

5E

RUINS OF SYMBAROU



Call of the Dark

TWO ADVENTURES SUITABLE FOR LEVELS 8-10



RUINS OF
SYMBAROUM
Call of the Dark

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THUS SPOKE AROALETA

*... and the dream was shared by woman and man,
imprinted in minds, incarnate in flesh,
the vision of freedom from bodily boundaries,
the wish to unleash the might of the Gods.*

*They sought to conceive of rites and relics,
to strengthen the clay, and harden the soul,
to shatter the walls of their corporal prisons,
transcending the bounds of the mortal domain.*

*But vain was their longing, deadly the daydream,
consuming their lives, squandering blood,
for their shell was created with delicate outlines,
that rupture if pressured too hard from within.*



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The Ambrian Realm...

...is plagued by internal strife. The troubling tendencies are not new, but in this time of unrest they grow increasingly worse. More and more factions seek to gain power and influence for themselves, rather than looking out for the common good; discord spreads across the land, among high and low, leading to conflicts and struggles indicating that Ambria is slowly but surely descending into chaos.

THE ADVENTURES IN this book deal with some of the effects of this escalating decline, and are designed to be played with characters who have already experienced all or most scenarios featured in the *Ruins of Symbaroum Adventure Compendium*. In *Call of the Dark*, the House of Karnak plots against the landless family Sarli, aiming to have them removed from the list of nobles – just to anger and make trouble for House Argona, Sarli’s long-time protector, and win favor with one of the Queen’s cousins. Facing the threat of losing the family’s privileges, Irena Sarli embarks on a perilous journey to their lost barony in Alberetor, seeking to prove the House’s status. The player characters get involved as Irena’s traveling companions, either as trusted friends or as a contracted escort. Many dangers await in the dead, darkened lands south of the Titans, while threats within Irena Sarli’s expedition bide their time and wait for an opportune moment to strike.

The second adventure, called *Retribution*, primarily takes place in Kurun. It revolves around a scheme concocted by a cell of Saarian agents, aiming to aggravate the relations between Ambria and Clan Zarek. Their ultimate goal is to thwart the union between the daughter of Mederen’s Mayor and the son of a Zarekian Chieftain. By utilizing the jealousy of a young woman, they hope to unleash the powers of an ancient, corrupting artifact, turning the wedding feast into the spawning ground for a rampaging abomination. In this case, the player characters will get involved as they investigate the disappearance of Belraya, a barbarian fortune hunter – a tool of the agents who suffered from remorse, and managed to reveal part of the conspiracy before being killed. Once the characters put the pieces together and realize what is about to happen, they have the option of traveling to Mederen. If they are quick enough, maybe they can avert the tragedy, or at least help its victims deal with the aftermath.

As always, there are different ways for the characters to get involved in the adventures. A number of suggestions are made in the texts (see page 11 and 52), but are only meant as inspirational guidelines. As Gamemaster, you can (and should) always make the necessary adjustments in order to adapt the story to the play style and preferences of your gaming group. The game world of the *Ruins of Symbaroum* is yours to mold to your liking.



ONCE THE CONVERSATION dies, silence falls like a heavy blanket over the world. The sudden cracks of the fire resound like hammer blows in your ears. To make any noise at all feels like a violation of the unnatural stillness. The world is absolutely quiet, mute like the dead. In the darkness beyond the wavering ring of light cast by your campfire, even the moaning of the wind has ceased.

As long as you were on the road, the silence was hidden behind the sounds of the journey – stomping boots, creaking backpack straps, clattering cookware. But even then, the surroundings were eerily lifeless. Not even the buzzing of insects could be heard. Irena says she saw a bird passing north during the afternoon; the rest of you nod agreement, none of you truly believing it.

This is northern Alberetor, on the border between civilization and the dark. You have not traveled very far from the Cliff of Korinda, but still it is a wasteland, abandoned by both humans and wildlife. The only creatures you can expect to meet are the dead that have risen again. They are out there, somewhere. Somewhere in the darkness, in the silence.



Call of the Dark

FOR LEVELS 8-9

Introduction

In the beer halls of Yndaros and Thistle Hold, the people of Ambria speak with dread about the fallen kingdom of Alberetor, the scourges plaguing the land, and the distortion of its inhabitants. Most remember only the bad times. Those who recall the happy days before The Great War gloomily shake their heads, while those with more recent experiences tend to bury their memories deep inside, hiding from the pain they cause. Besides, who would want to draw attention to their own proximity to the dark influence of The Eternal Night?

But along the mountain ranges of the Ravens in northern Alberetor, Queen Korinthia's people – though she may no longer see them as such – soldier on with their lives. The blackness is relentlessly eating its way toward them, from the south as well as the east, but if nothing else, there is still a living to be made. It is a place inhabited by stubborn Alberians refusing to abandon their native land, refugees who were too slow to leave, those too poor or blight-stricken to be allowed through Prios Pass, opportunists hoping to create something of their own beyond the reach of traditional authorities, and merchants and fortune hunters still thinking they can make a profit from the old country.

THIS ADVENTURE FOLLOWS one such fortune hunter, Irena Sarli, and her search for items hidden at House Sarli's old estate – heirlooms of great importance to her family's future. This initial chapter presents the adventure's background and course of events, and offers ways for the player characters to be drawn into the story. The text then provides a description of the adventure's starting location, the Cliff of Korinda, followed by three chapters outlining the acts of the adventure:

a first one that sets up the story, introduces the guide Dobaró, and portrays the journey to Sarli; a second describing the barony of Sarli, the important adventure locations in the area, and the groups operating there; and finally a third act in which Dobaró's true intentions are revealed and the player characters must decide how to tackle the situation. Finally it should be noted that you can find relevant rules, handouts and player maps in an appendix, at the back of this book.

Background

THE ONCE NOBLE

Not very long ago, before The Great War, the kingdom of Alberetor was a vast, rich and prosperous land. While the common folk toiled in the fields, as common folk always have, many families secured good positions and gained fiefdoms and titles. Even noble houses without much influence could live comfortably in the remote corners of the realm. The Great War, and particularly the subsequent colonization of the new homeland, wrecked all this.

Ambria is small and cramped in comparison, squeezed between the forest in the north and the mountains in the east and south, with often hostile natives to deal with. This

land's scarcity soon became apparent to the new nobility being formed, and the creation of new duchies, counties, and baronies became a question of grabbing as much land as possible. Too many wanted a piece of the pie; first, of course, the Queen's relatives and confidants, then the wealthiest and most prestigious houses, then important allies of said groups, then those who had distinguished themselves during the war, and so on. In the end, hundreds of Alberian noble houses were reduced to some 50 Ambrian ones, and many families who had enjoyed their privileges for centuries suddenly found themselves without any formal status whatsoever.

Some of these families, particularly those from the northern and western regions, have remained in Alberetor, unwilling to abandon their lands and the titles that go with them. Others are said to have sought their fortunes in the west, in the City States or even the Realm of the Order. Nevertheless, most of them have relocated to Ambria, partly out of necessity due to the blight sweeping through Alberetor, but also out of reluctance to give up the authority that once guaranteed their status. There they live with nothing but their names, their social position, and in some cases the wealth that could be brought across the Titans, to keep them from fading into anonymity.

This gives rise to constant conflicts between different families in the same precarious situation. They maneuver to win the favor of an established noble house or secure a marriage into another, or perhaps – as the ultimate goal of all their efforts and schemes – to be considered when the time comes for the Queen to assign new fiefdoms. They are all jealously watchful of anything that might damage their reputation or threaten their family’s place as a recognized noble house, listed in the so-called *Nobility Register*.

ON THE BRINK OF DISASTER

One family of the kind described above is House Sarli, once barons of Sarli on the north-eastern border of Alberetor at the foothills of the Titans. They held on for a long time, struggling with failing crops, farmers and crofters leaving their homes, and abominations coming in from the darkened plains in the south. But when the family patriarch Ogdeno died in year 14, his sons and daughters lost their fighting spirit – soon there would be no people for them to govern anyway, and when the family estate was destroyed in a fire shortly thereafter, that was all they could take. The family packed what valuables they could and set off north toward Ambria. Thus, the only ones left in Sarli were a few villagers and a group of stubborn Black Cloaks who refused to abandon their monastery.

The subsequent years have been hard on the Sarli family. Achieving a satisfactory status in the new country has proven more difficult than they expected. Sure, they still have enough thaler to live halfway decent lives, and they have established good relations with houses such as Dresel and Vereo, but the truth is that no significant progress has been made toward being reinstated as a noble house. And the day when their money runs out, along with their access to high society, is inevitably approaching. What is more, a new threat has arisen that could destroy any hope for their house’s future – its place in the *Nobility Register* has been called into question!

Porgalo Sarli, Ogdeno’s oldest son, does not know the exact details, but it is clear that some attentive reader has pointed out that the information in the *Nobility Register* regarding House Sarli’s privileges is incomplete. It lacks

The Nobility Register

The Register of Ambrian Nobility, or simply the *Nobility Register*, is the official list of the country’s noble houses, kept in the House of Nobles in Yndaros: it states when they obtained their privileges and fiefdoms and which monarch that granted them, and lists the current members of each house. Since the Queen still resided in Alberetor until year 7, the register includes an Alberian section in addition to the formal Ambrian one. The notaries have done their best to maintain and update it as a matter of tradition. However, the rights of nobility only apply to people in the Ambrian section, with two exceptions: the right to enter Ambria at Prios Pass, and access to the various Halls of Knights scattered throughout the new land. The ability to go to one of the Halls of Knights and socialize with their peers, or the loss of that privilege, has become a life-defining issue for all the families who were robbed of their old positions.

exact dates and does not specify which of the two Alberian kings named Oragan Argona issued them – the renowned warlord or his son, Oragan II. An investigation by the House of Nobles will therefore re-evaluate Sarli’s right to remain in the register. Regardless of the background, this threat must be countered decisively, and thus a simple yet bold plan has been devised. The family will send agents to the lost barony of Sarli and bring back irrefutable evidence of its position, such as the Royal Charter, which unfortunately was not brought across the mountains. This will clarify their rights once and for all. Porgalo appointed his daughter Irena to lead the mission, and so she loyally gathered whatever resources the family could provide and set off across the Titans.

THE SCHEME

Naturally, Porgalo suspects malicious intent behind these obvious attempts to smear his family’s name, but though he is partially correct, the truth is more banal. Sarli has fallen victim to the plotting of other houses, namely the young Bermeon Karnak’s wish to ingratiate himself with the Queen’s young cousin, Rilia Kohinoor. The main purpose is to publicly disgrace House Argona by repealing one of their ancestors’ royal decrees. House Sarli, and the somewhat sloppy notes about its status in the *Nobility Register* which Bermeon happened to stumble upon, simply became a suitable tool to that end.

Although Bermeon is actually quite indifferent to the fate of House Sarli, he does not want anything to thwart his plan. While doing everything in his power to influence

the notaries of the House of Nobles, he also takes measures to frustrate Irena's efforts once the rumors of her journey begin to spread. Through his contacts with Galeia's trading house, he has sent carrier pigeons with a message which preceded Irena to the Cliff of Korinda, offering a substantial reward to anyone who stops her from reaching Sarli.

Bermeon is neither able nor interested in controlling how his request is handled, and besides, he sees no reason to attract unwanted attention by making Irena's journey from Ambria even harder. If someone accepts his offer, great, otherwise she will probably be killed by the lurking threats of the Titans or Alberetor – with or without any additional effort on his part.

THE FATHER'S ANGUISH

One of those who has heeded Bermeon's request is a man named Dobaró, who has his own reasons to go looking for House Sarli. He is the bastard son of Ogdeno Sarli and younger half-brother of Porgalo and his siblings, making him Irena's uncle. But it is not a newfound love of family or a wish to vindicate his house that fuels his search.

Dobaró grew up far away from Sarli, raised in poverty by his mother, and only knew his father by name. The reason why Ogdeno abandoned them never interested him; instead he worked hard, with his own hands and mind, to create a dignified life for himself. Although the path was sometimes hard and winding, Dobaró never gave in to despair, and when he met Milena shortly after the end of The Great War and they eventually had children, his happiness was complete.

When many others were leaving Alberetor, Dobaró and Milena stayed behind, doggedly clinging to the piece of the world they had made their home. Their bliss lasted a few more years, but eventually darkness came for them as it had for so many others. About five years ago, Milena and the children succumbed to undeath. Dobaró was not affected, but the grief from seeing his loved ones in that state has almost driven him to madness. Like many before him, he has since searched frantically for a way to cure the undead condition, while at the same time hiding and protecting his family. The search has led him down the dark path of sorcery, for which Dobaró has shown a natural talent. And he has finally found what he thinks is a solution to his problem – a ritual codex he picked up in the eastern borderlands of Alberetor, in a ruined stronghold said to have been used as a base by the invading armies of the Dark Lords in the early stages of the war.

Supposedly, the ritual draws the corruption from the undead and binds it in the earth. But the magic requires certain odd ingredients, the most important being bones from the undead's ancestors, and the only ones Dobaró has yet to find are the remains of his own father, Ogdeno. For that reason, he sought knowledge about Sarli and, after realizing it was abandoned, about Ogdeno and, when he turned out to be

The Ritual

From a scenario standpoint, the magic Dobaró wants to use does not necessarily have to be functional. The ritual (which, by the way, could just as well be a ceremony without Dobaró realizing it) might be a fake, a theory, or so experimental that it destroys all participants. Moreover, Dobaró might not be capable of performing the magic, even if it actually does work as intended. If the players find themselves wanting to search for the codex, Dobaró has hidden it in his home, a few weeks of dangerous travel south from the Cliff of Korinda.

deceased, about his descendants – all in the hope of locating his father's resting place through them.

His research pointed toward Ambria, which led him to the Cliff of Korinda where he soon heard about Bermeon's offer regarding Irena's journey.

DOBARÓ'S PLAN

As far as Dobaró is concerned, things seem to be moving in a favorable direction, so instead of traveling to Ambria he decided to wait at the Cliff of Korinda. If he can infiltrate Irena's group much ground will have been gained, as that would take him to Sarli along with someone well-versed in the house's history. Dobaró is a competent pathfinder who knows more than most about the dangers of Alberetor, and hopes this fact will convince Irena to choose him as her group's guide. It is a job few others would be interested in anyway. As long as they can navigate around any bounty hunters hoping to collect Bermeon's reward, the journey to Sarli should go more or less smoothly. And once they have arrived, it is his hope that Irena will unwittingly lead him to the right location. When she and the rest of the group have served their purpose, Dobaró will have no qualms about leaving them behind.

THE OUTLAWS

Dobaró is obviously not the only one who has caught wind of Bermeon's offer. Even though the representative of Galeia's trading house has not gone to much effort to spread the message (see the description of the establishment in the chapter about the Cliff of Korinda), some of the more ruthless brigands and sellswords in the region have been thinking of ways to interrupt Irena's journey. One of the bolder bandits is named Olmira the Black, who has waited there for some time for the group to arrive from Ambria. She hopes to stop them before they even leave the Titans, and puts her plan in motion during Act 1.



The Cliff of Korinda is often crowded, making it very difficult to keep track of everyone moving about inside the walls.

The Player Characters

THE PLOT OF the adventure is basically a kind of treasure hunt, which should be relatively accessible for most gaming groups, with additional opportunities for the Gamemaster to complicate the story if so desired. The idea is that it should work both as a shorter scenario for groups who, for whatever reason, pass the Cliff of Korinda, or as the basis for a smaller campaign centered around the Sarli family's struggle for vindication.

INCENTIVES

As always, the Gamemaster decides how to best involve the player characters in the story and which changes and adjustments must be made to the written material. That said, there are a number of more general entry points that might be suitable for a gaming group.

Hired Help

An obvious plot hook is that the player characters are hired by Irena to help with her expedition. If the player characters have developed a reputation during previous adventures, for example through their travels in Davokar, Irena might well seek them out even before leaving Ambria. If the adventure instead starts at the Cliff of Korinda, Irena has fewer people to choose from and will naturally turn to the seemingly reliable adventures who happen to be there. In that case she

will have traveled the first stretch with only her faithful servant Adso and passed the Titans with a caravan. Note that the Sarlis are not rich and that any promises of rewards should reflect that.

Chronology

Call of the Dark can easily be adjusted to take place at any point in the game world's recent history, without making any major changes. All you need is some form of central authority in Ambria for House Sarli to deal with; the other motivations in the background can simply be given to other actors (or be omitted entirely as suggested under the *Fortune Hunters* heading on page 12).

For completely new gaming groups, the adventure can also serve as an introduction, especially for those wishing to play *The Promised Land*. Irena could then engage the player characters in exchange for later helping them cross into Ambria at Prios Pass (as described in more detail in *The Howling of Damned Gods*, featured in the *Adventure Compendium*).

Timeline

- ◆ **-25**
Porgalo is born, son of Baron Ogdeno Sarli.
- ◆ **-23**
Dobaro is born, bastard son of Ogdeno, grows up far away from the barony.
- ◆ **-3**
Ralea is born in an unknown location to poor parents.
- ◆ **0**
Irena is born, daughter of Porgalo. Dobaro meets Milena.
- ◆ **2**
Ralea is given a place at the monastery of Maral the Bright. Her parents are dead or have abandoned her.
- ◆ **6**
Ogdeno's wife Sopira dies and is buried in the family crypt.
- ◆ **14**
Ogdeno dies, his son Porgalo becomes the new baron. Later that year Tarkomal is destroyed in a fire, killing Porgalo's wife Letira and his younger brother Olano. The family decides to relocate to Ambria.
- ◆ **16**
Karkoli, prior of the monastery of Maral the Bright, moves the forgotten Sarli heirlooms and the reliquary caskets of Ogdeno, Letira and Olano from the ruins of Tarkomal to the monastery. The caskets and a few other items are later moved to the family crypt in the northern hills.
- ◆ **17**
Milena, along with her and Dobaro's children, Madisa and Derado, become undead. Dobaro seeks a cure through sorcery.
- ◆ **18**
The last inhabitants of Shoreby leave the barony. They ask the brothers and sisters of the monastery to join them; some accept, but Karkoli refuses. Karkoli reveals the truth about the monastery's founder to Ralea, hoping it will make her stay, but she leaves anyway.

A Player Character Instead of Irena

One good way to start the story, if any player character has the right background, is to have Irena entirely or partially replaced by a player character. If the character's family is in a similar position as the Sarlis, the Gamemaster only needs to change a few names and possibly adjust the geography and a few relationships. This could work even if none of the player characters are nobles, provided they have served a noble house in the past, in which case it would be possible for Irena to remain in the story if so desired.

The idea above is also viable if the player character/family in question is part of an established noble house, but then the Gamemaster should add some other factor that casts further doubt on their noble status. After all, the privileges of Ambrian nobility are granted by Queen Korinthia herself and do not depend on the history of Alberetor.

Moving up the Ladder

Another option is that a faction close to the player characters has some kind of stake in House Sarli's fate and asks them to help. Maybe the Sarlis are devoted members of a factions that the player characters support or owe a favor to? Perhaps a young member of one of the established noble houses the player characters have a relationship with wants to marry Irena's younger brother/sister, which would be impossible if the family lost its place in the Nobility Register? Perhaps Bermeon Karnak has enemies who want to see him fail? House Argona might see the entire affair as an attack on them and be willing to aid Irena's efforts by hiring the player characters to assist her.

Fortune Hunters

Although the adventure is not designed for it, it is entirely possible to exclude the plight of House Sarli altogether. If so, the player characters should start their journey at the Cliff of Korinda and instead be enlisted by Dobaro as his assistants. This would likely lead to a different finale - Dobaro might not reveal the purpose of the expedition, and he may or may not decide to abandon them in the end. Otherwise it should be possible to use the adventure landscape as it is written.

