of permanent Corruption once attuned. If the amulet is destroyed or another person attunes to the hand, then the permanent Corruption fades over the next few days.

Word of Doom
The master of the amulet utters words of doom over their enemies. For the next minute, any attackers have disadvantage on attack rolls against the bearer.

Requires: Action

Corruption: 1d4 temporary Corruption

Black Bliss
The bearer can reroll their last ability check.

Requires: Bonus Action

Corruption: 1 temporary Corruption

Mal-Rogan's Revenge
It is possible for the one tied to the amulet to destroy it; all it takes is a successful **DC 15 Wisdom saving throw** to overcome the desire not to harm the hand. If it is destroyed, the released soul of Mal-Rogan will try to possess its previous master. The character must make a **DC 15 Constitution saving throw**, a **DC 15 Wisdom saving throw** and then a **DC 15 Charisma saving throw**. If they succeed at two or more saving throws they have fought off the possession – the spirit of Mal-Rogan screams as it fades from this world.

If the possession succeeds, the character will be controlled by Mal-Rogan and seek vengeance on their former friends and anyone who hurt Mal-Rogan in the past. If the character is slain, Mal-Rogan dies a final death as well. If the character is the target of *banishment* or *greater restoration* then they can be restored to normal, although they remember all their actions as Mal-Rogan.

Fire Spirit

Medium elemental, neutral

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 75 (10d8 + 30)
Speed 30 ft

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	6 (–2)	10 (+0)	7 (–2)

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Damage Immunities fire, poison
Condition Immunities exhaustion, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained, unconscious
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10
Languages Ignan
Challenge 3 (700 XP, proficiency bonus +2)
Manner smiling, exulting in its freedom
Shadow non-applicable (Corruption: 0/2)
Equipment none

Fire Form. The spirit can move through a space as narrow as 1 inch wide without squeezing. A creature that touches the fire spirit or hits it with a melee attack while within 5 feet of it takes 3 (1d6) fire damage. In addition, the fire spirit can enter a hostile creature's space and stop there. The first time it enters a creature's space on a turn, that creature takes 3 (1d6) fire damage and catches fire; until someone takes an action to douse the fire, the creature takes 3 (1d6) fire damage at the start of each of its turns.

Illumination. The fire spirit sheds bright light in a 30-foot radius and dim light for an additional 30 feet.

Water Susceptibility. For every 5 feet the fire spirit moves in water or snow, or for every gallon of water splashed on it, it takes 1 cold damage.

ACTIONS

Embrace. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (2d4 + 2) fire damage. If the target is a creature or a flammable object, it ignites. Until a creature takes an action to douse the fire, the target takes 3 (1d6) fire damage at the start of each of its turns.

SOULEATER (RARE, LONG HAMMER, +1)

The Souleater is a long hammer that according to legend was made in the lands east of the Ravens, with the aim of satisfying an anonymous warlord's thirst for power. If the chronicles are to be believed, the weapon was ill-famed already in the days of Symbaroum, often described as being *"forged in envy and hardened in jealousy."*

All of its owners in old Symbaroum are said to have met with especially grim fates. When the Souleater is found in the mausoleum it has a spell from an earlier victim in store: *ice storm* at 4th level.

Corpse Raider

The Souleater can soak in a spell from a creature it kills and then store the spell in its rune-covered head. For that to happen, the warhammer must strike the killing blow and its master must decide to replace the spell already stored with one from the newest victim. The spell is captured at the highest level the caster can use.

Requires: your reaction
Corruption: permanent Corruption equal to the spell's level

Abuse the Dead

The master of the weapon can cast the spell held in the hammer, even if they could not cast the spell normally. You use your own proficiency bonus and +3 for your spellcasting bonus.

Requires: as the spell indicates
Corruption: 1d4 temporary Corruption

THE SUN STONE

In ancient times wizards bound a wildfire spirit to this stone. Normally it glows with a pale light and gives off a mild warmth (enough to keep someone warm on an icy winter day). Whoever attunes with the stone gains 1 point of permanent corruption while attuned. They can awaken the fire spirit and command it to perform more dramatic actions, namely the following ones:

Strike with Fire

By gaining 1 point of temporary corruption and using an action, the master of the Sun Stone can set an object that they can see within 60 feet alight. This includes enemy garments (1d6 fire damage for 1d4 rounds). A burning person can put out the fire by using an action.

Requires: Action
Corruption: 1 temporary Corruption

Amplify Flame

If the master of the stone can cast spells that produce fire damage, they can use the stone to increase their power. Once the stone is activated with this power, the mystic adds their proficiency bonus as additional fire damage to the next spell they cast, which must already do fire damage (any other spell fizzles as the magic of the stone and magic of the spell are contradictory).

Requires: Bonus Action
Corruption: 1 temporary Corruption

Fire Spirit

By using an action and gaining 1d4 points of temporary Corruption, the master of the stone can release the captured fire spirit and destroy the artifact. The spirit appears as a towering humanoid made of flames and soot. It is grateful and will obey its former master for one hour. It can be given simple commands like "guard this place", "attack that individual", or "keep me safe".

Requires: Action to destroy the stone
Corruption: 1d4 temporary Corruption

TERATO'S DRAUGHT, ELIXIR

To the teratomancers, monsters are sacred and monstrous traits are signs of having been chosen (for example the burden Bestial, which can be used among members of Terato's Dawn in the same way as the feature Privileged, page 75 in the *Player's Guide*).

One way for cult members to become exalted is by willingly injecting themselves with a teratogenic poison, which grants the burden Dark Blood along with the burden Bestial. Unfortunately, the poison is also very likely to kill the one subjected to it – this is the test, to ascertain whether one will be Chosen by the gods or, if unworthy, die by one's own hubris. This deadly side-effect has caused the sect to use it as a poison against unbelievers – those who survive, monstrously altered, clearly did not deserve to die, as the powers of monstrosity mark them as Chosen Ones!

This Draught is a highly forbidden master elixir. The one making it suffers 1d4 temporary corruption, and it can only be bought on the black market for 30 thaler a dose.

The elixir acts as a Strong poison (DC 20). A successful save gives the victim the burden Bestial for 1d6 days. A failed save gives 4d6 of poison damage and, if the victim survives, the burdens Bestial and Dark Blood, permanently (see page 151 in the *Player's Guide* for Bestial and Dark Blood respectively).

THORN CLOAK (UNCOMMON, +1 WITCH GOWN)

This garment protects the wearer and can also strike out at their enemies. It requires attunement. At the beginning of the wearer's turn, it strikes out, using their Wisdom score plus their proficiency bonus to hit (with a reach of 5 ft.). On a success, it does 4 (1d8) piercing damage.

Second Strike

The master of the cloak can use their bonus action to trigger a second attack at any time before their turn ends.

Requires: the master's bonus action
Corruption: 1

THUNDER, THE LONG HAMMER

(MASSIVE, REACH, TWO-HANDED, VERY RARE, +2)

No one knows the origin of the long hammer named Thunder by its current owner. Raharax found it shortly after having woken from his latest hibernation, in the nearby cocoon of a troll who clearly had not survived its transition from rage troll to liege troll. Perhaps the hammer comes from Küam Zamok, but if so, it must have been forged in Symbarian times and brought to the dwarven realm by its founders as they fled the downfall of the empire.

In the hands of a player character the hammer deals 1d12+2 damage, and comes with two special abilities:

Armor Breaker

The master who has bound the hammer to themselves may, after each attack, successful or parried, attempt to crush the enemy's metal armor or shield. Roll damage even on a failure; if the total is 6 or higher then the target's shield has been damaged. The protection of the shield falls to 0 until repaired. Magical shields are not damaged but the shields' straps may still break and the shield cannot be used for the remainder of the combat.

If the bearer targets the metal armor instead the damage value must exceed the AC value of the armor. If so, the armor is damaged and its AC value is reduced by 2. A second attempt on already damaged armor makes it useless – there are gaping holes and the internal harness no longer holds the armor pieces together or in the right place. Otherwise the armor can be fixed using the same procedure as above. For magical armor, only the first effect applies and no further damage can be done.