The Structure of the Adventure

CALL OF THE Dark is divided into three acts - the first being quite linear, the second open with various places for the player characters to explore, and the third a presumably action-packed finale taking place after the characters have reached certain points in Act 2.

ACT 1: LIGHT FADES

In this act the player characters have reached the campsite called the Cliff of Korinda where they are contacted by Irena Sarli, a young noble from an old house without fiefdoms in Ambria, on the way back to the family's old barony in Alberetor to search for lost heirlooms. She hires them as guards and helpers on the dangerous journey to the darkened land. They are introduced to the guide Dobaro, who has his own agenda for joining the expedition, and they may interact with the camp's inhabitants. The next day the group heads east, and in a narrow passage in the mountains they are attacked by outlaws. The journey then continues east through

the increasingly blight-stricken landscape, and the act ends with the group setting up camp on the border of Sarli.

ACT 2: SHADOWS GATHER

The second Act begins as the player characters reach Sarli and start exploring the desolate and forsaken barony and its three primary adventure locations. They may visit House Sarli's seat of Tarkomal, the market town called Shoreby, and the Black Cloak monastery known as Maral the Bright. At Tarkomal the characters can find evidence that the monks have moved the heirlooms since the family's departure; then, at the monastery, chronicles mention them being moved to the family crypt and describe the way there. During the act the player characters must deal with not only the stationary hazards in the area, but also another expedition sent by the

Realm of the Order to investigate the monastery, and a band of confused dragouls convinced they are defending Sarli against intruders sent by the Dark Lords.

ACT 3: DARKNESS CALLS

The third act starts with the characters finding and searching the crypt of House Sarli, and the adventure culminates with Dobaró - actually the illegitimate half-brother of Irena's father - showing his true colors and attempting to steal his father's bones from the crypt. He intends to use them to perform sorcery which he thinks will resurrect his family from their undead state, and the player characters must decide where they stand on this issue. Meanwhile, the characters will likely find themselves in a bad spot, as the furious undead ancestor Telgon emerges from the shadows to drive off all intruders.



The Cliff of Korinda

By the southern foothills of the Titans, and the first steep slopes rising toward the snow-laden mountaintops, lies the Cliff of Korinda. The place, which is not actually a cliff but rather a grassy plateau looming over the hillside, was named after the adventurer and caravan leader Korinda. It was she who set up the first camp there, right at the beginning of the colonization of Ambria. Korinda herself is long gone, eaten by a pack of kotka cats according to campfire stories, but her name lives on. Today the Cliff is not only a camp for caravans crossing the mountains, but also a trading post, a military outpost, and not least the first stop for refugees hoping to leave the dying Alberetor for a place in the new country.

FOLLOWING A TURBULENT time of conflicts between various trading houses, the Cliff has for the last ten years or so been controlled by the Queen's Rangers, supported by a contingent of regular army troops. Through the years the area has gained more and more strategic importance to Ambria. The Queen wishes to maintain a link to (and, as much as possible, her influence over) the strongholds and powerful factions that still remain in Alberetor. She also wants an early warning if the blight should spread further north, and a chance to prevent it if possible - something that has become increasingly relevant in recent years. Other organizations have similar motives, for example the Sun Church and Ordo

Magica, both of which keep agents posted at the Cliff even though their motives do not always match the Queen's.

The Cliff's garrison determines which caravans are permitted to continue north - an issue that has a sizable economic impact for many merchants in Ambria - and along with a group of Black Cloaks they also inspect the travelers to weed out the most severely blight-stricken.

Otherwise the caravan leaders, merchants and other groups are allowed to live their daily lives on the Cliff as they see fit - as long as there are no serious disturbances threatening public safety or too many refugees crowding the plateau, the military keeps its distance.

Overview

THE CLIFF OF Korinda is a flat plateau roughly 200 paces wide and long, with a natural boundary to the west in the form of a steep mountainside and a slight downward slope in all other directions. The place is enclosed by simple but robust fortifications, dominated by the garrison's keep. It has good access to fresh water through the wellsprings emerging from the slopes.

THE RAMPART

Raised the year after the Cliff of Korinda was finally claimed by the Ambrian military, the fortification now encloses the entire plateau, save the western side facing the mountain. It comprises a four-foot-high, tightly packed rampart reinforced with stone, topped with wooden spikes and fronted by an external ditch, connected at the north end to the garrison's keep. There are two entrances through the wall, one in the south and another in the east. They lack gates but are guarded at all times by two soldiers from the army post.

THE REFUGEE CAMP

Southwest of the Cliff, by a small stream winding down toward the valley, there is a semi-permanent refugee camp. It is inhabited by the poor souls who have failed to secure a place in one of the caravans headed for Ambria and either cannot or will not pay what the trading houses are demanding from people wanting to pitch their tents inside the

rampart. Occasionally, the camp is also visited (if they can slip past the watchful gaze of their neighbors) by people who were turned away at the Screening.

The camp disappears during the winter months and re-emerges in springtime, growing larger as the summer approaches. Inhabitants come and go at a rapid pace, and there are usually no more than 40–50 people at any given time – more during the summer, fewer during the spring and fall. Life at the camp is hard, and unlike in Ambria, there are no alms from the Sun Church or the Queen to rely on. It is not uncommon for people to perish due to the harsh living conditions.

THE SURROUNDING AREA

The site is situated at the intersection between the lower foothills of the Titans and the steeper slopes leading up to the passes to Ambria. It rises from the west side of a narrow part of the valley where the caravan route passes through. The area is usually free of snow, except during the four coldest months of the year (Morangal, Ofeliya, Agani, and Elisal).

The lowest mountain pass is located a hard three-day journey north from the Cliff. In the other direction, the route soon turns southeast, reaching the lower regions after barely a day's march. Shortly thereafter the road forks into two – the main path continuing south along the old route to the capital city, Kandoria, with smaller branches leading west as well as east.

Establishments

ON THE CLIFF there are a number of institutions which to a great extent facilitate and affect daily life at the camp.

THE GARRISON

Ambria has a considerable force in place to guard the area and the stronghold that is the Cliff of Korinda. The roughly 100 **soldiers** (page 198 of the *Bestiary*) are commanded by a **ranger captain** (page 191 of the *Bestiary*), who also has 20 or so of the **Queen's Rangers** (page 190 of the *Bestiary*) at her disposal. But the troops are often out patrolling the caravan route to frighten off potential robbers or carrying out other missions in Alberetor. No more than half of them are usually present on the Cliff at any given moment, unless some known menace threatens the Cliff or the season makes travel difficult.

The garrison buildings comprise a round two-story keep with a wooden lookout platform at the top. The tower houses the commander and her junior officers and is also used for storage and as a meeting place. Connected to the tower is a long stone building which serves as living quarters for the troops, with a stable large enough for a dozen hardy horses suited to the terrain.

The current commander is the fierce Captain Egusta, recently promoted from the outpost at Prios Pass where she served for a few years. If Egusta did not survive *The Howling of Damned Gods*, or if the Gamemaster would prefer someone else, she can easily be replaced with one of the other captains from that adventure (Domio or Elan) or some other ranger the player characters could be acquainted with. If none of these seem appropriate, the commander's name is Captain Lukrano – a weary veteran from The Great War.

THE SCREENING

This procedure is carried out by the Garrison, along with the Black Cloaks in the area, whenever a caravan arrives at the Cliff of Korinda or (less commonly) tries to pass it without stopping.

The inspections are usually handled by the soldiers at the entrances with assistance from a Twilight Friar, but when a larger group approaches, a patrol is dispatched to intercept the travelers on the road. First and foremost, their purpose is to prevent blight-stricken individuals and corrupted items from entering Ambria – a task they take very seriously. Secondly, it is a process of making sure the



caravans have legitimate economic interests in Ambria, that is to say, that they are transporting authorized goods and working with some Ambrian trading partner. And thirdly, the guards are charged with preventing goods from being smuggled out of Ambria. The decision as to who may enter Ambria, however, is left entirely to the administration at Prios Pass. Smaller groups of travelers without blight-marks, who are not transporting goods, are often waved through without closer inspection.

THE MARKET

Although the Cliff of Korinda was originally established as an outpost for travelers crossing the Titans and later turned into a military base, it has become a significant marketplace as well. Caravans on their way to and from Ambria will inevitably make a stop there, and for the Alberians still inhabiting the southern slopes of the mountains, the place offers a chance to trade valuables for important equipment that can no longer be found in their own region. But commerce is irregular and follows the caravan season, reaching its peak during the summer months and coming to a halt during the winter.

During the caravan season, most forms of ordinary equipment (simple weapons, light armors, wilderness gear,

and so on) can normally (1–8 on 1d10) be bought from some traveling merchant at the Cliff. Martial weapons, heavier armors, mounts, alchemical substances, artifacts, and the like are usually very rare and seldom sold at all. A scarcity of resources in the area drives up all prices, particularly for people trying to trade in coin:

- ◆ Food, 3× the prices in the *Player's Guide*
- ◆ Other wares, 2× the prices in the *Player's Guide*

Trading in goods is somewhat easier. Food will only cost twice as much, while other wares are sold at the same rates as in the *Player's Guide*.

THE TRADING HOUSES

Huddled against the mountainside is a small cluster of buildings belonging to the trading houses who have chosen to keep representatives stationed at the Cliff. They are easily recognized as, aside from the garrison, they are the only real buildings in the area and the natural center of the camp. There is an open space in front of them where passing merchants do business, travelers can procure equipment needed to continue their journey, and one can get something simple to eat or drink.

Galeia

House Galeia and its industrious patriarch Lagoboi have business interests in many parts of the world, including Alberetor. Their representatives are among those who have been at the Cliff of Korinda the longest, more or less constantly ever since year 7. However, not only is the trading post exposed and uncomfortable, but the trade is deteriorating, almost non-existent during the winter months. Still, the Cliff is nevertheless enough of a focal point to keep it manned.

The current representative is the former caravan leader Argasto, whom the player characters may have encountered during the adventure *The Promised Land* (see the *Adventure Compendium*), and who has served at the Cliff for roughly a year. Argasto views his task as a retirement posting, a way to use his hard-earned local knowledge to squeeze out a few extra thaler in his old age without risking his life on the mountain trails. Argasto does what is required of him so as not to displease his employer, but avoids taking any unnecessary risks, which is reflected in his efforts to stop Irena's expedition. He has four experienced henchmen and guards to help him, and a dovecote that allows efficient communication with the headquarters in Ambria. If Argasto died during a previous adventure, or if the Gamemaster for some reason does not want to use him again, he may be replaced with the merchant Virondo – a man of similar background and character.

Melion

The richest family in Ambria, House Melion of New Beretor, naturally has representatives on the Cliff of Korinda by virtue of its economic strength and its need to maintain communication with distant business associates. Their trading post was not made permanent until year 16, but quickly became one of the most influential establishments at the Cliff. With interests in refugee transports, transit of goods from trading partners in the City States, and a certain import of salvaged valuables from the forsaken lands of Alberetor, Melion makes the most of the area's otherwise modest business opportunities. All this to the dismay of their rival, House Galeia, as it is difficult to compete with the vast resources of Melion.

The dominance of House Melion is also reflected in their residence – a well-bricked main building with a wing. There a merchant named Morlam is in charge of four aides and half a dozen guards. Although the living conditions are still quite austere compared to the cities and villages of Ambria, House Melion's staff live as comfortably as the circumstances will permit.

The Melion building is also where Ordo Magica rents accommodation for passing members. The organization usually has two adepts stationed at the Cliff, though much of their time is spent traveling through Alberetor. These adepts always return to Ambria when the snow comes, and

new personnel are sent at the beginning of spring. When the player characters arrive at the Cliff of Korinda, the adepts in place are Feona and Daerol.

The Agrella Guild

The Agrella Guild is an association of smaller trading houses and merchants with interests and investments in the caravan traffic. While the guild owes its name to the fact that its founder, the peddler Salkomo, came from Agrella, most of its members are actually based around the Titans and many are themselves caravan leaders. Other prominent members include Baron Karolia Meleon from Prios Pass and Hurian, a merchant prince in Yndaros. The Guild's representative at the Cliff is the former caravan leader Ilva, whom the player characters may already have encountered in *The Howling of Damned Gods*, and her goblin servant Olf. If Ilva did not survive said adventure, or the Gamemaster has other reasons for excluding her, the representative is instead named Leona.

The Guild was founded less than two years ago as a reaction to Galeia and Melion's growing dominance in the area and their attempts to drive other operators away. They have actively, and with some success, tried to recruit independent caravan leaders to their group, which has allowed them to take control of a significant chunk of the Cliff – though they are still weaker than the competitors.

The Agrella Guild's expansion is viewed with animosity by House Melion, while Galeia is more ambivalent – partly because the Guild's activities reduce Melion's influence more than Galeia's, and partly because Galeia's representative Argasto has been on good terms with Ilva since long ago. While relations between the trading houses at the Cliff are normally quite relaxed, the conflict between them simmers beneath the surface, and it will probably not be long before Melion acts against the Guild, hindering their activities in various ways, intimidating members into abandoning them, or even ambushing its caravans.

THE TENT CAMP

Most of the Cliff is occupied by the camp that the trading houses have set up for caravans and other travelers, with permanent tent sites, fireplaces, latrines, enclosures for draught animals, and so on.

The camp is managed by Alberian daythalers from the southwestern valleys, refugees who cannot afford to keep traveling, or goblins adrift from the north. Houses Melion and Galeia each control about two fifths of the area, while the remaining fifth belongs to the Agrella Guild, although the boundaries can move depending on the local power balance. The trading houses tend to offer the larger caravans a discount in hopes of attracting their business; otherwise a wagon space costs 3 ortegs/night, a tent site 2 ortegs/night, and room for one animal in the pens (food excluded) 1 orteg/night.

With Death as a Neighbor

Living in a dying land has left its mark on the Alberian people. Although the value of life has decreased for many, there is increased caution about resorting to violence. Meetings with strangers are either avoided or marked by great suspicion, but warriors as well as ordinary people often leave their swords sheathed and their arrows quivered, even when things get heated. For who is to say that a person slain in combat will not rise as undead a month later? Maybe that person will remember, and seek revenge? The Alberians know that at the end of the day, an increased number of walking corpses is in nobody's interest.

The Black Cloaks

The Twilight Friars have put up a permanent pavilion in the middle of the tent camp. Their faction has been there the longest, before both the trading houses and the army. There are always four to six Black Cloaks in the area, sent by the Twilight Monastery with orders to stop any servants of The Eternal Night from entering the kingdom of Prios. At the time of the player characters' visit, the group is led by Brother Arhalt. The screening they are conducting is sanctioned by the Curia and carried out in cooperation with the Garrison, as described above.

Rumors on the Cliff

THE GAMEMASTER CAN let the player characters come across any number of the following rumors, as answers to their questions, in meetings with old acquaintances or in conversations with the camp's inhabitants.

About the Surrounding Area and the Road to Sarli

- ◆ There are brigands roaming the mountain trails... Desperate people who have lost everything.
- ◆ These are dark times for the Cliff of Korinda – it won't be long before the trading houses tear each other's throats out.

- ◆ The main road to the east is still in good shape, at least for a day's ride or so. I've patrolled those parts often enough.
- ◆ Stick a dagger in the ground in each direction around your camp at night. That'll keep the undead away.
- ◆ Hardly anyone ever goes east – that's where the blackness starts. But my friend Olke says he saw a group turn east at the crossroads a few days ago. Strange they were, with two sun priests among them. You don't see many such these days.

About Sarli and the Eastern Regions

- ◆ Sarli? There's nothing there, everyone left long ago.
- ◆ If I'm not mistaken, Eadra in North Kverne, the miller's wife, comes from Sarli. Moved there with a group when she was a girl.
- ◆ I've been told that black rains from Lyastra are sweeping through the plains in the east, knocking people to the ground. Then they rise again, as revenants.
- ◆ It's said that the people still living in the east are forced to sleep in underground burrows, lest the nighttime mists of the Dark Lords take them away to the Yonderworld.

About Alberetor

- ◆ The villagers in the valleys are poor folk, stealing anything they can get their hands on.
- ◆ The main road to Kandoria is safe for a few days south. The soldiers make sure of that.
- ◆ Prince Ogdaran rules the people west of Eagram – the king of Westmark he calls himself. The Queen's people can't be pleased, but what can they do? Of course, someone would take matters into his own hands when she's not around. And she's busy with the barbarians in the north, from what I hear.



The Light Fades

This chapter introduces the players to the adventure, presents important non-player characters, and sets the scene for the continued journey. It also gives the player characters a chance to explore the environment at the Cliff of Korinda and purchase any equipment they might need.

Game Opening

IF A PLAYER character has taken Irena's place in the plot, the adventure will likely begin with the group looking for a guide, which they will soon be advised to do if it was not already part of the plan. This gives the Gamemaster a chance to first let the player characters hear rumors about the old country and interact with the Cliff's inhabitants (perhaps they run into some old acquaintance?), before introducing Dobaro. At some point the characters may also get a chance to notice Olmira watching their camp site.

On the other hand, should the player characters have come to the Cliff of Korinda along with Irena or have other reasons for being there, the story begins with Irena either introducing them to Dobaro or hiring them to help with the journey. In the latter case she has already enlisted Dobaro's services as a guide.

In any event, Dobaro can be used to provide information about the dangers of Alberetor, anything that might be needed in order to make the journey to Sarli, and other practical advice. If the player characters lack the necessary equipment, the Gamemaster should give them a chance to purchase it at the Cliff, as long as it is reasonable for such things to be available there. Any items they might have, but do not want to take with them, can be left with Irena's servant, Adso, who fell ill while crossing the Titans and will await his mistress' return at the Cliff. The group will depart the following day.

Irena Sarli

Irena grew up in her father's shadow, shackled by the kind of expectations that come with being the oldest child and heir. This pressure increased during her years of exile in Ambria and has virtually exploded during the current crisis, with almost nightly sessions of planning, speculating and ruminating with her father. Embarking on the dangerous

journey to Alberetor and finally taking action, albeit desperately, almost came as a relief. Irena's own view of the importance of her house's place in the Nobility Register is something she has not yet had time to think about...

Irena is as old as the colonization of Ambria and consequently left Sarli as a teenager. She still has relatively clear memories of the landscape and where to find the various adventure locations, and has been given advice by Porgalo and other relatives – see the handout of Irena's map on page 92. Regarding Tarkomal, the family's old seat, she is familiar with the background described under History up to the point when her family abandoned it. She also knows the surrounding area fairly well and recalls the purposes of the various buildings, although the finer details may have escaped her. As for Shoreby and the monastery of Maral the Bright, she knows their history (or in the latter case, the official version) and is familiar with the geography, but lacks any detailed knowledge. She only visited the crypt of House Sarli once when she was six, when her grandmother Sopira was buried, and her memories of it are vague at best. Porgalo has told her what little he remembers and offered directions, and based on that information she is confident that she will at least be able to find the right part of the barony.

Regarding the mission's objective, it is the family's – therefore Irena's – belief that the Royal Charter, the most important piece of evidence to retrieve, was most likely left by mistake among the other items and documents they could not take with them from Tarkomal. They do not have a clear recollection, however (or else they would not have left without it) – at worst it may have been lost in the fire. It could also have been stored someplace else or moved by the Black Cloaks who were trusted with managing the barony after the family's departure.