Armor Breaker can be used repeatedly against the same target.

Requires: reaction on an attack roll
Corruption: 1d4 temporary Corruption

Synchronization

Thunder can adapt perfectly to the user's movements and hit with maximum effect. When activated, The synchronization deals +1d6 damage and gives advantage on Strength checks made with the hammer.

Action: bonus action (effect lasts 1 minute)
Corruption: 1d4 temporary Corruption.

TOME OF CEREMONIES

Mystical ceremonies are in general described in the *Ruins of Symbaroum Gamemaster's Guide*, starting on page 150. In his tome, Kagliostro has a special version of the Monster Control ceremony (see page 157 in the *Gamemaster's Guide*), created to free and possess the lindworm Margumal.

THE TROLL CROSS OF ELLA

(RARE, BUCKLER +1)

A troll cross engraved on a shield of meteorite iron, worn by the troll hag Ella to aid her against her nemesis, the blightborn barbarian warlord Odalbagar. Either the cross did not help her, or maybe she died in a later battle. Irrespective of which, her protective talisman has wandered on to new owners.

The shield is of suitable size for being a pendant hanging from the neck of a fully grown arch troll, consequently it is more like a buckler shield for a human – it can be used like that, following the rules described in the *Player's Guide* (page 171). Using it as a shield does not require that one attune to the artifact, but in order to use its powers attuning to it is a must.

Mind Shield
The master of the cross can use Ella's ancient blessings as protection against powers affecting the mind. The carrier has advantage on saving throws against enchantments and other mind control powers. If the effect allows saving throws over time, the master may also have advantage on a saving throw to end an ongoing effect – this also counts as a usage of the artifact's power.

Requires: the master's reaction
Corruption: 1

Mirror of Vengeance
The master calls on the support of Ella's deepest wisdom to try to turn incoming powers against the caster. All offensive spells targeting the master of the cross are affected.

The Mirror of Vengeance works as if the master of the artifact attacked the caster instead, with the same spell-casting ability. For instance, if the caster uses Charisma to determine a saving throw value, the Charisma modifier of the master is used instead.

It is worth mentioning that using this power is risky. A failure attracts even more corruption to the master.

Requires: the master's reaction
Corruption: 1d4 temporary Corruption if successful attempt, 1d6 temporary Corruption if failed

TRUTH SERUM

Type: Poison **Cost:** 20 thaler **Weight:** —
A creature subjected to this poison must succeed on a **DC 11 Constitution saving throw** or become poisoned for 1 hour. The poisoned creature can't knowingly speak a lie, as if under the effect of a *zone of truth* spell.

Ingested. A creature must swallow an entire dose of the poison to suffer its effects. The dose can be delivered in food or a liquid. You may decide that a partial dose has a reduced effect, such as allowing advantage on the saving throw or dealing only half damage on a failed save.

THE VILE WATER

The Vile Water consists of pure corruption, like an inverted Water of the Dusk (page 141 in the *Gamemaster's Guide*). It looks like black mercury and gives off dark fumes of corruption if not contained in a vial. In King Hurian's tomb the liquid is collected in a small carafe wrought from translucent, volcanic glass.

To bind yourself to this particular artifact requires you to accept one point of permanent corruption. The Vile Water has the following attributes:

Black-Light
In the hands of one who has accepted Darkness, the carafe can radiate with the dark of the Abyss, thereby blackening an area even if the sun is high in the sky. This means that a place (for instance a room indoors or a forest grove) goes dark for 10 minutes or as long as the master focuses on the effect, dark like a night without stars or moonlight.

Requires: concentration, as if it was a spell
Corruption: None

Black Synergy
He who bows before the supremacy of the Dark can use its blackness to enhance the powers of Sorcery. The master can cause the effect of a sorcery spell to double (either in size, duration or number of damage dice).

Requires: the master's reaction
Corruption: None

Salvation of Darkness
The master of the artifact can crush the vial with a thought, thereby releasing its darkness. All creatures present with at least 1 Corruption (temporary or permanent) immediately suffer 1d12 points of permanent Corruption. Beings that already have permanent Corruption are only affected if the outcome is higher than their current total Corruption – if so they suffer the difference. If the outcome is equal to or lower than their current Corruption value, nothing happens. The effect affects the master if he has any Corruption; only creatures with zero total Corruption are safe from harm.

Requires: action to crush the vial
Corruption: 1d12 (see description)

New Feat: Attune to Magic Item

You can use this to attune to a magic item by studying it carefully. You do not gain any Corruption for attuning to the item (you might still gain Corruption by using the item). If you ever lose or surrender the item, you still have this feat, which cannot be used for any other purpose unless you regain the item or an identical one.

The Young Gods

THE GREAT WAR brought about a radical change in the Alberians' attitude toward religion and spirituality. Before the war, people believed in a pantheon of godlike principles called the Young Gods, whom they believed could help them through the challenges of everyday life. Sometimes the gods would demand something in return – a small offering, a prayer (sung or spoken), or a promise of future deeds – but they were not worshiped, and were generally regarded as sympathetic to their human devotees.

Most of this changed with the war. Just after King Ynedar's death the sun priest Abramar had a revelation. He never doubted that it was the Lifegiver who visited his dreams, even though the god referred to himself by one of his older names: Prios – the First/Highest/One; a name that had already been reestablished by the nobles of the congregation called the Vestals of Prios. Inspired by his revelation, Abramar wrote the Lightbringer – a book that describes Prios' nature and sets out the laws of the sun.

Five years later, in the middle of a meeting with her war council, Queen Korinthia of Kohinoor collapsed. As she regained consciousness, the Queen announced that Prios had come to her with word of Father Abramar's writings and offered his assistance in their righteous battle against darkness. But the Lifegiver also let her know that he was dying, and that he needed the humans' help to grow well, free, and strong. Most importantly, the people had to abandon the Young Gods (except Prios); for according to the Lightbringer, these were merely aspects of the Eternal Night, sent to steal the power that comes from human faith and belief. In short: Prios seemed like humanity's only chance to defeat the creatures of the night, but in order for him to aid in their battle against the Dark Lords, all Alberians would have to submit themselves to his laws, fulfill their duties with diligence and zeal, and put their trust in the priesthood of the Sun.

Before long, their society as a whole had been reformed. The bond between the Sun Church and the crown was strengthened dramatically; for instance, the Queen and her administration adjusted the laws of the land in accordance with Prios' decrees. And what is more, she established an order of warriors to serve his church: the Knights of the Dying Sun, also known as the Templars.

However, on a personal level, the enthusiasm with which the Exaltation was received varied greatly from person to person. The vast majority wholeheartedly welcomed the Sun God's promise of assistance and did everything they could to contribute to his recovery and strength. Many others did their best to appear obedient, while secretly remaining devoted to the Young Gods. But there were also those who refused to submit and chose to flee what they considered a lie devised to enslave the people. Some even went so far as to publicly denounce the Queen as a heretic and a mistress of evil.

This section presents the greatest of the Young Gods, more thoroughly than the introduction found in the adventure *The Bell Tolls for Kastor*. Aside from describing the character, domain, and symbols of each respective god, we provide examples of places in Ambria where their presence remains strong. Worshiping one or more of the Young Gods is a crime, in both a legal and ecclesiastical sense, but since notorious heretics like Sarvola and Baron Mergai Dekanor have still not been punished, more and more people are following their example. Unfortunately (for them), it is often much more difficult to escape the stake if one lacks both powerful friends and massive public support...

PRIOS

Symbol: Sun or a bundle of sun rays

Name variations: The names Lifegiver and Sol/ Sola are often used by those who still worship the older version of Prios.

Domain: The spark of life, the hearthfire, and universal love

Practice: People worship the Lifegiver in the hope of increased fertility (both in humans and livestock), answered love, and relief from spiritual and physical ailments. To this day, many believe sunshine to be the best cure for all sorts of maladies. The Lifegiver is also regarded as a just defender of the sanctity of life, often worshiped by poor people praying for their daily bread and improved health.