Irena

Medium human (Ambrian)

Armor Class 19 (studded leather, shield)

Hit Points 85 (10d8 + 40)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	20 (+5)	18 (+4)	10 (+2)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)

Skills History +4, Insight +4, Perception +4, Persuasion +4

Senses passive Perception 14

Languages Ambrian

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP, proficiency bonus +2)

Manner upright and brave

Shadow gleaming like hammered silver (0/4)

Equipment dagger, 57 thaler, 18 shillings, 23 ortegs

Privileged. Irena has advantage on social challenges with other nobles.

Shield Fighter. If Irena makes a successful attack roll, she can use her bonus action to slam the target. If the target is a Medium sized creature or smaller, it must make a DC 15 Strength saving throw. On a failure Irena can choose to move it 10 feet in a line, or cause the creature to become prone.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Irena makes two attacks with Bluetongue, her fencing sword.

Bluetongue. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (1d8 + 7) magical slashing damage. *Deep Impact:* A critical hit with Bluetongue does 23 (2d8 + 14) magical slashing damage. *Paralyze:* see page 89.

REACTIONS

Parry. Irena adds +2 to her AC against one melee attack that would hit her. To do so, she must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon.

Dobaro

Dobaro is not an evil man, at least he does not see himself that way. He has set out to save his wife, daughter and son from undeath through whatever means seem most effective. How could that be considered a malicious deed? As described in chapter one, he never cared about his paternal relatives until quite recently, but deep inside he has always felt a streak of bitterness over his and his mother's squalid existence far away from the Sarli fortune. As Dobaro sees it, he has every right to take whatever he needs from the crypt - House Sarli owes him that much. He does not hate Irena - on the contrary, he tries to get to know her and asks questions about her family, particularly about Ogdeno - but at the same time he will never allow any regard for her to stop him from reaching his goal.

During Act 1 and 2, Dobaro will do his best to keep the group (especially Irena) alive. He tries to avoid displaying his mystical powers but will use them if necessary. He answers any personal questions with lies, claiming to have been a novice of Ordo Magica in his youth and that the darkening of the land seems to have affected his powers. Similarly, he will respond to any questions about his shadow by murmuring, "The darkness of these lands gets to us all, sooner or later."

Having walked the path of sorcery for the last few years, combined with the grief over his family's fate, he has become increasingly gloomy and dark-minded. The powers he has so skillfully acquired both frighten and fascinate him, especially the pleasure he gets whenever he is forced to use them on other creatures... Subconsciously he realizes that the path he has chosen will likely be his undoing, rather than the salvation he is hoping for.



Dobaro

Medium human

Armor Class 15

Hit Points 45 (7d8 + 14)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	20 (+5)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	17 (+3)

Skills Deception +5, Insight +3, Perception +3, Stealth +7

Senses passive Perception 13

Languages Ambrian, Lyastrian

Challenge 3 (700 XP, proficiency bonus +2)

Manner evasive

Shadow dark green like the rotten plants of a swamp (Corruption: 7/10)

Equipment dagger, mystical focus, ritual focus

The Darkened Path. Dobaro has advantage on Corruption checks.

The Power of Corruption. Dobaro has 7 permanent Corruption. He can cast spells totalling up to 7 levels before gaining any Corruption from casting.

The Shadowed Slope. Dobaro gains less total Corruption from unfavored spells, as noted below.

Spellcasting. Dobaro is a sorcerer (spell attack +5, save DC 13) that knows the following spells:

Cantrips: *acid splash* (0), *dancing lights* (0), *message* (0), *poison spray* (0), *prestidigitation* (0), *ray of frost* (0)

1st-level spells: *black bolt* (1d4), *charm person* (1d4), *mage armor* (1)

2nd-level spells: *hold person* (1d4 + 1), *suggestion* (1d4 + 1)

3rd-level spells: *hypnotic pattern* (3), *larvae boil* (3)

4th-level spells: *polymorph* (1d4 + 3)

Rituals: *detect magic*, *exchange shadow*, *water breathing*

ACTIONS

Dagger of Venom. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d4 + 6) piercing damage. Dobaro can use an action to cause the blade to become poisoned. The poison remains for 1 minute or until he hits a creature. The target must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or take 11 (2d10) poison damage and be poisoned for 1 minute. This effect cannot be used until the next dawn.

TRAVELING WITHOUT A GUIDE

Venturing into Alberetor without someone who knows the landscape is a bad idea, and the Gamemaster should make sure to have various individuals at the Cliff of Korinda point this out. If the player characters still choose not to enlist a guide, they must face the dangers described below on their own. In that case, Dobaro will secretly follow the group to Sarli. The Gamemaster must decide how this affects the course of events, as it will probably require a few adjustments, although most of the locations can still be used as written.

The Journey to Sarli

WALKING TO SARLI takes approximately three days - one to descend the mountain trail, and then another two-day march east along the old main road.

THE FIRST DAY

The first day of travel starts by following the caravan route winding southeast along the brook. During the first half of the day, the terrain is rocky and arduous, but by the afternoon the landscape flattens as the route continues toward the valleys. The characters reach the crossroads where the route meets the old main road, running along the mountains to the east and west, an hour or two before sundown.

So far, the landscape remains more or less the same and follows the normal seasonal changes. The vegetation and animal life are in many ways reminiscent of southern Ambria, and inexperienced travelers do not notice the darkness slowly consuming the land.

The Ambush

Around noon the route passes a steeper stretch where the path runs a bit further from the southward flow of the brook. Mountainsides rise in the north, and on the south side the view is obstructed by huge boulders - the result of past rockslides. This is where Olmira the Black has decided to ambush Irena and her companions, as she has used the spot many times before. Her scouts watched for the group's departure from the camp at the Cliff of Korinda, and used secret mountain paths to intercept them in this passage.

Olmira has her **archers** (page 196 of the *Bestiary*, twice as many as the characters) hide on both sides of the route. They open fire when the targets are standing between them. Olmira positions herself (**robber chief**, page 187 in the *Bestiary*) and half of her remaining **robbers** (page 186 in the *Bestiary*, equal number to the characters) in front of the targets, and will attack one turn after the archers start firing. The other half stay hidden in a rocky outcrop further south, and enter the fray after yet another turn, coming up from behind.

More or Fewer Outlaws?

The basic idea of the adventure is that Bermeon's offer to reward those who stop Irena is made as an extra insurance – simply because he can, not because he really thinks it is necessary for his plan to succeed. The resulting rumors about Irena's journey give Dobaro reason to await her arrival at the Cliff of Korinda. Since House Galeia has no vested interest in the mission and merely regards it as a favor to House Karnak, their local representative has not involved himself more than necessary. The information has only spread among a small circle of local crooks that Galeia feels compelled to maintain relations with, and a few individuals whose own inquiries made them seem suitable for the job, such as Dobaro who has been seeking information about House Sarli.

Olmira's outlaws are meant to represent the threat posed by such groups and provide some action at the start of the adventure. Depending on the gaming group's preferences, however, this section may be adjusted to include a lesser or greater number of encounters. In groups where Irena's mission is given a more central place in a campaign, Bermeon's schemes might start to cause problems while they are still in southern Ambria, and perhaps the group is stalked by persistent bounty hunters all the way to Sarli? On the other hand, gaming groups who prefer to use it as a side adventure or focus entirely on the exploration of Sarli and the conflicts that might arise there, are free to leave out the outlaw attack entirely.

The archers can be detected by an observant scout. If the players expressly state that they are looking out for ambushes, a character can make a **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check** to detect them. If they don't specify, they still make the same check but with disadvantage.

THE SECOND DAY

On the second day the party heads east, as Dobaro leads them down the main road winding its way across the hills with the mountain peaks to the left. The environment is still more or less the same as in Ambria, with a somewhat higher temperature.

Events along the way

These are intended as purely atmospheric scenes for the Gamemaster to use if so desired.

- ◆ A family turns onto the main road from a smaller path from the south. The group, composed of an adult couple, an old lady, and four children between the ages of 7 and 15, is pushing a cart piled high with everyday objects and other luggage. They are suspicious of the player characters and keep their distance, but if met with kindness, their attitude changes and becomes intrusive. They are starved and scrawny, and ask for some food. One of the children is blight-marked (blisters with dark edges on a scalp with hair falling off in tufts). If asked, they claim

to be on their way to the Cliff of Korinda to barter for supplies. They will then continue west. If the player characters give them something of use (Dobaro advises against it), they will keep asking for more until the player characters leave. They have never even heard of Sarli. If the player characters turn aggressive, the family quickly flees into the terrain, except for the youngest girl who becomes frozen with fear and starts to cry.

- ◆ The player characters notice a cluster of houses huddled together in a valley a few kilometers north of the road. There is smoke coming from the chimneys, and if they move closer, the group can see croplands and sheep pens. The place is inhabited by half a dozen families, though the houses seem to have room for three times that number. Player characters wishing to stay the night are offered accommodation and a bowl of hot soup. The locals ask for nothing in return, but will gratefully accept any gifts of useful items. The player characters may talk to the informal leader of the village, Reia, a serious woman in her fifties. She is familiar with Sarli and knows that the baron's family has abandoned the place. She isn't sure if anyone still lives there but knows that the place was still inhabited three or so years ago. She also thinks the monks at the Monastery of Maral the Bright were still around at that time. Four years ago, a group of Black Cloaks stopped at the village and claimed to be on their way there.

THE THIRD DAY

The third day starts in a similar fashion, but something changes around noon. With each kilometer the landscape becomes increasingly barren, and what little vegetation there is seems twisted and sickly. The change is obvious, and none of the characters can fail to notice it. By the end of the day they finally reach the western border of Sarli. Both Shoreby and Tarkomal are now roughly half a day's march away.

During the third day Dobaro becomes increasingly cautious. Sometimes he has the group pause for half an hour, without explanation, before going on; sometimes he leads them on seemingly inexplicable detours around certain parts of the route. Have Dobaro make two **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) checks**, one in the morning, one in the afternoon – failure means that he leads them through a blight-stricken area. Each character then suffers 1d4 temporary corruption due to sudden eruptions of darkness in the landscape. These events are unpleasant, but not physically dangerous. The following is an example for the Gamemaster to elaborate on as they see fit:

- ◆ They pass a small patch of marsh, about ten paces across. The wetland seems inexplicable, as the ground surrounding it is parched and there are no watercourses in sight. A yellowish-gray mist rises from the marsh and sweeps towards the player characters. The air becomes difficult

to breathe and hurts their lungs. It only takes a minute to move away from the mist, but the corruption causes gagging, nausea and drowsiness. A thin layer of yellow dust covers the characters and their equipment.

In the morning Dobaró tells them to stop at a small stream and fill their waterskins, explaining that the water of the lowland brooks and creeks is not fit to drink. If asked he can reveal that, further east, one must go higher up the mountains to find fresh water – a time-consuming task he would rather avoid.

Events along the way

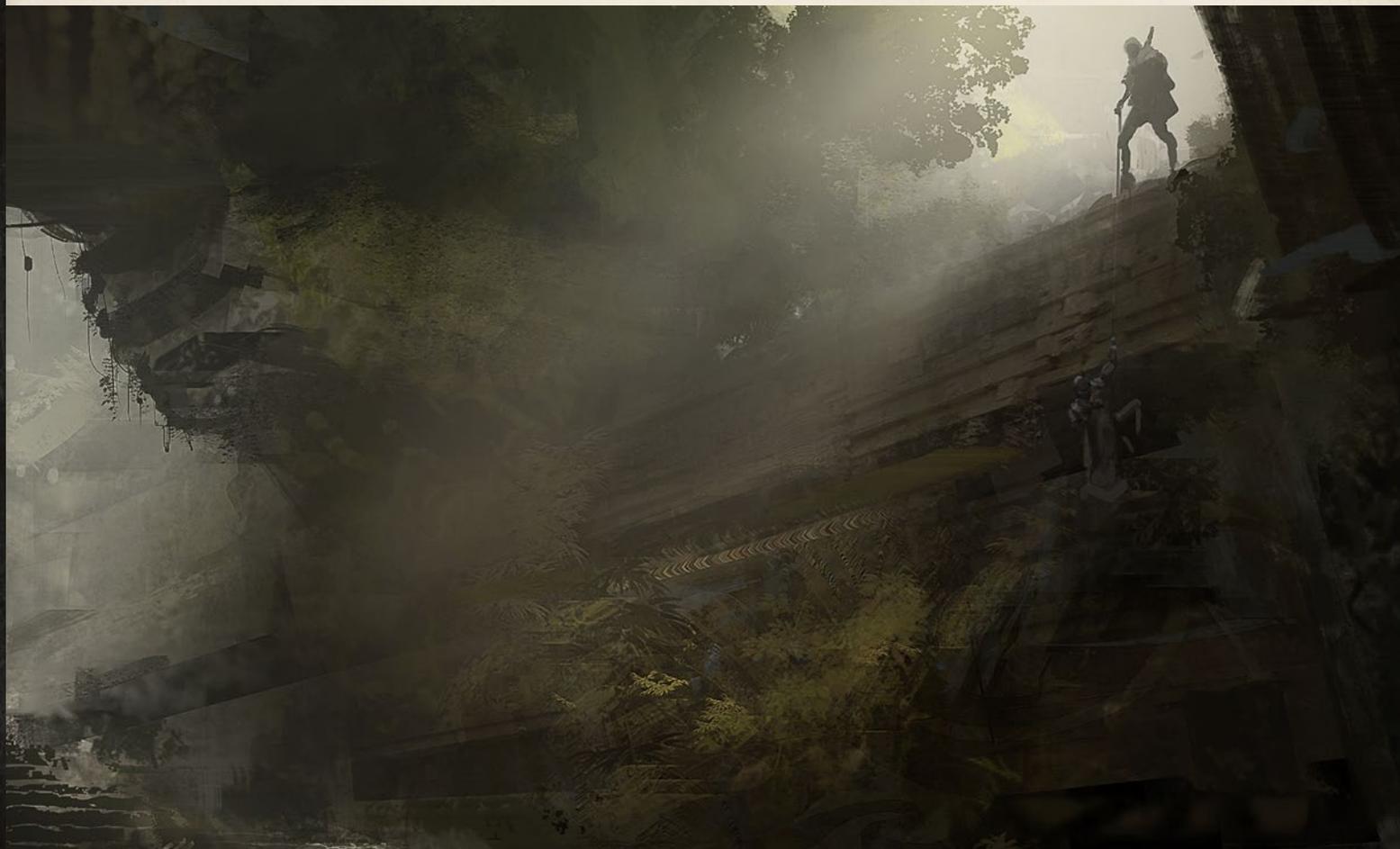
As with day two, these are scenes the Gamemaster may use in order to create atmosphere.

- ◆ The player characters pass the ruins of what was once the jetty of the renowned inn Iseos, located by a small lake. The name can still be read on the sign outside. If any player character has history in Sarli, he or she can recall a significant experience from a happy time spent in this place – a romantic encounter, a happy family gathering, or maybe a party where the character danced all night? In the ruined building's tap room they find Yldemo, once a blacksmith in Shoreby. Player characters who come from the barony can recognize him (otherwise Irena will). Yldemo has just fled east, as he could feel the blackness bubbling inside him and was afraid of what might

Alberian Food

As a result of falling incomes and spreading crop failure, people in the northern part of the country have been forced to change their eating habits. Porridge and dairy products are no longer the staples they once were; now their food is dominated by beets and turnips, sometimes supplemented with the occasional game. The sturdy and nutritious alsten root has become particularly popular, whether boiled, fried or mashed. It is common in the wild as well, and has proven remarkably resistant to the blight, even farther east. To the dismay of many, it has a bland, earthy taste that tends to survive even the most creative cooking methods. Along the caravan route to Prios Pass it is often joked that the mashed alsten root is as good a reason to leave Alberetor as the threat of the undead.

- ◆ happen to the people around him if he stayed. He is anxious and confused and speaks incoherently. If the player characters make an effort to understand him, Yldemo becomes lucid, if only for a moment. He asks them to end his life – cut off his head and dump his body in the lake. If they refuse, he starts to cry and disappears south.
- ◆ At the end of a dirt road that connects to the main road, there is a small, dilapidated cottage. The garden consists of bare, dead trees and withered bushes and vines. On the west side are two burial mounds covered with dry grass, but on one of them damp soil has been thrown to the side as if it had recently been dug up, and sickly, yellowish-green flowers grow around it.



The Shadows Gather

In this act the player characters begin their investigations of the various adventure locations in Sarli. These can be completed in any order the players choose. Thus, the chapter does not provide any specific scenes or encounters.

Exploration

ALTHOUGH THE ADVENTURE locations do not have to be visited in a certain order, the geography makes Shoreby or Tarkomal the most likely first stop, followed by the monastery of Maral the Bright and, lastly, the Sarli family crypt. The first three are therefore described in that order here in Act 2, while the final location is described in Act 3: Darkness Calls. But as always, the players might take unexpected routes and the Gamemaster must improvise accordingly. For example, it is perfectly possible to complete Irena's mission by going straight to the area where the crypt is located and finding it without consulting the Monastery Chronicles. If the group is equipped to handle the cryptwalker Telgon, they can leave Sarli immediately afterwards. The Gamemaster must adapt to the players' choices and decide whether to add any further complications.

If Irena serves as a non-player character and the group's quest giver, she will first want to visit Tarkomal, partly because she thinks it is their best chance of finding something, but also for purely sentimental reasons. However, she is willing to listen to the player characters' suggestions and adapt accordingly, depending on the Gamemaster's judgment.

At this stage, Dobaró is cautious about expressing his opinions for fear of saying too much, but will speak, however subtly, in support of taking the route he believes leads to Ogdeno's remains. If he thinks it will help, and is sure no one can prove him wrong, he will make up lies about possible dangers from the blight-stricken environment in order to steer the group in his preferred direction.

Overview of the Barony of Sarli

SARLI IS A small tract of land bordering on the southern slopes of the Titans. Its boundaries are delineated by Lake Ilmar to the south and the higher foothills to the north, and the barony is divided into east and west by the lake's tributary, the River Sidra. The old main road, which is still in relatively good condition, runs straight through the landscape from west to east.

When describing the area, the Gamemaster should emphasize its lifeless desolation. This can be achieved by letting player characters with previous experience of the barony pass through places they used to visit or seeing houses where friends and acquaintances used to live and maybe recognizing some of the items left behind.

GEOGRAPHY

The landscape features rolling terrain with low hills and ridges stretching down from the north. Back when Sarli was still populated, its inhabitants mainly lived in the level areas by the main road, around Lake Ilmar and along the Sidra, which were well-suited for growing crops like grain and root vegetables. The hills were largely unoccupied but used to cultivate fruit orchards and vineyards.

Larger forested areas were only found in the northern parts of the barony.

The croplands are still clearly marked by the presence of fences and ditches, though they are now covered with bushes and scrub. Abandoned farms (singly or in small groups) are a common sight from the main road, even though Shoreby was the only major settlement in the area. Most of the houses and farms are outwardly intact, albeit in disrepair from lack of maintenance. To a passing observer it is clear that people were not driven from the area, but chose to leave, which gives it an eerie feeling.

While Sarli itself never suffered any large outbreaks of undeath, such unholy creatures have migrated into the area, as have abominations who survived The Great War and now roam Alberetor seeking a new purpose in life. Some of these are described below, along with the places they are terrorizing.



You can find Irena's map of Sarli on page 92 of this book.



THE BARONY OF SARLI

1. Shoreby
2. Tarkomal – Seat of House Sarli
3. The Monastery of Maral the Bright
4. The Crypt of House Sarli

ENVIRONMENT

The vegetation is wild, sickly and twisted. Moldy leaves rot on their branches, the bushes are shrunk and thorny, the grass yellow and drooping. All this is interspersed with patches of arid ground where nothing seems to grow.

There is a noticeable absence of wildlife, with no more than a bird or two crossing the sky at a distance. But while this landscape dominates most of the barony, some places are better off. In the far north, at higher altitudes, the environment seems a bit healthier and shows signs of animal life. Clearly, Sarli is right on the border of the more advanced blight.

Inhabitants

SARLI HAS BEEN completely depopulated for a few years now. Its most recent inhabitants were the members of the monastery, the last of whom left in year 18. With the exception of Baron Telgon who is described in Act 3, Sarli has so far been spared the spontaneous undeath that is common further south. Over the last year, however, a small number of undead have come up from the southeast and now roam according to their own confused perception of reality. One such group of unholy souls is described below.

THE DRAGOULS

The remnants of a former Alberian army unit have made their way to Sarli, all of them undead (**dragouls**, page 156 of the *Bestiary*). They wandered in from the south a few weeks ago in what their captain Goriban, in his twisted mind, thought of as a “tactical retreat.” He has commanded his troops for many years, in life as well as undeath, but none of them remember when or why the transition took place. During this period some soldiers have departed and been replaced by new recruits, but the mission remains the same – to protect the realm and vanquish its

enemies. The group is currently composed of undead warriors equal to eight times the number of characters.

The story behind Goriban’s unit is shrouded in mystery, and the player characters will likely have neither reason nor opportunity to investigate – at most they might recognize some detail on an old uniform. It should soon be clear, however, that the undead are still working as a unit, bound together by their training, even though many other things have left their rotten skulls. It seems they can communicate or at least understand each other without words, and many can no longer speak even if they were inclined to try. They are also able to conduct relatively complex tactical missions.

In the dragouls’ reality, the war with Lyastra is still going on, and everything happening around them will inevitably be incorporated into this narrative. They are conscious enough to understand that they are in Alberetor, and on that basis Goriban has concluded that their mission is to hold the area until reinforcements arrive. They will regard anyone traveling through Sarli as hostile and combat them in various ways.

What the dragouls' place in the adventure will be is for the Gamemaster to decide. They are meant to be a complicating factor in the adventure landscape that the Gamemaster may use to set the tone, adjust the pace, or provide the players with a distinct challenge. As such, they are not directly related to the plot and can easily be overlooked, depending on the preferences of the gaming group.

One idea is to have them occupy Tarkomal. Goriban will have identified it as the best fortification in the area and will be waiting with a suitable force when/if the player characters arrive. They will then defend the fortress from the "aggressors." From Tarkomal they also send out patrols around the barony, which the player characters might encounter along the main road or at the adventure locations. Another option is to throw in the dragouls as a third party at some dramatic moment, such as during a confrontation between the player characters and the Orderlanders or the pursuit of Dobar. In the end it is up to the Gamemaster to decide how to use the dragouls - for setting the mood, as an action element, a distraction, or not at all.

Encounters with the Undead

In a confrontation with the player characters, the dragouls will initially try to defeat them by force of arms. While the undead fight with complete disregard for their own existence, they can still choose to retreat if that is the tactically sound move - to alert their commanding officer of the presence of intruders, for example. In an encounter with Captain Goriban himself, the player characters can both communicate and negotiate with him. However, the Gamemaster must keep in mind that the sole purpose of everything Goriban says and



Goriban and his men are but one of many troops of disorderly undead haunting the lands south of the Titans

does is to strategically position himself to fight the player characters. Any agreement with him will inevitably be broken once he thinks he has achieved what he wanted.

It should be noted that the Gamemaster ought to adjust the dragouls' actions depending on the outcome of their confrontations with the player characters, so that anything the characters do is considered a hostile act. Despite having lost their humanity and most of their memories, the dragouls are still militarily rational. If the player characters seem dangerous, they might concentrate their forces in a single attack; if they are trying to capture a certain point, the dragouls might stage an ambush, and so on. However, they rely on their commander, and should Goriban be ripped from his undead existence, this will adversely affect their decision making and unity.

Captain Goriban

Goriban leads his men in undeath as he did in life, through example. He steps in and tries to stall the most competent enemy warriors with his halberd until his troops can attack them from behind.

Captain Goriban

Medium undead

Armor Class 17 (scale mail)

Hit Points 45 (6d8 + 18)

Speed 30 ft

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	14 (+2)	17 (+3)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)	5 (-3)

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 feet, passive Perception 10

Languages Ambrian

Challenge 3 (700 XP, proficiency bonus +2)

Manner shuffling forward inexorably

Shadow yellowish-gray like dead skin, with black spots like dead skin (thoroughly corrupt)

Equipment 1d10 ortegs

Corruption Sense. If a creature has one or more points of permanent Corruption, Captain Goriban has advantage on Perception checks to find or notice it.

Pack Tactics. Captain Goriban has advantage on his attack rolls against a creature if at least one of his

allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage. If the target is a creature then it must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw. On a failure it becomes infected, gaining the poisoned condition and losing 1 hit point at the start of its turn. At the end of its turn it can repeat the saving throw, ending both effects on a success. If the creature dies as a result of this effect, it awakens as a dragoul in 24 hours.

Halberd. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d10 + 3) slashing damage. Requires both hands.

REACTIONS

Parry. Captain Goriban adds +2 to his AC against one melee attack that would hit him. To do so, he must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon.

Sudden Lunge (Recharge 5-6). If Captain Goriban misses with his halberd attack, he can lean into the target and make a bite attack.



Shoreby

ON THE EDGE of Lake Ilmar lies Shoreby, which during the good years was the only major settlement in Sarli. The village survived until its last inhabitants finally left, thanks to the remaining residents gradually abandoning their outlying farms for the relative safety of the village, especially after the baron's family had gone. Surrounding croplands and pastures were managed collectively, but despite many attempts to preserve and protect the lushest fields, the struggle against failing crops and tainted harvests was bound to fail. In year 18, the ten or so families that were left jointly decided to head west, realizing that a winter famine was just around the corner. They were accompanied by all but three of the remaining brothers and sisters from the monastery of Maral the Bright.

The main road passes through the village, with a clear bypath north toward Tarkomal. A kilometer or two east of Shoreby, the road crosses the River Sidra on an old stone bridge – the only one in the area.

THE VILLAGE CENTER

Shoreby comprises about 50 single- and two-story buildings that could house a total of roughly 300 people, clustered around a large open marketplace. A couple of jetties for fishing boats can be found on the south side. The village is better preserved than the farms the player characters have passed thus far, though some roof tiles have fallen off in certain places

and a door or two might hang obliquely from their hinges. It should be clear that this place was inhabited not very long ago.

An investigation of the buildings reveals that only the ones west of the square (the finest in the village) have seen use in recent years. While anything of value has been stripped from the area, heavier furniture is still in place and household items in poor condition can be found here and there: a pile of broken baskets in a corner, a set of thick, clay plates on a shelf, a collection of crudely carved wooden animals on a window frame. The other houses are empty and closed-up. Down by the jetty are two moored rowboats, one of them so full of water that it is level with the waterline. The other boat is leaking as well, but anyone proficient with carpenter's tools can repair it with a day's work.

INHABITANTS

Shoreby is currently home to a number of spirits who have not found peace in death. The ethereal imprints of past inhabitants are still clearly perceptible and are attracting the ghosts. For every 10 minutes spent in and around the village the characters risk attracting a **wraith** (see the *Bestiary*, page 159) who seeks out and attacks them. Roll 1d10 for each member of the party – for each 1 rolled, a wraith finds its way to one of them. A wraith will persistently stalk a person attempting to escape it, even after leaving Shoreby.

A person with the Bushcraft trait who passes a **DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check** can detect the wraiths' presence through the slight drop in temperature caused by the restless souls.

LAKE ILMAR

Once teeming with life, this highland lake has now become a foul-smelling marshland. The water level has dropped, and the shallow parts have turned into brackish swamps, some stretching hundreds of meters into what used to be the lake. Nowhere in Sarli is the blight more evident than in this place.

Tarkomal – Seat of House Sarli

THE ANCESTRAL STRONGHOLD of House Sarli is situated on a hill roughly one hour's walk north from Shoreby. A wide road, now cracked, winds up the hill toward the ruin. The stronghold must have been an impressive sight from the lowlands when the vegetation was not as wild, but now it can barely be seen above the treetops – only from the top of the hill can a wanderer take in the full view. The ruins are largely overgrown by bushes and vines, and a few short trees can be seen in the courtyard. Beyond the ruins, the woods begin anew, and the ridge keeps rising. The hills continue east while the west side descends, steeper and rockier, toward the plain.

If the dragouls occupy the stronghold, they post a sentry on each side of the ruin as well as in the watchtower. The others are standing by in the courtyard. The undead warriors outnumber the player characters' group four to one. Additionally, the risk of Goriban being present and commanding his troops is 1-7 on 1d20. It is likely that they ran into a patrol of dragouls (twice the number of the PCs) if they used the road from Shoreby.

HISTORY

Long ago, when Alberetor was less secure, Telgon – the first baron of Sarli – raised a keep around which other buildings later cropped up. Before The Great War, the area surrounding the stronghold was cultivated with vineyards and fruit orchards, and many crofters lived on small farms on the slopes of the Titans. But as the blight spread, the people went away, and by the time of House Sarli's departure in year 14, practically the entire landscape had gone feral.

The accident that finally made the family leave for Ambria was the terrible fire that ravaged Tarkomal a few months before their departure. Its flames devastated large parts of the structure and claimed the lives of Porgalo's wife Letira and his younger brother Olano. After this terrible blow, Porgalo no longer felt any reason to stay. Having buried the dead, the remaining family members gathered what valuables they could and left, placing the ruins in the care of the tenacious monks at the monastery of Maral the Bright.

Even in what remains of the lake, the water is muddy and coated in a sludge of algae and rotting aquatic plants.

Should anyone consider drinking the water from the lake, a person with the Bushcraft trait can point out that it would be ill-advised. If the person does it anyway, he or she suffers 1d4 temporary corruption and contracts the Sewer Plague disease (see the core rules). There will probably be no reason for the player characters to go out on the lake, but by repairing the boat by the jetty in Shoreby, it is possible to do so. In that case, the Gamemaster decides what happens and whether the lake is home to some blight-born predator.

For a year or two, Karkoli, prior of the monastery, also cared for the Sarli heirlooms, tombs and the stronghold's sun chapel to the best of his abilities. But as circumstances grew more dire, he felt compelled to find other ways of managing the situation. The chapel was boarded up, any items with some utility were given to the remaining people of Shoreby, and other objects (including the bodies) were relocated – first to the monastery and then partially to the family crypt, as explained in the descriptions of these two places.

BUILDINGS

Described below are the different parts of the ruin surrounding the courtyard. Where nothing else is mentioned, the spaces are empty except for some debris.

1-3. The Gate (1), Walls (2) and Watchtower (3)

Generally, the outer defenses are the best-preserved part of the stronghold. The southern wall, the gatehouse and the watchtower are all in good condition. At the north end, however, part of the wall was destroyed by the fire that razed the northern wing. The wall is ten feet high, with a wooden footbridge running along the inside of the sections that are still intact; the watchtower rises an additional ten feet above the top of the wall.

4. The West Wing

The west wing was the oldest addition to the stronghold and served as its main building, with bedrooms for the family members, a banquet hall, and so forth. It comprised two large floors where the first resembled a fortress with thick walls and arrow slits, while the second was a bit airier.

This wing was the least affected by the fire that devastated Tarkomal. Its southern end could be saved entirely and was renovated to house the Sarli family for a while, with newly constructed board walls at the northern end, new partitions in the rooms, and other such hasty additions. If they want, the player characters may investigate the interior's two floors. The rooms are empty save for a piece or two of bulky furniture. If Irena accompanies the group (or has been replaced with a player character) she has her own memories of living here.

1 CALL OF THE DARK



TARKOMAL – SEAT OF HOUSE SARLI

1. The Gate
2. The Walls
3. The Watchtower
4. The West Wing
5. The North Wing
6. The Keep
7. The Chapel
8. Graveyard
9. Overgrown Winery
10. Road to Shoreby

5. The North Wing

A bit younger than the west wing, but similar in construction, the north wing's ground floor served as a stable and workshop, with the second floor as the servants' quarters. The building is completely destroyed with only bits and pieces of the foundation walls still remaining. Against the north wall is a narrow staircase to the basement, visible but blocked by rubble and dirt.

6. The Keep

Dating back over 300 years, the three-story keep is the oldest part of the stronghold. Outwardly, it is perfectly preserved, while the interior is blown out like a massive chimney. The rubble has evidently been cleared or pushed against the walls in order to free up the spiral staircase in the northeast corner which leads to the basement.

7. The Chapel

For as long as anyone can remember, the Sarlis have been faithful followers of the Lifegiver, no doubt affected by their proximity to Maral the Bright (see the description of the monastery). Thus, it was only natural that the stronghold would have a sun chapel.

On closer inspection, the chapel seems strangely well-preserved compared to the rest of the stronghold. The windows are unbroken, and the door is bolted with a sturdy iron crossbar and locked with a padlock. Picking the lock requires a successful **DC 14 Dexterity (Thieves' Tools) check** but the door can also be forced open with the right tools, such as an axe, in which case the door has 18 hit points and AC 15. Once inside they will find that the interior is also in good condition. The setting sun on the western wall seems to have been given a new layer of paint not too many years ago, and there is a bundle of dried sunflowers resting on the altar.

8. Graveyard

Not far west from the stronghold is a shallow ravine, stretching down toward the plain, whose upper part is the location of a cairn raised for the three most recently deceased members of the Sarli family. There Porgalo placed his father, Ogdeno – a temporary solution until the remains could be moved to the family crypt – and just a month or two later he had to bury his wife, Letira, and his younger brother Olano in the same place.

Why the dead were not laid to rest in the crypt, as has been the Sarli tradition for hundreds of years, is something Porgalo does not have an answer to, though he usually



THE WEST WING

- 1. Entry Hall
- 2. Guard Room
- 3. Stairs
- 4. Salon
- 5. Bedrooms



THE BASEMENT

- 1. Kitchen
- 2. Cells/Rooms
- 3. Stairs to the North Wing
- 4. Storage Room

Funeral Rites

Within the cult of the Lifegiver, and later the Sun Church as well, it has long been tradition to consign the dead to the holy fire of their god. The bones are then gathered, crushed and placed around the skull in a casket or a small case/chest. Among the upper class the casket is usually made of a stainless metal such as silver or bronze, but various types of stone are also used. Wooden ones are common among the poorer population. The casket is then set in its final resting place, such as a crypt, a necropolis, or an earthly grave.

explains that there was not enough time once the decision had been made to leave for Ambria. But the truth is that the new patriarch did not have the mental energy to deal with the grieving process in addition to all the practical matters that required his attention, and that he was relieved to leave the dead behind.

Examining the cairn reveals that it has been dug up and that the reliquary caskets are missing.

THE BASEMENT

1. Kitchen

Dominated by a large stove that occupies the entire north-west corner and half of both walls. There is a staircase leading to the corridor beneath the north wing.

2. Cells/Rooms

Previously used as storage rooms and prison cells.

3. Stairs to the North Wing

Collapsed.

4. Storage Room

Here the Sarli family stored anything of value that they did not take with them on the journey, including some of Tarkomal's financial records and other ancestral artifacts, possibly the Royal Charter as well. The storage room was locked and the key was left in the care of Prior Karkoli. Should the player characters reach this area, they will find that the door is still locked. Picking the lock requires a successful **DC 16 Dexterity (Thieves' Tools) check**, but the door can also be forced open with a weapon, such as an axe, in which case the door has 15 hit points and AC 15. Once inside they will find the room empty.

1 CALL OF THE DARK



THE MONASTERY OF MARAL THE BRIGHT

1. Monastery
2. Overgrown Garden
3. Thrush's Peak
4. Road to Shoreby and Tarkomal

The Monastery of Maral the Bright

HISTORY

Maral was an early Lightbringer and member of the cult of Sola, or the Lifegiver, back when Lightbringers were something different than the war heroes who have become celebrated in recent decades. The stories about him are almost four centuries old, dating back to before the unification of Alberetor under Queen Almara Argona. They say he started out as a simple weaver, but that when his home region in southern Alberetor suffered from severe drought and poor harvests, the sun god sent him a prophecy of a new land for his people. And so it was that Maral led a band of followers toward the northeast.

The journey often seemed hopeless, but the strength of Maral's conviction and his vision of their new home in the shadow of the mountains spurred them on. One day, exhausted and thirsty, they reached an arid valley. By now, the strength of the wanderers had run out and they could go no further. Suddenly Maral noticed a narrow furrow with green grass high up the mountain slope, and said: "Look, there we can find water." But not even his strongest followers could finish the climb. Maral then ascended the slope by himself and fetched water. He went up and down, again and again, until all his followers had drunk their fill. This loving act saved the people, but brought the demise of Maral

himself, as he expended the last of his energy. Mournful but invigorated, the followers carried his lifeless body with them, determined to find the place of Maral's dreams. And so they came to Sarli, a lush and fertile land, and laid his body to rest in the most beautiful place they could find.

In time, people started making pilgrimages to the sacred tomb and other members of the cult of the Lifegiver settled down nearby. The most dedicated cultists founded a holy order and established a monastery in the area. Finally, roughly 200 years ago, their order was incorporated into the Sun Church.

PRESENT DAY

By the time of House Sarli's departure, the monastery had only a handful of members. But their persistent leader, Prior Karkoli, had no intention of abandoning the place or his duty to care for it, and consequently the monastery became the only remaining institution in the area. It therefore seemed natural for Porgalo to ask Karkoli to watch over the seat of his house, a task the Black Cloaks performed for as long as they could. But eventually, the isolation and the dangers of the land got the best of them, and when the abomination Kraal sealed the monastery's fate, the only ones left to devour were Karkoli and two young novices.

The Monastery's Ideology

Though the following that emerged around Maral early on decided to keep quiet about his link to the Hostess, this knowledge, preserved by their leaders, has helped the monastery stay to the most tolerant version of the Lifegiver, even before the Exaltation. When the other Young Gods were renounced, the monastery seemed to adapt to the new order, but Karkoli never abandoned his faith in the loving nature of Prios, nor did the vast majority of the monastery's inhabitants. Irena (or the player character who may have taken her place) knows that this was the case.

THE TRUTH ABOUT MARAL THE BRIGHT

The real significance of Maral is shrouded in mystery. While there are many tales chronicling his life, even the oldest of them were written many years after his death and that of his closest followers. What is clear, however, though only known by a few people throughout history, is that Maral did not worship Prios, but Lyra – a much older female version of the Sun God. However, Lyra stopped being worshiped in Alberetor around the time of Maral's death (but lived on elsewhere) and was replaced by her two aspects: the male Lifegiver and the female Hostess. The followers who cared for the tomb belonged to the Lifegiver's faction, and indicators of the Hostess's influence were toned down or forgotten as the cults split up.

As the years passed, these memories became an increasingly sensitive subject, and a century after Maral's death they were unknown to all but the closest initiates. This small circle of devotees maintained the knowledge but did not spread it, for though the Young Gods as a group were venerated by the people of Alberetor, the cults were in frequent conflict. What is more, the demands for orthodoxy within the cult were sometimes strict. When Maral's shrine was later incorporated into the Twilight Friars' order, this truth would have been considered blasphemous, and since the Exaltation of Prios it is of course regarded as heresy.

The story about Maral's faith has therefore only been passed down through the centuries from prior to prior, and when the time comes for the incumbent to appoint his successor, as is the monastery's tradition, the ability to safeguard this knowledge has always been the prime criterion. Only the prior has known the truth and been allowed to open the relic shrine which contains certain physical evidence. Karkoli, the last prior of the monastery, broke this tradition by finally sharing the information with his closest confidant and disciple, Ralea, during the difficult years after House Sarli's departure. But to Karkoli's disappointment, Ralea chose not to stay, but traveled west with the last of the barony's inhabitants a month or so before Kraal arrived.