Present-day worship: Father Sarvola at Thistle Hold is obviously the Lifegiver's most famous representative in contemporary Ambria, but his revived doctrine has spread to other parts of the kingdom as well, and gained ground within the Sun Church itself. Even Queen Korinthia has secret plans to renounce the Lawgiver in favor of the Lifegiver – if only to get rid of the ambitious First Father Jeseebegai. It should also be mentioned that Duke Ynedar of New Beretor is growing increasingly convinced that *"the Prios of War"* no longer has a place in the Ambrian realm; the Exaltation was a necessary evil during the war, but the time has come for the Sun to once again shine upon all its children.

THE EARTHMOTHER

Symbol: Goblet or a well

Name variations: Aside from the variation Mother Earth, the Earthmother is sometimes referred to by her older names; Mylla and Torva.

Domain: Nature, harvest, and safe childbirth

Practice: The Earthmother is worshiped in times of sowing and planting, as well as during pregnancies and childbirth. It is also believed that she can still earthquakes, heal sickly or unfruitful lands, and correct disturbances in the seasonal rhythm.

Present-day worship: Large parts of the Ambrian population are farmers, either working their own lands or those of wealthier landowners. It must be very rare for such people, even those living in Prios Domain, not to give the Earthmother a thought while sowing their crops. Since the Templars razed the free settlement of Earthmoor to

the ground in the year 17, there have been two major cults in Ambria – one in Kurun and the other centered around Count Hastorio Arobel and his estate, located near the river Noora's inlet into the Doudram. Both are unknown to the public and strongly (and secretly) opposed to the Curia's interpretation of Prios' nature and laws.

THE EXECUTIONER

Symbol: The double-axe as a stylized rune

Name variations: The Executioner is sometimes referred to by older names such as the Punisher, the Hangman, or simply Death.

Domain: Punishment, honesty, and just or natural death.

Practice: The Executioner is worshiped in times of turmoil and war, by warriors hoping for a glorious death and by civilians hoping to survive. Elders and their relatives pray when someone is dying, and the Executioner can supposedly help victims of crime to hunt down the culprit, and bring vindication to the wrongly accused.

Present-day worship: Aside from quiet prayers, whispered out of habit or precaution, there are currently a handful of groups exclusively devoted to the Executioner. One such is the Yndaros-based Headsmen – a secret society of twenty or so like-minded individuals, led by Captain Andonio of the city watch. Its members always wear full executioner's robes when attending gatherings or performing assignments, and therefore do not know each other's real identities; should someone be captured, or the group infiltrated by spies, the others need not fear being exposed. The group's mission is twofold: to counteract the Sun Church and its heretical interpretation of the Executioner, and deliver justice where the law cannot. The latter often involves punishing nobles who have escaped justice because of their status – either through physical beating or destruction of property.

THE PATHFINDER

Symbol: A triangle of twigs

Name variations: As one of the most beloved of the Young Gods, the Pathfinder has been given many names over the centuries: the Seeker, the Gamekeeper, the Trapper, to name a few.

Domain: Luck, hunting, and safe travel

Practice: The Pathfinder is worshiped in all things belonging to his domain – when embarking on journeys of any length, hunting game or birds, and in all situations where the outcome can be attributable to chance (for example during different kinds of games and contests).

Present-day worship: In the shadow of Sarvola and his attempt to reestablish Prios as the god of universal love, Thistle Hold is the place where the Pathfinder's following is at its strongest. Many merchants are secretly selling triangle symbols to gamblers and fortune hunters, and with the right contacts (and attitude), one may be invited to one of the feast-like masses which are sometimes held in Davokar. The fact that the Rangers have occasionally raided such gatherings only seems to have increased their popularity – even though a handful of mass participants have been arrested and burned at the stake.

THE WILDLING

Symbol: A braid

Name variations: The Wildling is sometimes referred to as the Artist or the Dreamer, depending on which aspect is cherished the most.

Domain: Passion, inspiration, and visions

Practice: The Wildling is mostly worshiped by artists in need of inspiration, but sometimes one can also hear authorities at different levels whispering prayers to the god of inspiration, asking for guidance and help in solving difficult situations, whether social or practical in nature.

Present-day worship: The feasts sometimes held to honor the Pathfinder are nothing compared to the parties of the Wildling. In Agrella, a large group of artists and free-thinkers arrange so called Wildling Feasts, behind closed doors and shutters. Vast quantities of intoxicants and recreational drugs are consumed, tales are told, songs are sung, and the nature of existence is dissected. Rumor has it that many of Ordo Magica's scholars often attend these events; even that the former archmage Elionara Yellowcat is one of the organizers. The First Father has recently ordered tougher measures to be taken against gluttony and promiscuity, and the burning of a heretic archmage would of course please him enormously.

THE ARCH-BUILDER

Symbol: An arch or an open gate

Name variations: Craftsmen of different kinds sometimes give the Arch-Builder names with the epithet "*the Greatest*": The Greatest Mason, Potter, Builder, Seamstress, and so on – or simply the Great Creator.

Domain: Creation, building, and forging

Practice: In Alberetor, the symbol of the Arch- Builder could be found in every craftsman's workshop, but ordinary people also prayed to the Great Creator before tackling the day's reparations, constructions, and handicrafts. The Arch-Builder arch is never seen in contemporary Ambria, but the whispers can still be heard in smithies, bakeries, and at construction sites.

Present-day worship: The elitist craftsmen's order known as the Higher Academy was dismantled as a result of the Exaltation, at least officially. The members who remained in Alberetor repented publicly and declared the order dissolved, but their passion for free creation never waned. According to Prios (of War), the craftsman's task is to cultivate nature in a way that benefits humanity; the Higher Academy claimed the right to cultivate for the sake of cultivating, and perfect the raw material irrespective of utility or worth.

Today the Higher Academy is legendary among craftsmen, and its aim often a secret ideal. And of course the organization does live on, in the shadows. For most people its existence remains an unsubstantiated rumor, but for one or two craftsmen a year the rumor is confirmed. They are invited to the order's headquarters in Mergile, where they must pledge allegiance to the Arch-Builder and condemn the "*laws of the Curia*" before twenty or so members and the current head of the order, the Master Seamstress Alma.

THE SEAFARER

Symbol: A ship or an anchor

Name variations: Older names like the Mariner or the Helmsman are sometimes used by Ambrians who remember the coasts of Alberetor; younger people use the Seafarer.

Domain: Sea travel, fishing, and storms

Practice: Usually, the Seafarer has to make do with a quiet prayer before the boat or ship goes to sea, but sometimes he is also presented with offerings in the form of pastries, flowers, or a few drops of blood. Longer prayers and promises of future gifts might help when trying to calm a raging storm (on both land and sea).

Present-day worship: All Ambrian vessels are marked with at least one discreet Seafarer symbol – the Sun Church can hardly accuse someone of heresy because of an anchor carved into the hull. But some sailors are still fully convinced that their welfare depends on the Seafarer's favor. One such example is the crew of the two-masted river boat Esmeralda, led by Captain Mendero. Mendero is one of those who thinks that the Lawgiver was invented by the crown to force people into submission, and his (carefully selected) crew always gather in the captain's cabin before embarking on a longer journey, to pray to the Seafarer and his brother Sol for favorable conditions. As soon as the Esmerelda leaves the dock, a ceremonial goblet of blood is poured over the railing – something that, were it ever discovered, would definitely constitute heresy.

THE GUARDIAN

Symbol: A wall or a tower

Name variations: The Mason is sometimes used when defenses are being built, while those who keep sensitive secrets or engage in secretive activities may appeal to the Veiler or the Shadow.

Domain: Protection, safety, and secrets

Practice: It was common practice in Alberetor to carve the Guardian's symbol into the bases of walls and towers, and honor him with work songs during the construction. Secret items or documents were thought to be extra safe when covered by a veil embroidered with one of the god's symbols.