RALEA'S FATE

Ralea was very struck by what Karkoli told her about Maral and Lyra. In a sudden flash of insight, she seemed to understand the true nature of the Lifegiver. But for her, the

knowledge became a reason to leave Sarli, doomed as it was, rather than to stay and protect the place with no hope of success, as Karkoli had wanted. The truth should no longer be withheld, but proclaimed! For this purpose, Ralea traveled west to the Realm of the Order. There she has spent years discussing her insight with followers and leaders of cults worshiping both the Lifegiver and the Hostess, as well as other deities. While her preaching has been met with a certain degree of skepticism, it was recently decided that an expedition shall be sent to Sarli to investigate the matter. This group is described in greater detail below.

THE VALLEY

The path to the monastery branches off from the main road just east of the River Sidra and continues toward the northeastern heights. Near the end it winds its way through a wide valley toward the hills above. The place where the valley levels out is the location of the monastery, a cluster of low buildings over which looms the golden dome of the chapter hall. It is clear that this was once a gloriously beautiful place, before the landscape started to wither, with an amazing view of the fields and lake to the south, and the snowy peaks of the Titans to the north.

Low hills rise up to the north and west, with the hillock of Thrush's Peak as a landmark on the east side, while fields that were once croplands and pastures dominate the areas west and south of the monastery. Attached to the buildings is a now overgrown garden, still enclosed by a sturdy fence.

THE ORDERLANDERS

An expedition from the Realm of the Order, prompted by Ralea's preaching and arguments, recently arrived in Sarli (the player characters may have heard rumors about them at the Cliff of Korinda). They have been there for three days and are currently encamped in the valley northeast of Thrush's Peak. They have already made an initial cursory search of the monastery, but had to retreat when Kraal, the abomination haunting the basement, surprised them and almost killed Jumano. Since then, they have been watching the monastery, considering how to proceed without reaching a consensus. Otherwise the group has not moved around the barony very much, although the scout Solea made a quick visit to the outskirts of Shoreby. From Thrush's Peak they have a good view of the monastery. Unless the player characters are actively trying to conceal their arrival, they will be spotted well before reaching the monastery.

The group is led by Captain Edrano of the People's Militia, a veteran from The Great War. Other members include Ralea, who shows the way, the sun priest Nireon representing the Lifegiver, Jumano representing the Hostess, and the scout Solea. The members give a calm and united impression, but nothing could be further from the truth, for they have a spy and a traitor in their midst!

Nireon, Sun Priest and Curia Spy

The somewhat elderly and meek Nireon is just a mask for one of the Lawgiver's most dedicated and self-sacrificing servants. Almost since the Realm of the Order was founded, he has been the Curia's spy in the new land. Jeseebegai realized early on that the threat posed by the Realm of the Order could not be left to the Royal Sekretorium, but required the Church's own resources. Nireon was not their only agent in place, but certainly one of the obvious choices for such a difficult mission – anonymous but loyal, perfect for the role of a renegade sun priest. He is also the most successful one, having worked his way up these long years to the ruling council of the Lifegiver's cult. He has provided the Curia with many valuable pieces of intelligence.

Nireon

Medium human (Ambrian)

Armor Class 14 (robes, magical shield)

Hit Points 67 (9d8 + 27)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	11 (+0)	16 (+3)	13 (+1)	20 (+5)	15 (+2)

Saving Throws Intelligence +4, Wisdom +8

Skills Deception +5, Insight +8, Perception +8, Persuasion +5, Religion +4

Senses passive Perception 18

Languages Ambrian, Lyastrian

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP, proficiency bonus +3)

Manner crafty and quiet

Shadow sparkling silver with matte streaks (Corruption: 6/16)

Equipment component pouch, sun symbol, 68 thaler, 5 ortegs

Spellcasting. The theurg (spell attack +8, save DC 16) 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), *inflict wounds* (1d4 + 1)

2nd-level spells: *hold person* (1d4 + 2), *spiritual weapon* (2)

3rd-level spells: *dispel magic* (1d4 + 3), *revivify* (1d4 + 3)

4th-level spells: *death ward* (1d4 + 4), *lifegiver* (4)

5th-level spells: *hallow* (5)

Rituals: *divination*, *holy smoke*, *purging fire*

ACTIONS

Quarterstaff. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d8 + 1) bludgeoning damage.

He views his current mission as a crucial struggle between the Light and The Eternal Night. Stopping Ralea's heresy from spreading is absolutely paramount. So, Nireon wants to see them fail, and their present situation suits him rather well, as Kraal seems like an excellent guardian. But the player characters' arrival might change the dynamic a bit (see the Negotiations heading below). Nireon's priority is to destroy Maral's relics and any other evidence of Lyra worship, but if possible, he would prefer to do so without blowing his and Edrano's cover, either by avoiding suspicion or killing any witnesses.

Edrano, Militia Captain and Traitor

Edrano is more or less what he claims to be – a veteran from The Great War, organizer of the People's Militia (the Realm of the Order's armed forces), beloved captain – as well as, for a year or so, a paid agent of Ambria. Edrano simply lost his spark when a wraith attacked a village near the western border. Though it was swiftly dealt with, the event ate itself into Edrano's mind as a sign of the futility of his efforts. All strength and energy drained from him, and in the end, it was he who approached the Ambrian agents. He has already put away a hefty sum of thaler, with more to come once his current mission is completed, as Nireon has promised to let him disappear and drink away the rest of his life far from any place tainted by the history of Alberetor.

Edrano answers to Nireon as far as the mission is concerned but must at the same time maintain his role as leader of the expedition and represent them in meetings with other groups. He will therefore keep up the facade and let Ralea and Jumano play an important part in interactions with the player characters – until Nireon prescribes other, more violent methods. He couldn't care less about Jumano and Ralea, but would prefer to spare Solea's life if at all possible, as she is one of his most loyal soldiers and supporters.

Use the **Pansar** on page 199 of the *Bestiary* for Edrano's stats.

Fewer Conflicts

Gaming groups who think the underlying internal conflicts of the Orderlanders make the interaction with them too complex, stealing focus from the player characters' true objectives, can easily remedy this by uniting the group. In that case, Nireon is not the Curia's spy but a priest of the Lifegiver, and Edrano is not his agent. While Nireon is still skeptical about Ralea's proclamations and does not expect to find anything of value, he will not actively oppose her, but help the group as best he can. Otherwise there should be no need for any significant changes in terms of the Orderlanders' backstories and personalities.



Ralea, New-sprung Prophet

Ralea is a young woman, practically raised at the monastery of Maral the Bright, where Prior Karkoli was the closest thing she ever had to a father. But his revelation regarding Maral's history left her deeply shaken. Perhaps she is actually going through a religious depression, but nevertheless, the knowledge drove her to action and made her leave for the Realm of the Order. Karkoli always wanted her to stay and ensure the continued safekeeping of Maral's relics. She knows this, and though she thinks she did the right thing, the guilt from this betrayal weighs heavily on her, especially after learning of Karkoli's passing. She clings to the prospect of retrieving the artifacts and bringing them safely to the Realm, as if the sanctity of her soul depended on it.

Ralea has had a difficult time in the Realm of the Order. Although she was well-received from a material point of view, her proclamation has been met with skepticism and harsh words. That the expedition is actually underway is a success for her, she knows that, but it was achieved through great sacrifice, social as well as mental. Ralea's top priority is to secure Maral's relics and bring them back to the Realm. She is willing to compromise on all other issues or means of action.

When she encounters Irena (or the player character replacing her), Ralea will recognize her (but Irena does not recognize Ralea). She will not mention this, or anything about her own background. If the player characters explain their objective in detail, Ralea can recall that Prior Karkoli was somehow entrusted with House Sarli's property, but does not remember exactly what happened as she was not present at the time. However, she suspects it would have been recorded in the Monastery's Chronicle. If the question arises, she will use her knowledge as a bargaining chip to gain their help in accessing the Reliquary (see the Negotiations heading).

Use the **liturg** entry on page 170 of the *Bestiary* for Ralea.



Jumano, Priest of the Hostess

Jumano is probably the least enthusiastic member of the expedition, certainly the most vocal about his discontent. He does not believe Ralea's claims and thinks the expedition is pointless at best, and at worst, a danger to both them and the entire Realm of the Order. He joined the group to protect the interests of the Hostess cult and because he was asked to. But now that he has ended up in this situation, he will do what he can for the mission to succeed.

The cult of the Hostess was never particularly influential, even before the Exaltation. This made it easy for its members to go underground, but also meant that its position in the new Realm of the Order is equally weak, without many followers or strong organizational capabilities. Such experiences have shaped Jumano, for though he came of age in the Realm of the Order, he remembers the time before then - the secrecy and humiliating compliance required of him and his parents. This has made him headstrong and distrustful of authority, though his resentment does not go beyond individual pompous leader figures - he is unswervingly loyal to the Realm of the Order as an idea.

Jumano can be represented by the **theurg** entry in the *Bestiary*, page 171. His third level spells are exchanged for *beacon of hope* (1d4 + 3) and *create food and water* (3). He knows the *purify food and drink* and *augury* rituals.

Lyra, the Lifegiver, and the Lawgiver

It is important to note that Ralea's claims about the link between Lyra and Prios are theological dynamite. The issue concerns the other Young Gods as well, which is why it has been treated very delicately by the Realm of the Order and why the expedition was sent in the first place. Any evidence they bring back will no doubt be fervently debated. The version of history that Maral's background presents is

unacceptable to the followers of the Lawgiver, but it would also be extremely hard to stomach for those who see the god as the Lifegiver. This is particularly true in Ambria where the Reformists, despite preaching a more tolerant version of Prios, have not had any religious competition for many years. As such, they would not lightly accept a reality where their religion evolved from another cult.

Solea, Scout in the People's Militia

Sprung from the poor farmlands of Alberetor, Solea quickly learned to hunt to supplement the larder. Life was certainly hard sometimes, especially after her parents died in the war and even more so after the Queen ran off to another country. But Solea was fine as long as she had the rest of her family. So, naturally she joined her older brother and his young wife as they fled to the Realm of the Order, though she did not quite understand why, as life in the new country was not so different from that in the old one. Still, some things did change. Solea met Edrano and found a community. Sometimes, listening to wise folk like Nireon, Ralea, and Jumano talk, she gets the sense that hers is not the only way of understanding the world.

Solea is an excellent scout and marksman but finds it difficult to act on her own initiative, beyond what the job at hand requires. She joined the expedition because Edrano needed a scout, that is all. She knows they are going to get something, but neither what nor why. On her own she is easily influenced and can be won over to the side that first presents some reasonable arguments, as long as the proposal does not seem treacherous toward Edrano. In Edrano's presence she will follow his commands, including to attack other members of the Orderlanders' group.

Solea uses the statblock of a **wilderness guide**, see page 194 of the *Bestiary*.

NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE ORDERLANDERS

Upon discovering the player characters, Edrano will first send Solea to find out what they are after, while he and the others stay out of sight. The Gamemaster decides how the interaction develops based on the player characters' actions.

A negotiation between this group and the player characters will likely require some quick decisions from the Gamemaster. The Orderlanders' official objective is to get into a certain room in the basement. Nothing is mentioned about the history of Maral and Lyra. If the player characters propose a joint effort in this endeavor, they are willing to discuss it. Let Edrano and Ralea do most of the talking, with Jumano and Nireon as observers. Provided that the player characters' goal is not in opposition to her own, Ralea will be open to cooperating. She lays claim to any objects of direct religious nature that are found in the monastery, but the only things that are non-negotiable are Maral's relics – everything else is potentially up for trade. A collaboration on the player characters' investigations of the crypt is also a possibility.

The Gamemaster must bear in mind that a collaboration must be attractive to both Ralea/Jumano and Edrano/Nireon. Nireon will try to create a situation that poses maximum risk to Ralea and Jumano and minimal risk to Edrano and

himself, while at the same time giving him access to Maral's relics. Under certain circumstances (e.g. if the player characters are getting along with Ralea) this can mean that he proposes an attack on Kraal (see below); in other cases (e.g. if the player characters seem to be hostile) he might press for a direct confrontation with them. A third approach for Nireon could be to leave the player characters to their own devices, and if they manage to defeat Kraal and bring back the relics, arrange an ambush to reclaim them and hope that Ralea and Jumano are killed in the process. Remember that Nireon plays along with the charade until the point when he decides not to.

The thing that might ruin the player characters' relations with Ralea and Jumano (and Nireon, given the "right" circumstances) is any of them being an obvious Lawgiver worshiper or showing hostility or disdain toward followers of the Young Gods. Any collaboration would then be difficult, even though Ralea and Jumano do not act aggressively at first. Once again, the player characters' response and Nireon's ability to interact with it will determine the outcome.

If cooperation is established between the groups, the Orderlanders inform them that the basement is dominated by an abomination, which must somehow be neutralized before it is safe to proceed. If asked, Ralea can also explain where the monastery kept its archives, while Solea can describe the situation in Shoreby.

MONASTERY – GROUND FLOOR

The monastery comprises a number of single-story buildings gathered around a courtyard with a well. A low wall encloses the yard. The whole place gives an eerie impression of having been abandoned in a hurry. Tools have been left on the workbenches, dirty blankets and clothes are gathered in a laundry basket, and a yoke with buckets is resting against the edge of the well.

1. Stable and Storerooms

The monastery's work animals and visitors' mounts were kept in this building. It also includes storerooms, workshops and an outhouse. The skeleton of a long dead donkey is still tethered in its stall.

2. Guesthouse

This is where visiting pilgrims used to stay. Fitted with bunk beds for a total of 10 people.

3. Chapter Hall

A simple yet beautiful hall, far removed from the extravagance of many other sun temples. On the north side is a shrine to the setting sun, and the walls are decorated with paintings depicting scenes from the life of Maral the Bright. On the northeast wall is a stairway leading down to the basement.



MONASTERY – GROUND FLOOR

- 1. Stable and Storerooms
- 2. Guesthouse
- 3. Chapter Hall
- 4. Refectory
- 5. Cells
- 6. Scriptorium
- 7. Prior's Cell
- 8. Larder

4. Refectory

Dining hall, kitchen and assembly room. There is a human skeleton lying on the floor, dressed in a novice's robe (one of the monastery's three inhabitants, killed by Kraal).

5. Cells

Small one-man rooms. Most of them are empty except for a crude wooden bed and a cupboard, but two of them show signs of having been recently occupied.

6. Scriptorium

This once served as the monastery's library, meeting room and study. At one end of the room is a locked cabinet containing books and scrolls of a theological nature. The lock can be picked with a successful **DC 17 Dexterity (Thieves' Tools) check** or busted open with an axe or similar object (AC 19, 5 hit points). A member of the Sun Church can easily recognize most of the books as various standard works, though several of them are older versions of the texts.

At the large table at the center of the room sits a slumped human skeleton wearing a liturg's robe (one of the monastery's three inhabitants attacked by Kraal). The deceased

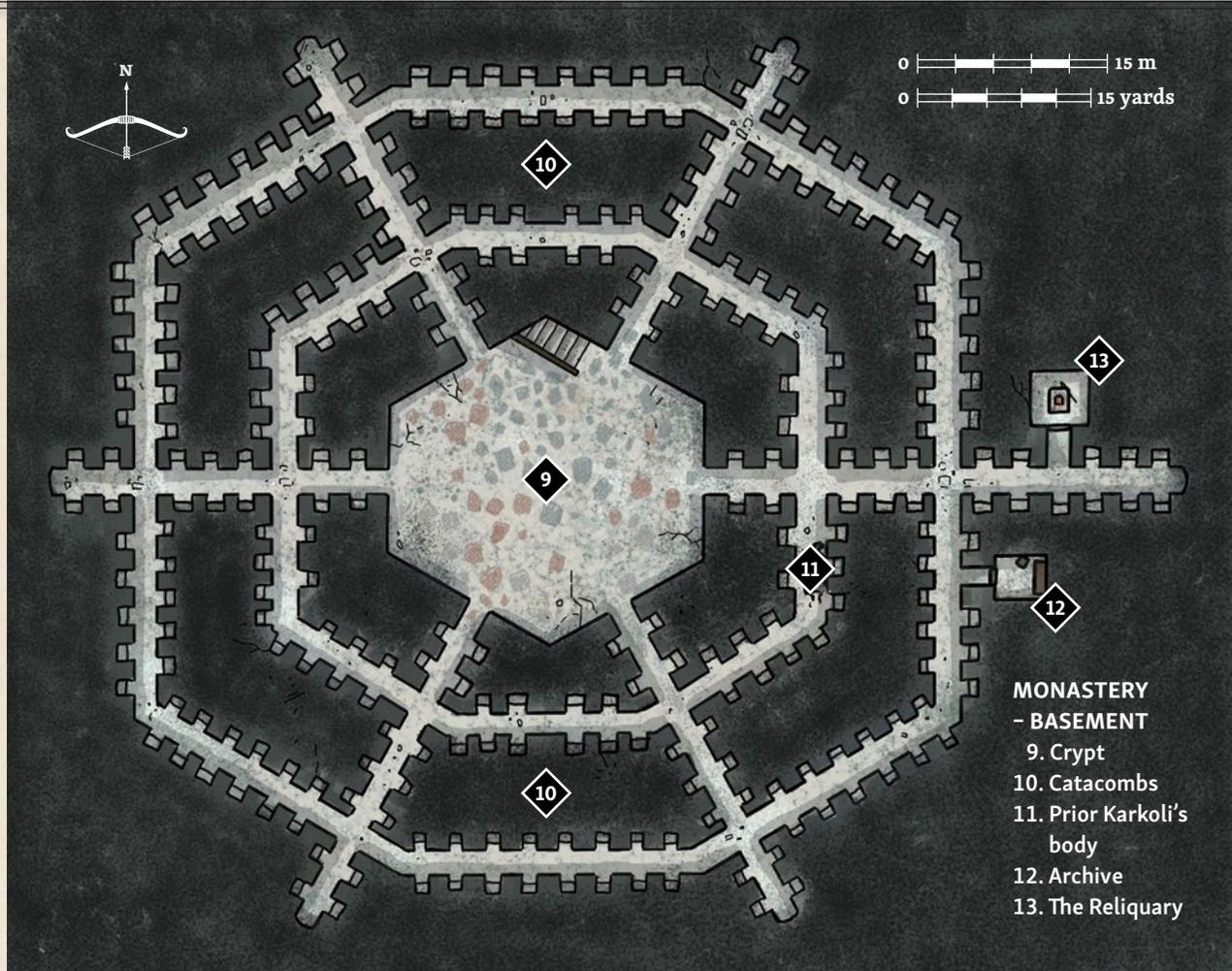
was apparently working on restoring the illustrations in the book in front of him. Dried up cups of paint and brushes lie scattered on the table. The book is a copy of "The Life of Maral the Bright" – another standard work, albeit an out-dated one. A person with the Loremaster trait who passes a **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check** realizes that the book in question is very old and, given its location, probably the original version on which all later copies are based. This book is worth 200 thaler if sold to one of the Sun Church's factions and 100 thaler if sold to an antiques dealer. However, the years have left the book worn and fragile: anyone who handles it must make a **DC 10 Dexterity check** or damage it.

7. Prior's Cell

This was the simple residence of Prior Karkoli. His cell is somewhat bigger and a bit more comfortable than the rest, but otherwise there is little difference between it and the others. The cell shows clear signs of having been occupied.

8. Larder

The monastery's food storage, now containing nothing but empty canisters.



MONASTERY - BASEMENT

Kraal the abomination stalks the basement waiting to get hold of the relics of Maral the Bright - see the description of this creature below.

9. Crypt

Beneath the chapter hall is the crypt where Maral was originally laid to rest, which more recently has served as a storeroom for items used in prayer during various holidays. The ceiling is supported by a low brick arch, and there are six narrow passages leading out along the walls like spokes in a wheel.

10. Catacombs

Over the centuries, the monastery's inhabitants have dug passageways that extend beneath the ground, where the reliquary caskets of deceased members have been placed. The narrow passages display an array of architecture: masonry arches, brick walls and constructions supported by old wooden beams. The oldest passage is the eastern one, which runs beneath the monastery to the reliquary. For centuries, this has been the traditional resting place of the priors. There are niches in the passage walls, covered by slabs of wood or stone engraved with the sun symbol. Behind these

slabs, which are easily removed, are reliquary caskets containing the bones of the departed. Most are made of metal, but there are caskets of wood and stone as well.

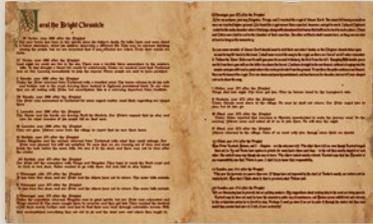
11. Prior Karkoli's Body

Here rests the skeleton of a dead human dressed in a prior's robe. This, of course, is Prior Karkoli, who met his demise as Kraal emerged from the dark. Next to him is a broken lantern. A key ring with eight keys of various sizes hangs from a strap around the prior's neck. These lead to:

- ◆ The Reliquary
- ◆ Maral's Relic Shrine
- ◆ The Archive
- ◆ The book cabinet in the Scriptorium
- ◆ Karkoli's private cell
- ◆ The storeroom in Tarkomal's basement
- ◆ The chapel at Tarkomal
- ◆ The Sarli crypt

12. Archive

In later years, this locked chamber is where the monastery stored its most precious items. A person in a rush - chased by Kraal, for example - who attempts to open the door using



You can find the monastery chronicle on page 90 in this book.



You can find the cloth with the Lyra symbol on page 93.

Karkoli's key ring must pass a **DC 18 Intelligence check** to find the right key. Otherwise the chance of success is 1 on 1d8. Picking the lock requires a successful **DC 16 Dexterity (Thieves' Tools) check**, but the door can also be forced open with suitable tools, such as an axe: in that case the door has 20 hit points and AC 15.

Inside the little room is a shelf with the many volumes of the Monastery's Chronicle (see handout on page 90), which recount the over three-hundred-year history of the order, and the artifact called the Stones of Redim (see Appendix, page 89). "*The Life of Maral the Bright*" in room 6 is normally kept here as well.

On a small table is a wooden crate containing items from Tarkomal that have remained at the monastery. These include:

- ◆ Tarkomal's financial records for years -3 to 7.
- ◆ A number of letters from Ogdeno's youth. These seem mainly to concern his courtship of the young Sopira and the planning of leisure activities with various friends, but a thorough read (requires at least a day's study and a successful **DC 15 Intelligence check**) reveals Ogdeno's care for a certain child in Indaro (a smaller village in central Alberetor) where he asks his friend to ensure that a sum of money reaches the child's mother. This child is of course Dobarro, though it is possible that the player character will never make that connection.
- ◆ Seven intricately painted clay tablets framed in bronze, depicting tiny landscapes and scenes. These were created as a hobby by both Irena's grandmother Sopira and her mother Letira.

As far as Irena is concerned, the financial records and the letters can be used as indicators of the family's status, but unfortunately they do not constitute conclusive evidence. The clay tablets only have sentimental value to the family.

13. The Reliquary

Behind a locked iron door is the reliquary that was built specifically for Maral's remains shortly after the monastery was established, as the true story was becoming more sensitive. Entering with a key or picking the lock works the same as for area 12, The Archive. Forcing the door open requires suitable tools, in which case the door has 30 hit points and AC 15. There is also a risk that the tool will break: roll 1d20 for each "attack," where 1 means that the item breaks.

The walls inside the room are covered with peeling paintings of lush green plants. The far wall is adorned with a

mosaic of a sun setting into a blue sea, and in front of it stands an altar. The images all have religious significance for worshipers of Lyra, but modern scholars would interpret them as Lifegiver symbols or even as purely decorative artworks.

On the altar rests a patinated copper chest with gold fittings, barely a pace long, next to the spear known as Argondin's Bane (see Appendix, page 89). The chest is locked - a **DC 15 Dexterity (Thieves' Tools) check** - but can be broken into with a hammer or an axe - AC 17, 10 hit points. It contains fragments of human bones placed around a skull, and the sides are covered with a tapestry depicting elaborate vines and sun symbols. After removing the bones, a Lyra symbol can clearly be seen in the fabric beneath.

Kraal

The abomination haunting the monastery's basement was once an ordinary creature. Maybe not human, Kraal cannot remember, but someone who could feel togetherness with others - joy and sorrow. It had a different name then, but all memory of such things has faded into oblivion. Now it sees itself only as Kraal. When the war came, its masters - the Dark Lords - transformed it, changing it into a weapon. At first Kraal was distressed by what it was forced to do to the Alberians, then angry - with itself, with its masters, with the enemy - and eventually it did not feel anything at all, except that it could no longer stop itself from continuing its terrible work. In the chaos after the war, Kraal fled east before making a long and lonely journey north, and then west. There the land was not as ravaged, with enough sources of bright energy to feed its dark hunger. Kraal had come to Sarli.

Kraal's background is unclear, but it is likely the result of experimental magic, and possibly the only one of its kind. It was created by the Dark Lords as a weapon to specifically target the priests of Prios, highly sensitive to the energies surrounding theurgy and capable of combating them. Over time, as a result of the terrible deeds it was forced to commit during the war, Kraal has developed an insatiable urge to keep devouring humans and items related to Prios. In year 18, when Kraal entered Sarli from the east and reached the monastery of Maral the Bright, for a brief moment, it finally had its fill. It sucked the life out of Prior Karkoli and his two novices without hesitation, and consumed several holy artifacts. But there was one source of energy it could not reach - Maral's reliquary - enshrined in the basement. With nothing else to eat, Kraal has patiently been watching the monastery's catacombs, waiting for an entrance to open up.



Kraal is humanoid in appearance, with short hind legs, long arms/forelegs, and a short tail. It prefers to move on all fours but can walk upright. The head is long like that of a horse, with a short neck and a small, fanged mouth. Its eyes look eerily human. Six gripping arms/tentacles of different lengths (3-9 feet) extend from the protruding spine. They are constantly moving around Kraal, whipping with increasing intensity as the creature becomes more excited. The rest of its body is thin, almost emaciated, with dark skin. Kraal cannot speak but understands simple forms of Lyastrian. As a result of the transformation it was forced to undergo, Kraal is thoroughly corrupt and has developed its own mystical powers.

Kraal's Goal

Kraal's only remaining motivation is to drain the energy out of creatures and items related to Prios. It has waited a long time for a chance to enter the Archive and the Reliquary and devour the relics and artifacts kept in there (Maral's bones, the spear Argondin's Bane, and the Stones of Redim). Thus, it will initially perceive other creatures as a threat to this goal and attack, but if for whatever reason it should realize that the intruders want to access these rooms as well, it may retreat and wait for a better opportunity. If anyone versed in *Theurgy* goes down into the basement, Kraal's goal will be to consume that person's life force. Having done so it will resume its attempts to reach the relics.



Kraal

Large abomination

Armor Class 20 (natural armor)

Hit Points 147 (14d10 + 70)

Speed 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
21 (+5)	20 (+5)	22 (+6)	2 (-4)	17 (+3)	3 (-4)

Saving Throws Str +10, Dex +10, Con +11, Wis +8

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison, psychic; bludgeoning, piercing and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, poisoned

Skills Perception +8, Stealth +10

Senses passive Perception 18

Languages —

Challenge 13 (10,000 XP, proficiency bonus +5)

Manner undulating without moving

Shadow dark like blackened glass (thoroughly corrupt)

Equipment —

Acidic Blood. A creature that attacks Kraal with a melee weapon takes 1d8 acid damage and 1d4 temporary Corruption from its blood spattering onto their body.

Drain Life Force. If Kraal begins its turn with a creature or item grappled, he can use his bonus action to do 21 (6d6) points of necrotic damage to the grappled creature or item. This damage is reduced by the creature's permanent Corruption. The creature must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or reduce

Kraal appears like a nightmare from the darkness, spurred by his hunger for holy powers

its maximum hit points by the damage amount as well. If its maximum hit points are reduced to 0 by this effect, the creature dies. If the creature escapes Kraal, it regains 1d6 maximum hit points for each extended rest it takes until it is once again at maximum.

Regeneration. Kraal regains 11 hit points at the start of his turn unless he took radiant damage since the beginning of his last turn.

Sense Theurg. If there is a theurg within 1,000 feet or an active theurg spell in effect in the same range, Kraal has advantage on his Perception checks.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Kraal makes two attacks with its Defiling Claws or Grasping Tentacles.

Defiling Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6 + 5) slashing damage and 1 temporary Corruption.

Grasping Tentacles. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* the target is restrained and grappled (escape DC 15).

REACTIONS

Bleak Scream. When struck, the primal blight beast can let loose a scream that darkens every creature's heart. Each creature within 60 ft. of the beast that is not deafened must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw, taking psychic damage equal to their total Corruption on a failure or half that amount on a success.

The Monastery's Chronicle

THE CHRONICLE DATES back over 300 years, to the time before the monastery officially became part of the Twilight Friars' order, and covers the internal affairs of the monastery as well as external events. The calendar seems to start with the death of the Prophet (i.e. Maral, though this is never explicitly stated). The early texts, from the first 150 years or so, can only be understood by a Loremaster (master) with plenty of time for reading. The entries appear to have been written at irregular intervals, sometimes summarizing years of history in a single paragraph, sometimes recounting several seemingly insignificant days in a row. It should be obvious to most players that the chronicle was written by many different people.

Player characters reading the Chronicle will find the most recent entries (also see the player handouts) to be of relevance to their search:

14 Verion, year 369 after the Prophet

Our new baron has been in low spirits since his father's death. He talks more and more about a future elsewhere, about his children deserving a different life. This may be common thinking among the people, but we are surprised that it has affected our rulers. Truly their minds are fickle.

27 Verion, year 369 after the Prophet

Last night we could see fire in the sky. There was a terrible blaze somewhere in the western hills. In this drought a forest fire would be unfortunate. Today we received word that Tarkomal was on fire. Leaving immediately to help the injured. Many people are said to have perished.

5 Konelia, year 369 after the Prophet

Today the Prior returned from Tarkomal with a troubled mind. The baron refuses to let his wife and brother rest in the crypt, burying them instead in Ogdono's provisional tomb. In our view they are all resting with Prios, but nevertheless, this is a worrying deviation from tradition.

26 Konelia, year 369 after the Prophet

The Prior was summoned to Tarkomal for some urgent matter, most likely regarding our chapel there.

2 Leandro, year 369 after the Prophet

The Baron and his family are leaving Sarli for Ambria. Our Prior's request that he stay and care for what remains of his people fell on deaf ears.

19 Leandro, year 369 after the Prophet

They are gone. Yldemo came from the village to report that he saw them leave.

13 Serliela, year 371 after the Prophet

Today Singalea and the novices returned from Tarkomal with what they could salvage. Our Prior was pleased, but still not satisfied. He says that we are running out of time and must finish the task before the snow falls. We owe it to the dead, and there may not be time after the winter.

30 Serliela, year 371 after the Prophet

Our Prior left the monastery with Firego and Singalea. They hope to reach the Sarli crypt and be back in two days. Ralea wanted to go with them, but was told to stay behind.

3 Morangal, year 371 after the Prophet

It has been four days, and our Prior and the others have yet to return. The snow falls outside.

4 Morangal, year 371 after the Prophet

It has been five days, and our Prior and the others have yet to return. The snow falls outside.

5 Morangal, year 371 after the Prophet

Today the expedition returned. Singalea was in good spirits, but our Prior was exhausted and Firego seemed ill. The snow caught them by surprise, and they got lost. They reached the lowland a full day's march further east, and had to find their way back through untrodden terrain. Still, they accomplished everything they set out to do and the dead now rest where they ought to be.

[The entries below are in a different handwriting and written in first person]

6 Morangal, year 371 after the Prophet

After an arduous journey, Singalea, Firego, and I reached the crypt of House Sarli. The snow fell heavy around us once we reached higher ground. We found the crypt sooner than expected, however, and got to work. I placed Ogdono's casket in the main chamber where it belongs, along with abandoned heirlooms that befit such a lord in such a place. Olano and Letira were laid to rest in the chamber of their own line. The other artifacts shall remain here, so they can survive at least as long as the monastery.

In case some member of House Sarli should want to visit their ancestors' tombs, or the Lifegiver should shine upon us and bring life back to this land, I shall now record the way to the crypt, as there are few of us left who remember it. Follow the River Sidra north until you pass its second tributary, the first from the left. Roughly 2500 double paces north from there you will see the hills rise above the forest. Continue straight to the northwest, without straying into the woods, and you will reach a point where the rocks protrude from the ground. From there the path continues northwest, then north toward the crypt. It is run-down and poorly maintained, and has been so for decades, but we left sun-shaped cairns to show the way.

[Here the first handwriting picks up again]

1 Ofeliya, year 371 after the Prophet

Firego died last night. The fever got him. May he forever kneel by the Lawgiver's side.

9 Andonia, year 372 after the Prophet

Today Elando went down to the village. He says he shall not return. Our Prior urged him to stay, but let him go.

16 Elisal, year 373 after the Prophet

Today Ralea reported that everyone in Shoreby has decided to make the journey west. In the evening, Yldemo came and asked all of us to join them. He will stay the night.

17 Elisal, year 373 after the Prophet

Yldemo returned to the village. None of us went with him, though some think we should.

[Here a third handwriting picks up]

22 Elisal, year 373 after the Prophet

Now Prior Karkoli, Balmeo, and I - Singalea - are the only ones left. The other three left us, even though Karkoli begged them not to. He and Ralea have spoken in private for many hours these past days - in the end they mostly shouted at each other. She walked away in tears. The others looked mostly relieved. Karkoli says that the Chronicle is my responsibility now that Tebria is gone. I shall try to honor that responsibility.

13 Leandro, year 373 after the Prophet

This year the harvests are poorer than ever. If things have not improved at the start of Ynedar's month, our larders will be empty by fall. Now that I think about it, this is precisely what Yldemo said.

29 Leandro, year 373 after the Prophet

We are discussing how to proceed but are getting nowhere. My suggestions about seeking help in the west are being ignored. Karkoli says he does not want to leave the monastery under any circumstances, and Balmeo seems indifferent and retreats to the scriptorium unless he is forced to stay. Perhaps I must go alone if we are to make it through the winter, but then, how would they survive back here if I left, if ever so briefly?

[This is the last entry in the chronicle.]

The Chronicle comprises 10 volumes. It is an interesting historical document of some value to those who are able to transport it and find the right buyer. The full collection is worth 120 thaler to one of the Sun Church's factions, who are also willing to pay 8 thaler/book for individual volumes. A normal antique dealer in a large town would offer 6 thaler/volume.

Darkness Calls

In this final act, the adventure is wrapped up and the various parties involved collide as the player characters reach the crypt of House Sarli. The act is linear in that it follows a certain chain of events, but the circumstances surrounding it are still left relatively open. The player characters will of course get the opportunity to confront Dobaró, but might also decide to find another way of solving the situation. Given the development of Act 2: The Shadows Gather, it is likely that the player characters sooner or later will seek out the crypt, which triggers Act 3.

The Crypt of House Sarli

IN THE NORTHERN part of the county, just northwest of the upper reaches of the River Sidra, lies the crypt that the early barons of Sarli had built for their kin. All barons up to Ogdono are buried there, along with most members of their families.

THE WAY THERE

A few kilometers north from the place where the Sidra's second tributary (the first from the west when traveling from Lake Ilmar) reaches the main stream, a path veers off toward the hills in the northwest. Nowadays the path is completely overgrown and more or less impossible to spot for those who do not know what they are looking for. However, Irena or a person who has read the directions in the Monastery's Chronicle can move in the right direction with a successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check**. On a failure, the group consumes a couple of hours finding the path.

Once it reaches the hills, the path continues through rocky areas toward higher altitudes. Only those who have read the Monastery's Chronicle have a chance of finding the right way ahead without wasting lots of time searching the rugged terrain. But even if no one has read the chronicle, they can still find the crypt through patient, painstaking effort (those who have read the Chronicle find the continued path on the first day). If the group's guide passes another **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check**, they have a 1 in 4 chance

of finding the right way for every day of searching (roll 1d4). Let the players make new checks every day if they are forced to take this approach.

OVERVIEW

The crypt's entrance is located in a rocky part of the area. A set of stone stairs, broken with age, leads up to the entrance facing southwest. The masonry exterior is crowned with an ornamental arch. It is clear that the crypt is almost entirely cut out of the mountain. The entrance is sealed with an iron bar gate, the key to which can be found with Prior Karkoli's body at the monastery of Maral the Bright. Unless the player characters have it with them, they must either pick the lock with a successful **DC 18 Dexterity (Thieves' Tools) check** or break it down with suitable weapons; it has 20 hit points and is AC 19.

1. Stairs

The path takes one more winding turn before merging with a flight of stairs carved directly into the hillside. Scraggly vegetation springs from cracks in the unkempt stone, making the stairs difficult, but not dangerous, to ascend.

2. Entrance

Stone blocks, carved and fitted together, form a large structure that juts out of the face of the hillside. An iron bar



gate topped with an arch decorated in scenes and symbols relevant to the Sarli family leads into darkness.

3. Main Chamber

The earliest gravesite of the crypt, originally consecrated to the Executioner which is still apparent in the images carved into the walls. For hundreds of years, ever since the time of Telgon I (whose bones are still there), this was the resting place of House Sarli's matriarchs and patriarchs. There are funeral monuments in the form of niches in the walls as well as sarcophagi on the paved floor.

In the far-right corner of the chamber, Karkoli has raised a dry-stone pedestal where he placed the large stone casket of Ogdno Sarli. The inscription on the lid clearly states whose tomb it is. In addition to the bones, the casket contains the Royal Charter enclosed in a wooden case covered in leather, and a sun medallion with the inscription: "To Baron Sarli, for prosperity in your marriage. First Father Abramelin."

THE CRYPT OF HOUSE SARLI

1. Stairs
2. Entrance
3. Main Chamber
4. Side Chamber
5. Side Chamber

0 |-----| 10 m

0 |-----| 10 yards



4. Side Chamber

These cave rooms contain the tombs of less important members, ordered by lineage.

5. Side chamber

Same as #4 above. This chamber is where Letira and Olano were laid to rest, each in a separate niche.

The Spirit of Baron Telgon

As a result of the blight eating its way further and further into Sarli over the past year, the county's dead have begun rising from their sleep. So far, the first undead to emerge is also the first baron of Sarli, who rose from his sarcophagus as a **Crypt Lord** (page 154 of the *Bestiary*), confused

and enraged. The Baron does not understand the world around him, but recognizes his crypt and regards it as his stronghold, which must be defended to the last drop of the blood he has already lost. He looks like a haggard old lord, wearing chain mail, a high helmet, and a thorn cloak that flows around him.

The Finale

THE THIRD ACT culminates with Dobaró finally having the opportunity to get his hands on Ogdeno's bones. A dramatically appropriate time for this is when Baron Telgon's spirit appears in the crypt and tries to drive the group away, but the Gamemaster may find other moments more suitable.