Present-day worship: One could always go to the Guardian's temple in old Alberetor for help with hiding objects, documents, and other things best kept secret. This tradition lives on through secret temples in Yndaros and Thistle Hold. In the latter case, the aged Father Marald runs a hidden chapel in his basement inside Haloban's ring, near a tavern named Brew. And below the basement are three more levels, full of items that have been left in his care. Their owners never contacted Marald directly, but through one of his three initiated followers – two women and a youngling who are very careful about whom they offer the Guardian's services. The question is how long it will be before the chapel is discovered.

THE HOSTESS

Symbol: An eye or a butterfly

Name variations: Alternative names such as the Lover, Desire, and the Temptress are mainly used by those who focus on giving and receiving pleasure.

Domain: Cookery, beauty, and pleasure

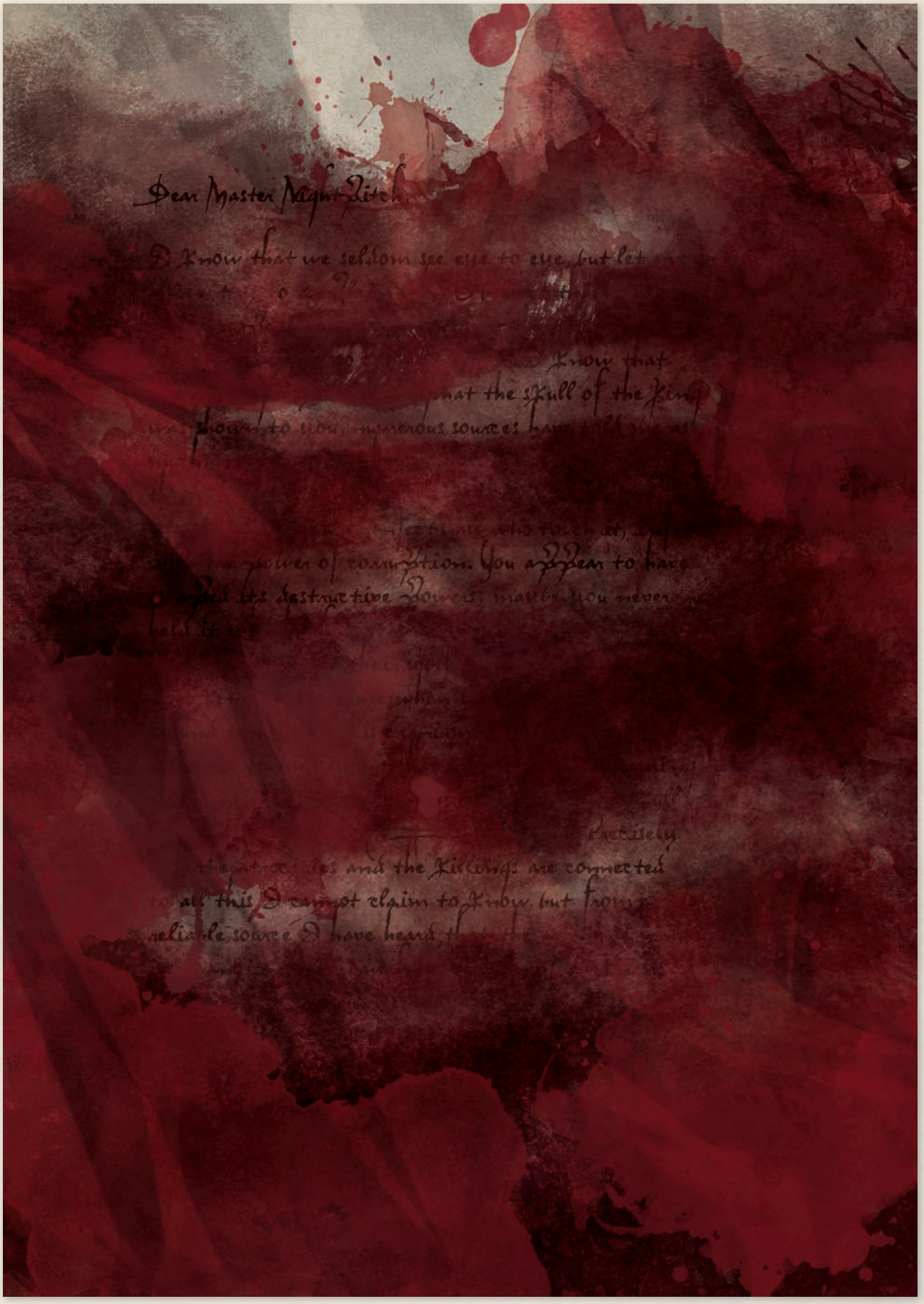
Practice: A pinch of salt or sugar, an extra flower in your hair, or a careful breath in your lover's ear is all it takes to receive the assistance of the Hostess.

Present-day worship: In Yndaros a group of young men have rallied around a distorted interpretation of the Hostess. They all come from humble backgrounds, and most of them spend their days as builders, waiters, and dockworkers. But twice a year they gather in a shrine devoted to the Temptress (actually a decorated warehouse) to prepare for "the Night of Conquest". Their goal is to sneak into some fancy event and find themselves a wealthy man or woman to lead astray; as they reunite the following day, the one who can boast of having received the most extravagant lover's gift has earned the right to call himself the Temptress' Ward. So far, all victims have kept quiet about what happened (probably out of shame), but that luck is bound to run out sooner or later.

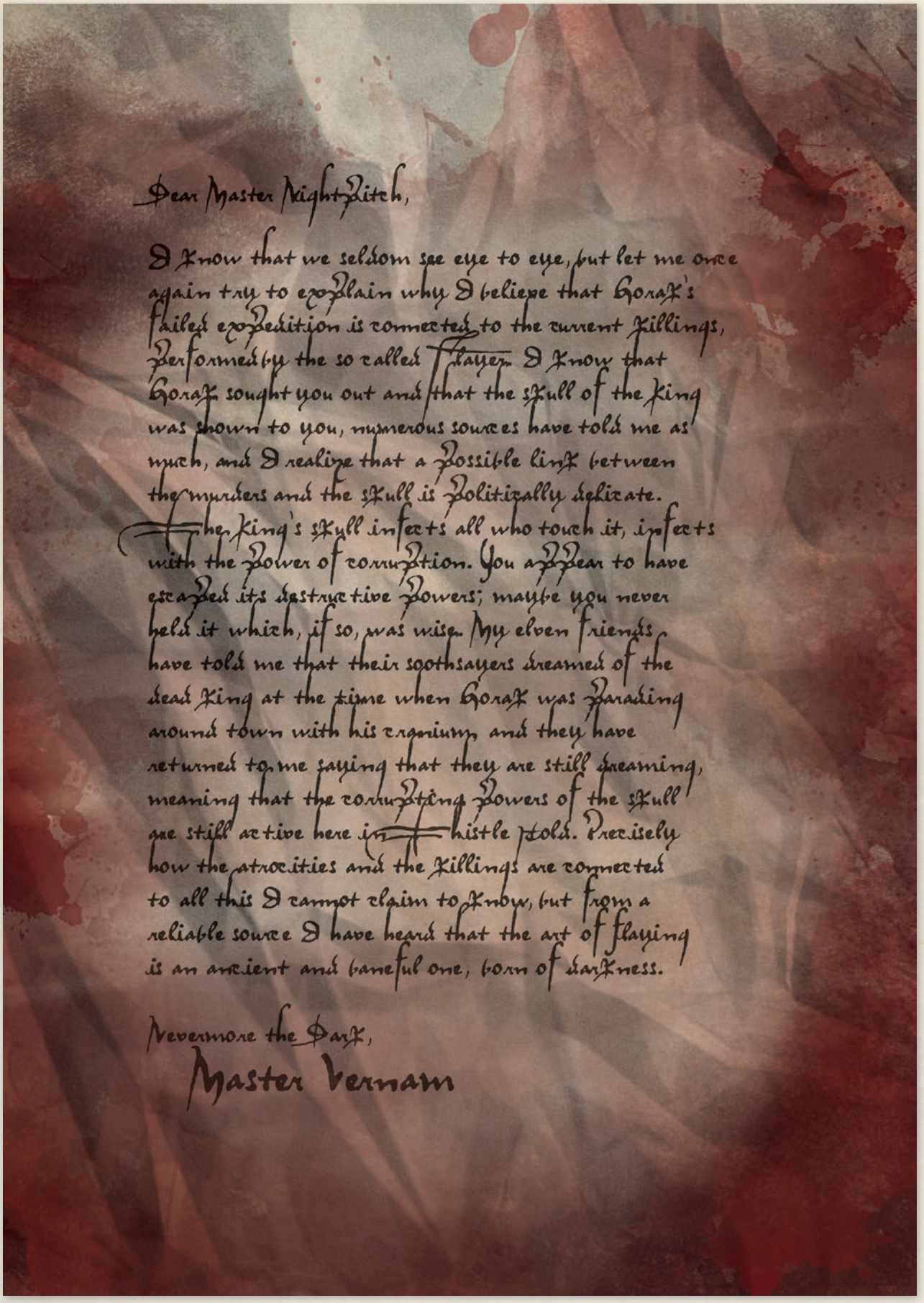
RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

The examples of present-day worship mentioned above all refer to groups that are focused on one particular Young God. In old Alberetor the gods were often worshiped as a family, rather than as individuals. Their holy places were not called temples, but temple cities, regardless of whether there were several buildings or just one – the largest ones in Kandoria and Berendoria consisted of a magnificent building for each of the gods. In fact, such communities also exist in today's Ambria, though rarely in its largest cities.

One example is the Temple of the Many, a congregation in Kastor whose members gather underground to hold mass. The Temple of the Many, once common in the south, can be found in other places as well – mainly rural villages in the duchies of Kasandrien and Narugor. In many cases even the local sun priest has joined the congregation, which would of course never be tolerated if the Curia ever found out about it.



Master Vernam's letter to Master Nightpitch



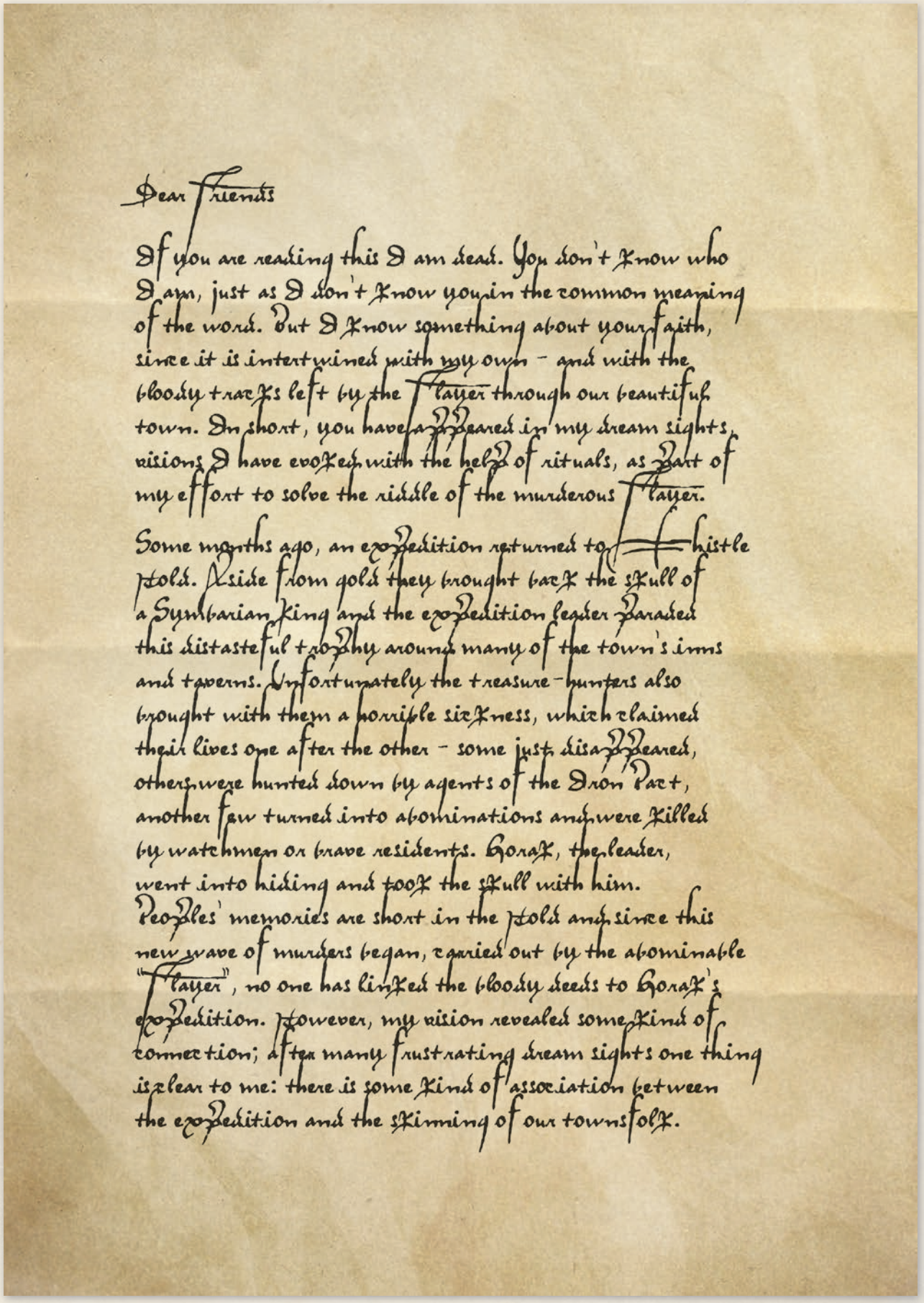
Dear Master Nightpitch,

I know that we seldom see eye to eye, but let me once again try to explain why I believe that Horax's failed expedition is connected to the current killings, performed by the so called Slayer. I know that Horax sought you out and that the skull of the king was shown to you, numerous sources have told me as much, and I realize that a possible link between the murders and the skull is politically delicate. The king's skull infects all who touch it, infects with the power of corruption. You appear to have escaped its destructive powers; maybe you never held it which, if so, was wise. My elven friends have told me that their soothsayers dreamed of the dead king at the time when Horax was parading around town with his cranium, and they have returned to me saying that they are still dreaming, meaning that the corrupting powers of the skull are still active here in Whistle Wold. Precisely how the atrocities and the killings are connected to all this I cannot claim to know, but from a reliable source I have heard that the art of flaying is an ancient and baneful one, born of darkness.