Regardless, Dobaró will abandon his assumed role, secure the bones as quickly as possible, and try to eliminate anyone who might stop him.

Unless Irena is a player character, the player characters can assume that she will react strongly to any attempt to "desecrate the remains of her ancestors" and is too upset to be reasoned with. In that case the player characters will simply have to choose sides. Bear in mind that Dobaró does not take any chances and will try to eliminate them

if he doubts their intentions. Any antipathy that has developed between the two relatives may also come into play at this point.

Nevertheless, it is still possible that Dobaró thinks he can reach an agreement with the player characters without Irena's approval. This can also happen if a player character has taken Irena's place. On a practical level, both parties can get what they want: the Royal Charter to House Sarli, Ogdeno's bones to Dobaró. If that is the case, the Gamemaster should be open for such a development and adjust Dobaró's actions accordingly.

No matter how the situation develops, the adventure ends once the confrontation with Dobaró has been resolved, and any player characters who survived begin their journey back to the Cliff of Korinda.

Aftermath

There are a number of adventure seeds for the Gamemaster to build on after finishing *Call of the Dark*.

Depending on Irena's role and fate in the adventure, the player characters might feel obligated to help her along, or to finish her mission after her death. This is of course particularly relevant if a player character has taken Irena's place. Although the dangers and obstacles of Alberetor have been played out, Bermeon Karnak still plots to stop House Sarli from salvaging its status and reputation. This could be the basis for an adventurous journey through Ambria and a game of intrigue leading all the way to the House of Nobles in Yndaros.

Another adventure seed is the significance of Maral's reliquary casket. If Ralea manages to bring it to the Realm of the Order, it may be some time before the impact is felt, but eventually it will no doubt cause religious strife within the various factions of the Sun Church. And what happens

if it is the player characters who have the casket, possibly with Ralea's dying wish to complete her mission? Do they understand the significance of its contents? Will they destroy the evidence, or maybe bring the relics to Ambria? Or to the Realm of the Order? Do they hand them over to a certain faction, and if so, what will that faction do? This could be a great opportunity for the player characters to navigate the complex religious structures of Ambria and the Realm of the Order.

Lastly, it is possible that one of the groups at the Cliff of Korinda will hear about the dragouls' invasion and ask the player characters to lead a small force back into Sarli to eliminate them. If Goriban has been able to continue his undead existence, he may have assembled an even more numerous group of "soldiers." Driving out the dragouls might involve tough battles around the strategic locations of Sarli.



Who is Who

Here is a guide to various characters from the adventure.

PEOPLE FROM THE BACKGROUND

HOUSE SARLI

Irena Sarli	Eldest daughter of Porgalo Sarli
Ogdeno Sarli	Baron of Sarli, husband of Sopira, father of Porgalo and Dobaró
Sopira	Wife of Ogdeno, mother of Porgalo
Letira	Wife of Porgalo, mother of Irena
Porgalo Sarli	Last Baron of Sarli, son of Ogdeno and Sopira, husband of Letira, brother of Olano, father of Irena
Olano	Son of Ogdeno and Sopira, brother of Porgalo

PEOPLE IN SARLI

THE ORDERLANDERS

Nireon	Aged sun priest, senior member of the Lifegiver's cult, and for many years now the Curia's spy in the Realm of the Order, determined to stop Ralea
Edrano	Leader of the expedition, captain in the Realm of the Order's People's Militia, veteran from The Great War, disillusioned traitor bought by Nireon, Solea's mentor
Ralea	Former sister of the Black Cloak monastery of Maral the Bright, Karkoli's disciple, recent prophet of Lyra
Jumano	Priest of the Hostess, skeptical but loyal member of the expedition
Solea	Scout and docile follower of Edrano, has trouble understanding the purpose of the expedition

THE BLACK CLOAK MONASTERY

Maral the Bright	Lightbringer of the Sun Church, originally a Lyra worshiper
Redim	One of Maral's followers, reluctant at first, then the most devoted of all
Karkoli	Last Prior of the monastery of Maral the Bright, Ralea's teacher, killed by Kraal the abomination, his body is found at the monastery
Balmeo	Brother of the monastery of Maral the Bright, killed by Kraal, his body is found at the monastery

DOBARO AND HIS FAMILY

Dobaró	Bastard son of Ogdeno Sarli, half-brother of Porgalo, uncle of Irena, husband of Milena and father of Madisa and Derado
Milena	Wife of Dobaró, undead
Madisa	Daughter of Dobaró and Milena, undead
Derado	Son of Dobaró and Milena, undead

THE BLACK CLOAK MONASTERY

Singalea	Sister of the monastery of Maral the Bright, killed by Kraal, her body is found at the monastery
Firego	Brother of the monastery of Maral the Bright, died after visiting the crypt of House Sarli in year 16
Elando	Brother of the monastery of Maral the Bright, left the monastery in year 17
Tebria	Sister of the monastery of Maral the Bright, left the monastery in year 18

MISCELLANEOUS

Abramelin	Former First Father of the Sun Church
Almara Argona	Ancient Queen of Alberetor, united the realm
Argondin	Ancient hero in Sarli from the time of the Alberian unification
Bermeon Karnak	Noble plotting against House Sarli to win the favor of Rilia Kohinoor
Goriban	Captain, leader of the dragouls haunting Sarli
Kraal	Abomination haunting the monastery of Maral the Bright
Oragan I (Argona)	Ancient King of Alberetor
Oragan II (Argona)	Ancient King of Alberetor, son of Oragan I
Rilia Kohinoor	Cousin of Queen Korinthia



THE NORTHERN CLANS of Davokar forest have never warmed up to the Ambrian people, and still regard them as hostile intruders. With that in mind, it is easy to understand that their leaders are enraged by how the clans of the south and the High Chieftain on Karvosti more and more seem to treat them as partners. Most clan chieftains never do more than mut-

ter curses and clench their fists, but that has never been the way of Saar-Kahn. No, Chieftain Razameaman and his blood-soaked daughter will not stand idly by while the warmongering subjects of Queen Korinthia steal the land, resources and treasures that belongs to the clans.

The time for a full-scale war is not yet at hand, but there are other ways to thwart the enemy's plans - especially in regard to the growing yet unstable friendship forming between clanfolks and newcomers. Ambrian authorities know full and well that there are agents from the northern clans in their land, working to sever the bond between the peoples, to turn clanfolks and Ambrians into the enemies they once were - men and women with strange speech and mystical tattoos who add fuel to existing conflicts, who call attention to injustices or even make them happen.

And in Ambria, there are always those who are willing to assist; those who feel wronged by the world, who believe that vindication can be achieved by heeding the insidious advice whispered into their ears; those who are prepared, or foolish enough, to deal with powers they don't understand; ignorant individuals who unsuspectingly wake and spread the darkness of The Eternal Night...



Retribution

FOR LEVELS 9-10

Introduction

Tears welled up in Visara's eyes as she watched the scene taking place in the meadow below the hill. The sun would soon set beneath the horizon, and drunken men and women crowded the open space or occupied long tables, Ambrians and Zareks side by side. The fiddling of bards blended with the sound of barbarian drums as musicians started playing under the great oak tree, to the delighted cheers of the guests. In the east end, fires were lit to cook the evening's roasted boar. Sister Odarea and the witch Marlomon walked past the crowd, away from the city. Visara felt a sudden disgust and contempt for the two priests: they of all people should have recognized the deceit and falsity of this union. But instead they blessed it! She shook her head angrily – she could not let such thoughts distract her. It was almost time. The sun had set, and the bride and groom had retired to the pavilion on the western edge of the forest. Right now that brute was bedding his new wife, as was the custom of his clan, after which they would emerge to the cheers of the crowd. A morose expression flitted across Visara's face. What a fool he was to accept her gift, smiling and kissing her cheeks, failing to understand that their friendship had evaporated like morning mist on a summer's day. She raised her eyes to the horizon. There was no need to keep waiting; she had given them long enough. It was time for her to unleash the power of the necklace.

THIS ADVENTURE IS about a young woman, Visara Mederen, who is tricked by agents of Saar-Khan into using dark powers in an attempt to break up the engagement of her beloved Gede, daughter of the Mayor of Mederen, to Laranod of Zarek by means of a cursed Symbarian artifact. This opening chapter describes the background and structure of the adventure, and offers suggestions on how the player characters might get involved in the story.

The next chapter presents the primary adventure location, the city of Kurun, and is followed by three chapters that

make up the acts of the scenario. The first act starts off the story and provides the necessary clues for the characters to realize that something is wrong. The second act covers the characters' investigations, provides various options for how they can travel to Mederen to disrupt Visara's plans, and describes obstacles they may face along the way. In the third act, they have a chance to stop the devious plan from succeeding or, failing that, fight a recently spawned abomination. New rules, handouts, and player maps are found in the appendix at the end of this book.

Background

Here is some of the history relevant to this adventure.

AS IS CUSTOMARY

Five years ago, fourteen-year-old Visara left her family home in the southern parts of the barony of Mederen to stay with the Dowager Baroness Edindra Mederen, aunt of Visara's late father. It is customary for young Ambrian nobles, especially those of less illustrious descent, to live with more prominent relatives for a while in order to learn the habits and duties of the Ambrian nobility. During these years, they are either trained for a suitable occupation or prepared for a marriage favorable to the family's interests. That was the plan for Visara as well, but the future her mother Perala had

hoped for never came. The Baroness was completely uninterested in the girl, and life at the castle revolved around the Baroness's youngest son, Aldamei, and his obsession with big-game hunting in the woods of Davokar. Thus, the coarse men who visited the estate were hardly the handsome young lute players Visara often romanticized about.

Bored and dispirited, Visara eventually found her salvation in another girl of the same age: Gede, daughter of Galatro who was mayor of the nearby town of Mederen. They met by chance as Galatro and his family visited the Baroness, but the connection between them was instantaneous. Visara was soon paying long and frequent visits to the mayor's household, and at 15 she gathered her belongings, left Edindra's castle,

and moved in with her friend. Had the old Baroness had any affection for the girl, she may have reacted differently. Instead, Visara's departure simply relieved her of an unwanted burden, which she told Perala in a letter shortly thereafter.

Snubbed by Baroness Edindra, and with no other relatives to turn to, Perala resigned herself to her daughter's will and made an arrangement with Galatro. The kind-hearted mayor was willing to go to great lengths to please his daughter, and also hoped (perhaps wrongly) that future exchanges would strengthen relations with the barony's nobles.

THREE FRIENDS

Six months after Visara arrived on Galatro's doorstep, another person moved in as well – Laranod of Zarek, son of Village Chieftain Ingorod on the southern shore of Lake Volgoma and nephew of Clan Chieftain Monovar. This unusual circumstance was the result of long-standing trade relations between Galatro and Ingorod. They had developed such mutual trust that when Galatro offered to let Ingorod's son spend some time in Mederen to learn the Ambrian ways, the chieftain accepted without hesitation. And so the three participants of the love triangle were gathered.

The years that followed were the happiest of Visara's life. The three youngsters did everything together: they slept under the stars in Davokar, dove into the waters of Lake Volgoma, listened to the witch Marlomon's tales of days long past and heard Sister Odarea talk about the time before the Exaltation and her life in Alberetor. They danced together at parties in Mederen, around tribal campfires and in village barns, and they raced their horses across the plains. Visara finally got all the friendship she had lacked, and soon forgot about her girlish dreams of a noble husband. Instead her love grew for the perky Gede, with her warm laugh and clear eyes. In moments of solitude, Visara found herself thinking more and more about how they could be together without Laranod and what a future with her would be like.

LOVE IS BLIND

Unfortunately, Visara misinterpreted the friendliness shown by Gede. Preoccupied with her own infatuation, she failed to notice the love that bloomed between Gede and Laranod, until one night when the former confided in her, pouring out her feelings in a rush of euphoria.

Visara was plunged into the deepest despair. Her world fell apart, as the joy she had felt turned into anxiety and depression. She distanced herself from her friends, claiming to be tired, ill or behind on her studies. And just like Visara had been blind to the feelings between Gede and Laranod, the loving couple never noticed their friend's pain, incapable of understanding that their happiness could be the source of someone else's suffering. After a few weeks, having lost all hope that the relationship would fail, Visara could no longer stand the cheerful mask she had to put on whenever

Gede, Laranod or Galatro were around. On the pretext of visiting her mother, she fled Mederen with no intention of ever coming back.

A LOST SOUL

After a time of isolation with only her pampering mother for company, Visara's thoughts grew so dark that she found herself pushed to the brink of suicide – at least that is what she told herself. She might have gone through with it, had she stayed with her mother, but as it happened she left with Aldamei Mederen. By a twist of fate, Aldamei and his group passed the young woman on their way to Kurun, and he recognized her from the time at Baroness Edindra's estate. They stopped for a chat and Aldamei invited her to ride with him to the town by the river Eblis. Perhaps Aldamei saw something in her that he had not seen in the past, or maybe he just felt sorry for a clearly despondent relative? Visara immediately accepted, to her own surprise, despite the voice inside her whispering that only a few months earlier she would have laughed at the weathered man's offer.

Outwardly, her days in Kurun were happy. Aldamei introduced her to the city's elite and let her stay at the family's townhouse. She attended parties, balls, dinners, and all the other forms of entertainment available to young aristocrats like herself – all to take her mind off the memory of Gede. One of the people she got to know during this time was Firodon Kalalti, a man just a few years older than herself, who quickly became a central part of her social circle. It is possible that he detected a darkness behind her cheerful façade and sought to unveil it, but his courtship of her could just as well have been a recreational distraction. Whatever his reason, Firodon soon got Visara to tell the story of her unrequited love, tormented as she was by the need to share her sorrows with someone who seemed to understand. But there was no pity in Firodon's mind.

MY ENEMY'S ENEMY

Firodon was in fact a lapsed member of a dark cult in Yndaros which he had wormed himself into despite his simple background in the Artisan's District. He came to Kurun a year earlier, after a long time on the run from witch hunters. Here he has lived under an assumed name as the only living member of House Kalalti from the south-west coast of Alberetor, commonly believed to have perished in The Great War. But the opportunity to go to Kurun and establish himself among the city's elite had come at a price. The arrangement was orchestrated by agents of clan Saar-Khan in Ambria, who quickly seized the opportunity once they ran into the desperate Firodon in the slums of Yndaros. Of course, they did not help him out of kindness, nor to aid a fellow enemy of the Queen. No, the Saarian saboteurs expect to see returns on their investment, and Firodon knows it, constantly afraid of what might happen if they start to doubt his usefulness.



SACRIFICIAL PAWN

When Firodon told Ilonor, leader of the Saarian cell in Kurun, about Visara's story and the relationship between Gede and Laranod, the latter realized that the love triangle could be used to stage an attack. The union between the Zarekian chieftain's family and an Ambrian noble house would hardly benefit the Blood-Daughter's plans to unite the clans under her rule. Moreover, if the relationship could be broken in a way that cast blame on the Ambrians, that would give his allies within Clan Zarek a chance to fan the anti-Ambrian sentiment among the people, thus turning them against Chieftain Monovar and possibly causing the clan to pull out of Tharaban's alliance. And Ilonor already had the right tool for the operation – the cursed Symbarian artifact called Agan-Re, which had the power to thoroughly corrupt its wearer.

When Visara received word of the upcoming wedding between Gede and Laranod, the final piece fell into place. The suffering she thought she had escaped began anew, and darkness descended on her. Weeping, she turned to Firodon for comfort, and he fed her the words Ilonor had given him, whispering about justice and vengeance – about her

deserving to win back her love and banish Laranod from Gede's mind; about stories he had heard in Yndaros of ancient powers useful for such purposes; about artifacts used by young lovers in the olden times. Visara soaked up every word and let his lies spark a flame of impossible hope inside her, increasingly convinced that her dreams could be fulfilled through magic. Then Ilonor – via Firodon and his intermediary, the exiled fortune hunter Belraya – could easily place Agan-Re in the hands of Visara, along with instructions on how to use it.

Convinced that the misled woman would trigger the artifact's terrible power at the wedding, Ilonor devised the rest of his plan. Laranod's life was already forfeit, and there was a good chance that his father Ingorod, brother of Chieftain Monovar, would be killed as well. He therefore sent orders to allies in Zarek territory to be ready to blame it all on barbarian-hating groups in Ambria, even the Queen herself, once news of the wedding incident got out. Even if the end result would not be exactly according to plan, the ensuing chaos would certainly weaken one of Tharaban's important allies, which would be a desirable enough outcome, so naturally Ilonor congratulated himself on a well-executed conspiracy.

Young love: for some the most beautiful thing there is, for others an unspeakable torment.

THE HONOR OF BARBARIANS AND THE PRINCIPLES OF DWARVES

What Ilonor had not anticipated was that his tool, the former fortune hunter and artifact peddler Belraya, would suffer pangs of conscience about her involvement. Belraya was exiled from Clan Odaiova after Chieftain Embersind accused her of being affiliated with his rebellious nephew Embramer. She was not aware of the circumstances and did not know who Visara was, but realized that she was being duped. The artifact Belraya pretended to sell her would not accomplish what she had been instructed to say it would.

Belraya knew she would not find peace until she found out who the young woman was and where she was going. Her research led her close to the truth, but also attracted the attention of Firodon. He informed Ilonor who quickly decided to dispose of her. The Saarian saboteurs found Belraya at the West Harbor and arranged an attack, but before completing their mission they were interrupted by a City Watch patrol. With the last of her strength, the mortally wounded Belraya crawled her way to the home of her friend Yndlas, where she died just after passing on what she had learned. The terrified goblin has since been in hiding, in the vain hope that no one would come to question him if he buried his newfound knowledge deep inside.

Here the trail of Visara and the Saarian conspiracy would have gone cold, were it not for the fact that Belraya served other masters as well. She did odd jobs for Ilonor under threat of being handed over to Embersind, but it was the dwarven family of Maretko who enlisted her services on a daily basis. Belraya had fallen into debt with the Maretkos when she first arrived in Kurun, lost and afraid, and since then she made her living fencing stolen goods for the dwarves. When their artifact expert suddenly went missing, their initial reaction was concern, but eventually the dwarves saw the need to protect their investment and their influence in the city's underworld. There is no shortage of destitute spies, but nevertheless, interfering with Maretko's affairs can never go unpunished! The matter must be thoroughly investigated, and Belraya must be located. But using the family's own resources can be sensitive; who knows where the trail will lead?

No, such a mission requires outside problem solvers. Perhaps someone who owes the dwarves a favor...

Timeline

Presented below is a brief summary of the background and forthcoming developments. The details of future events will be laid out in upcoming chapters.