Nevermore the Dark,

Master Vernam

Master Vernam's letter to Master Nightpitch, cleaned version

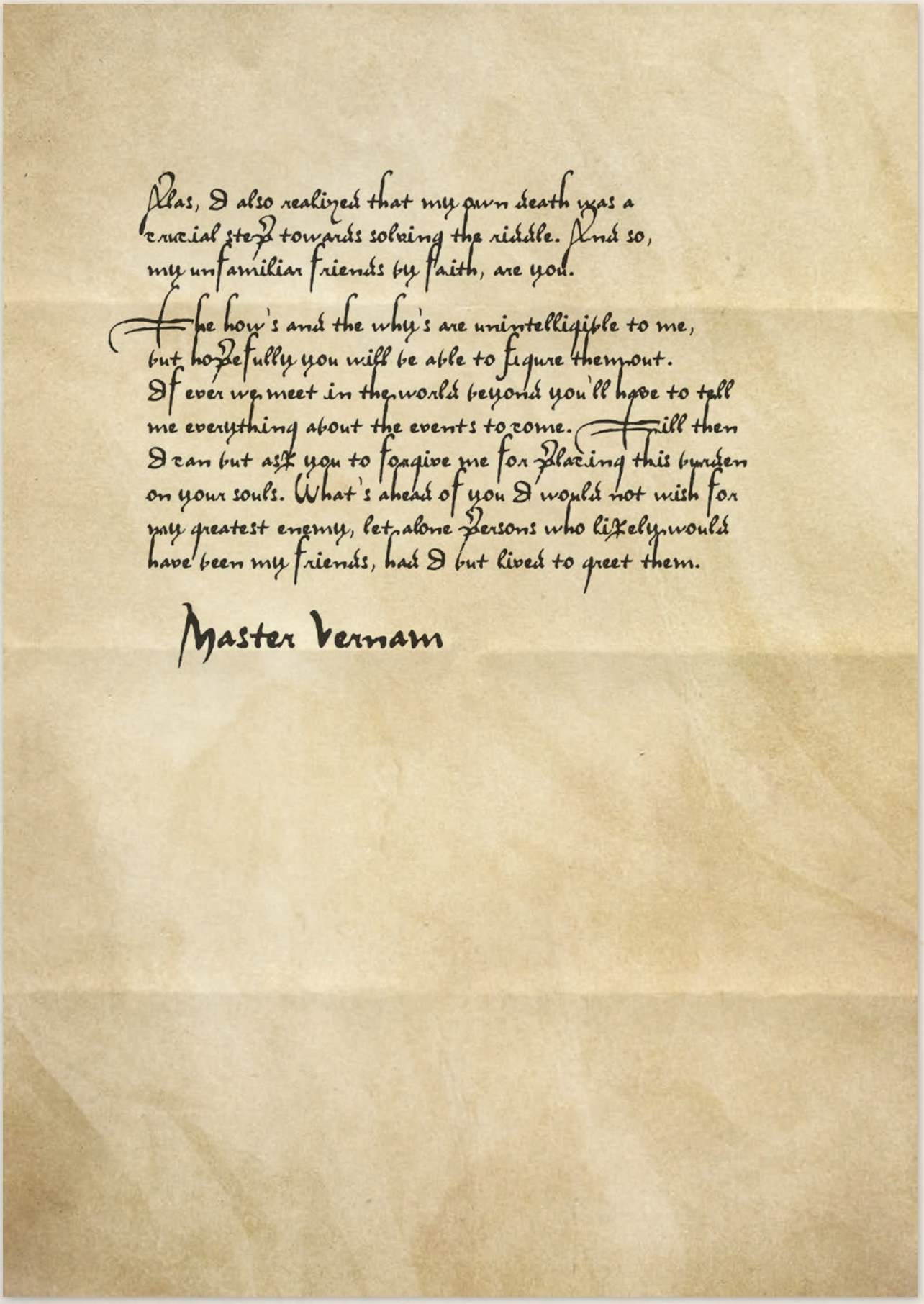


Dear Friends

If you are reading this I am dead. You don't know who I am, just as I don't know you in the common meaning of the word. But I know something about your faith, since it is intertwined with my own – and with the bloody tracks left by the Slayer through our beautiful town. In short, you have appeared in my dream sights, visions I have evoked with the help of rituals, as part of my effort to solve the riddle of the murderous Slayer.

Some months ago, an expedition returned to [redacted] histle Hold. Aside from gold they brought back the skull of a Symbarian king and the expedition leader paraded this distasteful trophy around many of the town's inns and taverns. Unfortunately the treasure-hunters also brought with them a horrible sickness, which claimed their lives one after the other – some just disappeared, others were hunted down by agents of the Iron Fart, another few turned into abominations and were killed by watchmen or brave residents. Horak, the leader, went into hiding and took the skull with him. Peoples' memories are short in the Hold and since this new wave of murders began, carried out by the abominable "Slayer", no one has linked the bloody deeds to Horak's expedition. However, my vision revealed some kind of connection; after many frustrating dream sights one thing is clear to me: there is some kind of association between the expedition and the skinning of our townsfolk.

Master Vernam's letter to the characters 1/2


Alas, I also realized that my own death was a crucial step towards solving the riddle. And so, my unfamiliar friends by faith, are you.

The how's and the why's are unintelligible to me, but hopefully you will be able to figure them out. If ever we meet in the world beyond you'll have to tell me everything about the events to come. Till then I can but ask you to forgive me for placing this burden on your souls. What's ahead of you I would not wish for my greatest enemy, let alone persons who likely would have been my friends, had I but lived to greet them.

Master Vernam

Master Vernam's letter to the characters 2/2

Excerpt from Ordo Magica's journal 2/4

At the morning assembly, Magister Senia told us that she has established a circle here at the keep and completed a first report to Thistle Hold. I notice that others besides me find this reassuring, even if all of us know that the feeling of security was an illusion: we are a long way from safety and the circle will not save us if threats arise. But we can get advice, and that is a very precious thing in an exposed situation like ours.

The investigation of the ruins has afforded both joy and some exasperation. Our scouts have located the tomb from which the plunderer Gorak stole his tainted artifact. The ancient writings on the mausoleum indicate that it contains the remains of a person of stature, likely one of the local kings who ruled the area during Symbaroum's early days. That the tomb has already been breached is evident, but hopefully the robbers did not manage to empty it or destroy it completely.

Excerpt from Ordo Magica's journal 1/4

Just like the scouts foretold, we found the overgrown ruin satisfactory and established our base camp there. During the hike from the outpost we had to be ever diligent, hacking a path through the dense greenery which rules the area. Everyone took to the knife to help clearing out the ruined keep. Outside we left everything untouched, hoping to mask our presence – who knows what famished creatures lurk hereabout?

Excerpt from Ordo Magica's journal 3/4

After mapping the whole area, Magister Senia found the tomb most promising. She also warned us about the sinkhole. This is hardly necessary since we all know that two patrols have vanished in its vicinity, but it demonstrates the greatness of her heart and her care for all members of the expedition. The mutterings and curses of the scouts and servants are evidently misdirected: Magister Senia is far from a "coldhearted slave driver" and the ruins much more than some "overgrown meat-grinder"!

On another note, the scouts have reported seeing streaks of grayish, black death spreading throughout the area, radiating out from the sinkhole if the reports are correct. What this is and if it will affect our work is hard to know but very easy to have nightmares about.

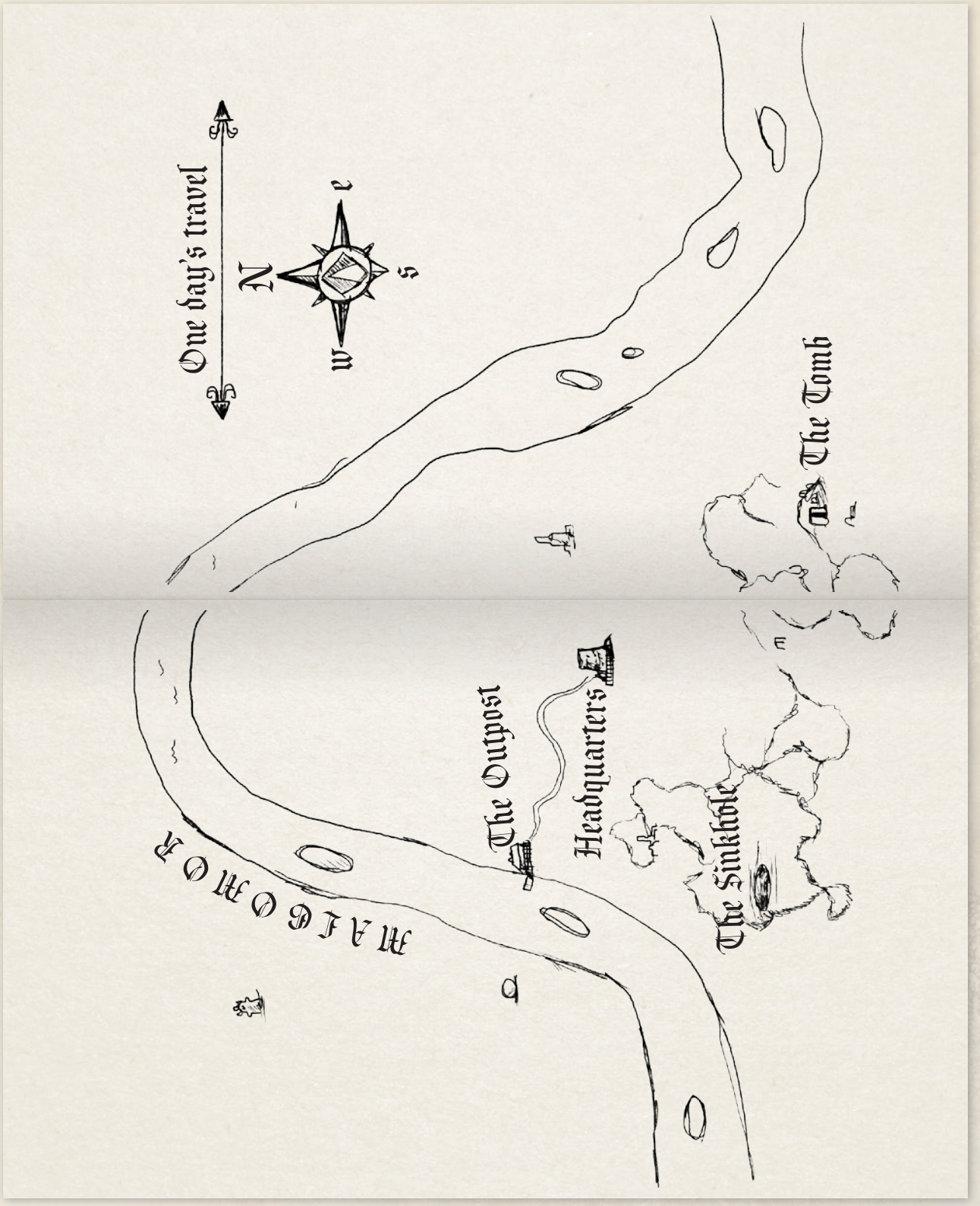
Magister Senia has ordered the whole expedition to start preparing for entering the mausoleum, and she has deciphered the text on the entry vault, hunting for clues as to what awaits us inside. If the streaks of dead nature keeps spreading our time here may soon come to its end, so we have every reason to hurry.

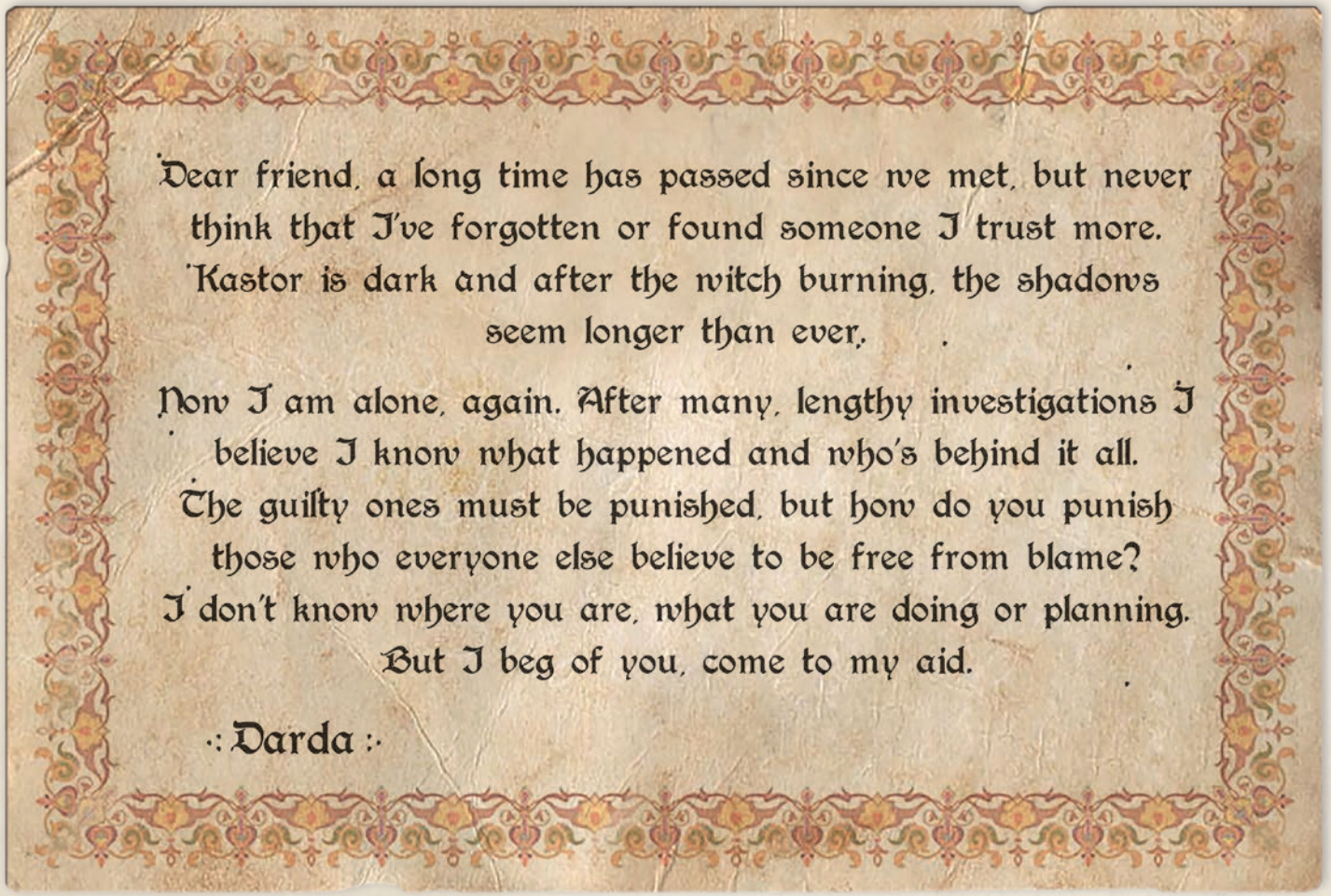
The ground quivers in pain, screams echo through the ruin. I dare not go outside. A deeper kind of darkness roams the night. I am nearly paralyzed, the cold eats at my soul. By Prios, the darkness is bleeding through the walls!

From the heavens a light, like a descending sun of simmering limbs, she embraces me. The savior is here, Prios be praised.

Excerpt from Ordo Magica's journal 4/4

Tonsel's map


One day's travel
N
w
e
s
The Tomb
The Outpost
Headquarters
The Sinkhole
E



Dear friend, a long time has passed since we met, but never think that I've forgotten or found someone I trust more. Kastor is dark and after the witch burning, the shadows seem longer than ever.

Now I am alone, again. After many, lengthy investigations I believe I know what happened and who's behind it all. The guilty ones must be punished, but how do you punish those who everyone else believe to be free from blame? I don't know where you are, what you are doing or planning. But I beg of you, come to my aid.

·: Darda :·

Darda's letter

On orders from the Curia

- The prisoner is to be taken to the Templewall cathedral

- Do not gaze into the heretic's eyes; avoid physical contact; do not speak to her

- Non-lethal use of force is authorized

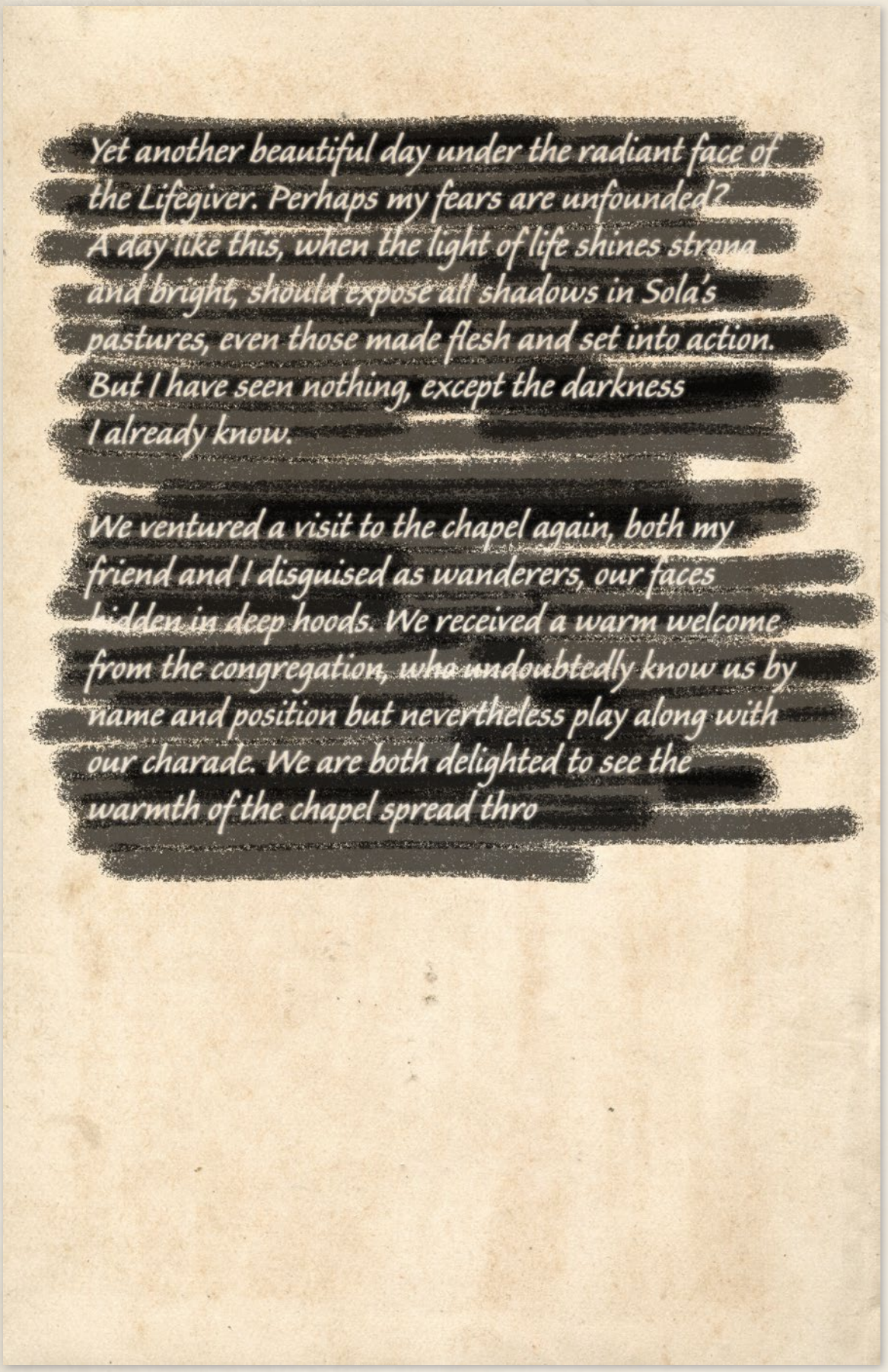
- Our Queen and her administration have been informed; they will neither stop you, nor provide any assistance

- Avoid contact with the fallen knights, Sarvola's renegades, and the general public

- In the event of imminent peril, bring the heretic to safety; trust no one but the brothers and sisters of our order

It is as I feared: the Master Weaver and his apprentices in the wagon behind Ilvas are lying. They are guards, escorting a prisoner. A woman. Old and hunched. Pale as sugar. And she saw me. She pierced me with her bloodshot eyes. Just for a second, like the stab of a knife. Or a cut. An intense expression, but what it meant I do not know. Perhaps it was hatred. Perhaps a warning, a threat. For a moment I thought she wanted to eat me. Or maybe it was a cry for help.

I will not get involved. Not tell anyone. Keep my distance. I do not want to know what her eyes were really saying. Death. That is the prevailing feeling: death



Yet another beautiful day under the radiant face of the Lifegiver. Perhaps my fears are unfounded? A day like this, when the light of life shines strong and bright, should expose all shadows in Sola's pastures, even those made flesh and set into action. But I have seen nothing, except the darkness I already know.

We ventured a visit to the chapel again, both my friend and I disguised as wanderers, our faces hidden in deep hoods. We received a warm welcome from the congregation, who undoubtedly know us by name and position but nevertheless play along with our charade. We are both delighted to see the warmth of the chapel spread thro

Ombardo's notes


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Prios Pass
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Ravenia
0
50 m
0
50 yards






N
Kastor
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0 100 yards

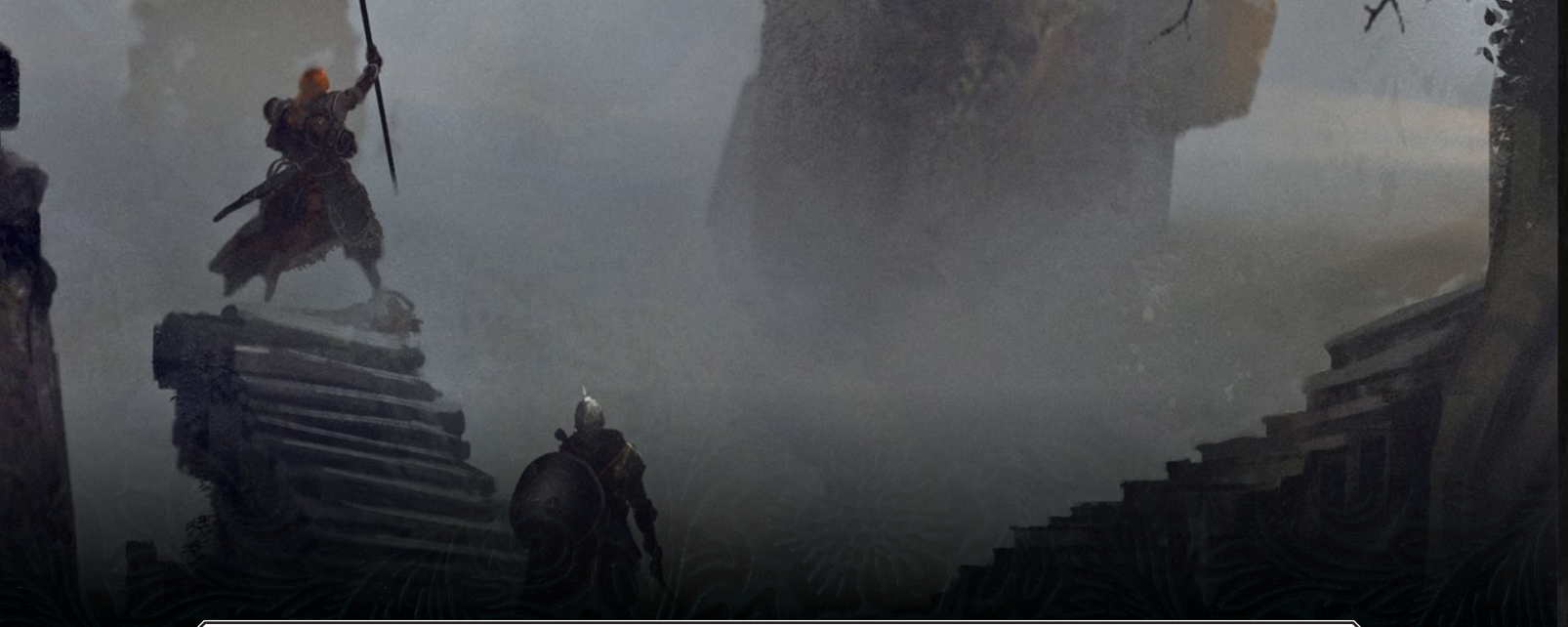
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