<p>5 years ago</p> <p>Visara arrives at the castle of Dowager Baroness Edindra Mederen.</p>	<p>◆</p> <p>◆</p>	<p>4 years ago</p> <p>Visara moves in with her friend Gede, daughter of Galatro, Mayor of Mederen.</p>
<p>3.5 years ago</p> <p>Laranod, son of Ingorod of Clan Zarek, joins Galatro's household.</p>	<p>◆</p> <p>◆</p>	<p>1 year ago</p> <p>Firodon arrives from Yndaros to Kurun under instructions from the Saarian saboteurs, and settles down under the assumed name of Firodon Kalalti.</p>
<p>3 months ago</p> <p>Gede and Laranod become a couple. Visara is consumed with jealousy, leaves Mederen, and goes to stay with her mother.</p>	<p>◆</p> <p>◆</p>	<p>2 months ago</p> <p>Aldamei Mederen bumps into Visara in the street and invites her to join him in Kurun, where Firodon soon becomes part of her social circle as her confidant.</p>
<p>Three weeks ago</p> <p>News of the engagement reaches Visara. Having coaxed the background out of her, Firodon feeds her lies about ending their love by mystical means.</p>	<p>◆</p> <p>◆</p>	<p>5 days ago</p> <p>Firodon introduces Visara to the artifact dealer Belraya who, in turn, hands over Agan-Re, along with false instructions.</p>
<p>4 days ago</p> <p>Visara leaves for Mederen. Belraya is last seen at work by the fence Silando.</p>	<p>◆</p> <p>◆</p>	<p>3 days ago</p> <p>Belraya regrets her role in the deception and tries to find out who Visara is and where she has gone.</p>
<p>2 days ago</p> <p>Belraya finds Firodon, who realizes what she is up to; he informs the Saarian saboteurs. Belraya seeks refuge with Yndlas. Silando is concerned by Belraya's absence. He notifies the Maretko family.</p>	<p>◆</p> <p>◆</p>	<p>Yesterday</p> <p>The Saarian agents attack Belraya, leaving her mortally wounded. She makes it back to Yndlas and tells him what she has learned. Yndlas goes into hiding. Bardolin Maretko decides to enlist outside problem solvers.</p>
<p>Now</p> <p>Game begins. The characters are hired to find Belraya.</p>	<p>◆</p>	<p>4 days from now</p> <p>The wedding ceremony.</p>

The Player Characters

THE CENTRAL PLOT hook of the adventure is that the player characters are engaged to seek out Belraya and in their investigations uncover the conspiracy and an opportunity to act against it. Depending on the composition of the gaming group, the exact starting point may need to be adjusted to suit specific circumstances.

INCENTIVES

Below are some suggested plot hooks that should work for a wide range of gaming groups.

Blood Debt

One possibility is that one or more of the player characters owe a debt to a prominent dwarven family who now calls in the favor by asking that they track down Belraya. It could be the Maretko family or one of their allied families. They are then contacted by Bardolin Maretko who asks them to accept the mission in order to pay their debt.

Exchange

A second option is that the dwarves offer something in exchange for the characters' services, such as simple financial compensation or something more specific, and more interesting. Perhaps the dwarves have heard of the

player characters in some context, or maybe Bardolin is growing impatient and offers the job to a random group of fortune hunters?

Moving up the Ladder

If the dwarves do not seem like a suitable starting point, Belraya could be of interest to a faction on good terms with the player characters, who then agree to find her at the request of that group. Gaming groups sympathetic to the Reformists could be hired by a local representative who worries that Belraya's disappearance is a sign that the Whip of Prios has struck the city; a similar premise may also suit groups associated with Tharaban's barbarian alliance. Conversely, player characters with ties to the Queen, the Curia, or the Templars could be asked to hunt down a suspected heretic.

A Friend in Need

If none of the other plot hooks seem appropriate, you could let characters with a background in the barbarian clans be contacted by a friend from home, who has come to Kurun in search of Belraya on some important errand and who needs help from people more familiar with Ambrian society. In that case you should adjust Belraya's background to match that of the player characters and the friend.

The Structure of the Adventure

The Maretko Family

The Maretko family is actually based in Yndaros and a close ally of the currently most influential dwarven family: the Valotzars. Two years ago, the two families started making substantial investments in commercial activities, both legal and illegal, in Kurun and along the river Eblis. With the growth of Kurun this trade has become increasingly lucrative, why the Valotzars and Maretkos have decided to establish a permanent presence in the city in order to better protect their interests. Bardolin Maretko is running the operation from an anonymous building in the city's commercial district, with the help of half a dozen dwarven underlings. But although the two families have great resources in Yndaros, their position in Kurun is still quite modest. This is why Bardolin is reluctant to expose his own people and prefers to use outside operators, which also decreases the risk of leaving a trail that can be traced back to the dwarves.

RETRIBUTION IS DIVIDED into three acts, the first of which opens with a number of different leads to follow up on. The second act is more linear in that the player characters must make it to Mederen as soon as possible, although there are two paths to choose from. The third act begins when the player characters arrive in Mederen, and can play out in different ways depending on what they decide to do and whether or not Visara has already put her plan into motion.

ACT 1: PAYING A DEBT

In this act the characters are engaged by the dwarves of the Maretko family to seek out their employee, the artifact expert Belraya, who has gone missing in Kurun. While investigating her background and activities, they uncover a number of trails, which can be followed in any order. These finally lead the characters to Belraya's friend, the goblin Yndlas, and the barbarian woman lying dead in his home.

ACT 2: TIME IS RUNNING OUT

Through information from Yndlas and by following in Belraya's footsteps, the player characters can find out that she placed a corrupt artifact in the hands of the noble Visara

and later regretted it. Visara is now at risk of unwittingly activating its dark powers. Further investigation, including a meeting with her mother, can clarify Visara's identity and that she has left Kurun for Mederen. The player characters are also given an opportunity to learn more about Belraya's original employer: the Saarian saboteurs, and their tool in Kurun, the cultist Firodon – a fugitive from justice.

For player characters who realize that time is of the essence and want to reach Visara before she can use the artifact, the rest of the second act describes various paths they can take

to get to Mederen as quickly as possible. It also addresses the obstacles that Ilonor and his agents have placed along the way.

ACT 3: THE COST OF JEALOUSY

The third act can play out differently depending on how quickly the player characters reach Mederen. But it basically revolves around their opportunity to prevent Visara from unknowingly unleashing an abomination at the wedding feast. If they have acted quickly during Act 1 and 2, the adventure can have a more or less happy ending; if they have wasted too much time, the story might end in tragedy.



Kurun

Kurun, the seat of the Duke of Berakka, is often eclipsed in the public consciousness by the fortune hunter's town of Thistle Hold on the edge of Davokar. And indeed, Nightpitch's creation, the hub of treasures hauled from the forest, is symbolically significant for both Narugor and Ambria in the search for a new life. But the people of Kurun shake their heads at the fascination with the settlement in the north. For though it may offer occasional encounters with the most exotic elements of the new country, they see Kurun as the natural center of the duchy.

IT IS THE seat of political power, the war hero Junio, the military might of the 5th Army, economic strength and trade along the river Eblis, and the intellectual elite at Ordo Magica's Kurun chapter under the direction of the

brilliant Chapter Master Argoi. No, for people in Narugor who wish to make their fortune without risking their lives in a vain search for Symbarian gold, Kurun is the place to be.

History

THE CITY OF Kurun is as old as Ambria itself, founded as an outpost for the invading army of the warlord Urondo Salamos before the ultimate conquest of Kadizar. A small Jezite settlement already existed there at the time, whose people watched over the Bridge of Banotar which stretched over the river Eblis, but the barbarians holding the bridge were quickly routed. Urondo immediately realized that the place was strategically important for passage to the western plains. The work to strengthen the bridge started right away, and from the garrison which Urondo left behind grew the city that exists today.

The place became increasingly important for the realm: first as a military base and maintenance area, then as a fortified stronghold against the barbarian clans. As the years went by, it turned into a trade center for goods shipped on the river Eblis and on the roads between New Berendoria and central Ambria. In the year 5, when Narugor was established as a duchy and the new title was conferred on Junio Berakka, he took up residence in the city and named it Kurun, in memory of his place of birth in southern Alberetor.

Districts

KURUN IS BUILT on five hills with a winding river between them, on the northeast part of a ridge stretching out from the Titans on both the west and east side of the river. The city's sturdy, crenelated walls and the great castle towering over them clearly reflect its ruler's military inclination.

There are many farms around the city, in the dips between the hills, whose slopes are largely occupied by terraced fields and fruit orchards. On the hilltops the army has raised wooden watchtowers to detect enemies approaching overland or from down the river.

Each of Kurun's districts has its distinct character and geography, greatly influenced by the hill on which it is located and the area's predominant population.

THE HARBOR

The area between the city's four central hills, on both sides of the river, is commonly known as the Harbor, as that is where the first moorings were built. People from all over the city and every part of the country gather here to trade and exchange news. Sailors, merchants, hunters, royal messengers, and clanfolk from the forest all walk the wide streets of the Harbor where the roar of the river blends with the shouts of the fishmongers and hymns from the Sun Temple. The area is connected by the great Bridge of Banotar: a wooden structure built on a base of stone which is supposedly as old as the city state of Lindaros, raised in its current form roughly 50 years ago by the Jezite chieftain Banotar and wide enough for two wagons to pass each other midway. Ambrian engineers have since moved its abutments higher up on the steep riverbank and raised its arches so that smaller ships can pass under it without breaking their masts.

The district's natural center is the great Duke's Plaza by the east bridge abutment, dominated by the large Sun Temple run by the strict Mother Sanagea. Events held in the plaza include markets, festivals, religious processions, executions and frequent competitions in the popular local sport of Firebring – often between teams from different districts and from the city's army regiments.

On the west bank of the Eblis lies West Harbor, the hub of river-based trade in Kurun. Long docks stretch into the water to receive all types of vessels, whose goods are loaded and unloaded on their way to the rest of western Ambria. The nearby Bridge Square is the site of daily markets, where local merchants sell samples from their stores and negotiate the price of entire batches. The saying that anything can be bought in Kurun is not far from the truth. Many of the duchy's and indeed the kingdom's most prominent trading companies have representatives in the district. But despite the lucrative commerce, West Harbor is one of the city's poorer areas. The inhabitants are warehouse workers and stevedores working long hours for

Firebring

Colloquially known as torch fighting or pyrelight, this organized sport is a contest between two teams of 5–10 players. The goal is to control the arena's only torch and use it to light a number of braziers positioned along the edges of the playing field, which can be an arena, a public square, or just a field. Most versions are played with one brazier per player, and with each team's braziers on opposite sides of the field. The players are unarmed and unarmored, but other than that there are no holds barred, and many games result in bloody fistfights and bone-crushing tackles.

Once a fire is lit, the game restarts with the torch in the middle. This means that the team who is behind gets fewer and fewer fires to defend and can therefore concentrate on preventing their opponents from lighting any more of them. The game continues until one side has lit all their fires. Simpler versions of Firebring are often played with a club instead of a torch and with woven baskets for braziers, while the traditional equipment is used for larger events. As a result, famous pyre players will often have plenty of burn marks.

The game has a long history and has not changed much since the days of Alberetor. While it is known and occasionally practiced in other parts of Ambria, the tradition has mainly lived on in Kurun. The reason for this is that Urondo Salamos and his officers were particularly fond of the game and arranged tournaments where teams from different military units competed against each other. As the soldiers retired and settled down in the city, the interest in firebring spread among the population, and today it is the city's most popular form of entertainment and a common topic of conversation. The best and most popular players in the city, such as the war veteran Ulmina Fireborn, can even make a living from the prize money.

meager wages, and at night the cheap taverns lining the west-side alleys are filled with drunken sailors and thieves who make the streets unsafe.

THE HILL OF YNEDAR

To the southeast rises the broad Hill of Ynedar, named after the Queen's father. That is where one finds the most beautiful buildings from the first year of colonization, when houses were built for the new ruler and high-ranking officials. It also has the best-paved streets, including the main road called Queen Street, as well as many of the city's most renowned stores and inns. People walking down the hill's well-kept side streets will often find a surprising calm and small oases of unexpected vegetation where trees and bushes have been left to grow into small parks. Much of the district is home to Kurun's nobles, merchants and other affluent Ambrians, and houses institutions such as City Hall, Ordo Magica's chapter house, and the local House of Nobles.

OWL'S CREST

To the north of the Hill of Ynedar lies Owl's Crest, flatter and somewhat lower than its neighbor, where the buildings rise in circles toward the level hilltop. Its quarters are dominated by cramped alleys and winding streets with tall, narrow buildings leaning over them. A number of failed attempts have been made to rectify the cluttered townscape, most recently after the great fire in the year 16. Owl's Crest is also more bustling than any other part of Kurun, except the harbor. The swarms of pedestrians, riders and wagons, and the sounds of numerous workplaces, can easily leave an overwhelming first impression. The place is crowded with artisans and mongers: a diverse mix of potters, blacksmiths, tailors, cobblers, leather workers, alchemists, spice peddlers, tanners and carpenters. These hardworking people, along with their families, servants and helpers, make up most of the district's population.

Owl's Crest is also home to the city's largest and most popular taverns and entertainment establishments, such as the traditional beer hall Pint of Stut and Klavman's Gambling Den. The latter has kept its name even though its founder went missing many years ago, reportedly on the run from debts owed to one of Yndaros' dwarven families.

GLASS MOUNTAIN AND PEAT HILL

Duke Junio decided early on that the west bank should be included within the city walls – the opportunity to control both sides of the river crossing was deemed more important than being fully protected against attacks from the river, a decision that has not yet been put to the test. However, this meant that much of west Kurun initially consisted of empty spaces. Development in the area has since gone more or less unchecked, although the worst slums were vacated and torn down after the great fire in the year 16. These features characterize its two districts, Glass Mountain and Peat Hill.

The hill known as Glass Mountain is littered with low houses in disordered quarters. Most of its residents are poor Ambrian workers: stevedores, oarsmen, sailors, errand boys, coachmen and trading company henchmen. But it also has a sizable population of newly arrived barbarians, adventurers, fortune hunters and sellswords. The area is clearly a slum, its most distinct feature being the stench that never seems to go away, no matter how hard the wind blows or how well the streets are swept. Glass Mountain generally has nothing to attract visitors, with the possible exception of the prize fighting establishment called the Slaughterhouse, where wrestling matches and fistfights can sometimes draw large crowds.

While the two districts resemble each other to a large extent, the tall Peat Hill gives a different, less chaotic impression. This is because its population consists mainly of more recent newcomers from Alberetor, who generally adhere to the orthodoxy established by the followers of the Lawgiver within the Sun Church – reinforced by this branch's representatives among the city's liturgs and the

rootlessness that comes from being displaced from one's homeland. And with the spreading rumor of the Peat Hill spirit, newcomers of the same faith have consolidated the local culture. The inhabitants' lives are characterized by duty, zeal and reverence for Priors, and smaller chapels run by the worshipers themselves are quite common.

The ambition to cultivate the Sun God's gifts has made the district somewhat richer than its neighbor, Glass Mountain, with several smaller movements having established themselves. At the same time, the residents of Peat Hill keep to themselves and prefer not to mingle with other groups in the city, except during religious holidays. Outsiders who are not obvious devotees of the Lawgiver are often treated coldly, and anyone who appears to represent the degenerates of the new country (barbarians and non-humans) is often viewed with outright hostility. Peat Hill's only landmark (one of the most famous in Kurun) is the magnificent Tower of Leandro. It was named after the lightbringer Leandro Salamos who died in the war against the Dark Lords, and who was also an uncle of Kurun's founder, Urondo. But the tower's history goes back much further than that. Ordo Magica's historians have not been able to draw many conclusions about its origin, but the predominant theory is that it was raised by the same people who constructed the Bridge of Banotar. All that remains today are the exterior walls of the bottom six floors, and no attempt has been made to restore it for fear that it will collapse.

BARBARIAN TOWN

What was originally a sparsely populated part of Peat Hill has in recent years grown into what is commonly known as Barbarian Town, as more and more clanfolk gather in the city – sailors, shipwrights, and refugees from conflicts up north. The influx of barbarians has so far been tolerated but is causing rumblings among many of the Ambrian groups, such as army commanders concerned about infiltrators and conservative members of the Sun Church who view the clanfolk's faith as a form of idolatry. Meanwhile, merchants and sailors are benefiting greatly from the barbarian element.

The Duke has not yet commented on the issue, but it will only be a matter of time before he is forced to take a stand. Relations between the district's residents and their neighbors on Peat Hill are strained at best, and unless something is done to defuse the situation, there will likely be riots in the streets.

Barbarian Town is full of simple homes, often inspired by Davokar's culture and architecture. Ninety percent of its inhabitants are barbarians, mainly from Zarek and Odaiova, and most of them earn their living as sailors, carpenters and shipwrights – constantly in demand on merchant ships and at King Koriano's Shipyard. The natural meeting point is the Water Hole tavern, which is the only public establishment in the district, although many nights the locals gather around fire pits between the houses and let the scent of roasted food drift over the rooftops.



0 |-----| 100 m
0 |-----| 100 yards





◆ **PUBLIC PLACES**

1. Castle
2. South Gate
3. North Gate
4. West Gate
5. Duke's Plaza
6. Bridge Square
7. West Harbor
8. The Bridge of Banotar
9. Sun Temple
10. Ordo Magica Chapter House
11. House of Nobles
12. City Hall
13. The Crown (inn)
14. Taohar's Tea Room
15. Pint of Stut (tavern)
16. Klavman's (gambling den)
17. The Huldra's Honor (inn)
18. Trollhunters
19. Slaughterhouse
20. The Tower of Leandro
21. The Sunlight (tavern)
22. The Water Hole (tavern)
23. King Koriano's Shipyard
24. Goblin Camp

◆ **ADVENTURE LOCATIONS**

25. The Maretko Family Seat
26. Silando's Store
27. Belraya's Residence
28. Yndlas' Hideout
29. Asorios' Store
30. The House of Rams
31. Ilonor's Residence
32. Firodon's Residence

KING KORIANO'S SHIPYARD

Along with Agrella, Kurun is one of a few places in Ambria where the art of shipbuilding is held in high regard. In the northern part of the city, on a large open space on the east bank between Owl's Crest and the city wall, lies one of the country's few shipyards, and likely the most important one.

Named after the seafaring King Koriano II, it is a source of pride for its inhabitants. Not only are the shipwrights building flat-bottomed barges for the transportation of goods, like in many other places, but also lighter and faster vessels. Recent years have even seen multi-oared warships. Lately, several Zarekian carpenters and caulkers have been offered employment at the shipyard, which has advanced its shipbuilding even further. Meanwhile, the yard's activities have become important to the entire realm, as dominating the waterways has become a military issue. Tentative efforts to establish a small Ambrian fleet have begun. The reason for this is of course that it is increasingly clear that a large-scale conflict with some of the barbarian clans is imminent. Controlling Lake Volgoma and the transport routes to and from its shores may prove a deciding factor in this war.

The shipyard is firmly run by Master Shipwright Jigeno. It is a major source of work for many of Kurun's inhabitants, as well as the surrounding rural population, and it is one of the largest purchasers of timber in the region.

The Fall of the Alberian Navy

Alberetor was historically a great maritime nation, with long coasts and extensive trade across both the eastern and western seas. During The Great War, at least initially, the royal navy was a vital part of the war effort, especially as Lyastra had no significant presence at sea. But the ships were highly vulnerable to the Dark Lord's powers, which was illustrated to devastating effect early in the war, during the battle of Vherdhan Bay. In a large-scale maneuver, Admiral Elfeno Harl had blocked the entire inlet in an attempt to cut off the supply lines to Bright Haven on the Meritra river. But the enemy's naval inferiority made the Alberians careless, so when the disciple Enohar unleashed the dark wildfire, it spread very fast. Not one ship escaped its flames. Virtually the entire Alberian navy was wiped out in a single blow; a defeat from which it never recovered. The resources dedicated to shipbuilding were instead used to combat the undead hordes on land, and slowly the knowledge of naval warfare dwindled. When the colonization of Ambria began, there was not even any need for it, although trade was quickly established on the rivers.

Housing & Entertainment

THE CROWN

At the start of Queen's Street, not far from South Gate, lies *The Crown* – considered the finest inn in Kurun. The proprietor, Master Siermo, who bought the establishment three years ago, is well aware of its reputation, constantly trying to imprint it in the minds of his guests. *The Crown* provides high quality in most respects, and is particularly well known for the extraordinary baths in its basement, connected to a natural spring – discovered in the city's early years, probably as old as the Bridge of Banotar, but thoroughly renovated. Hot and cold baths are offered in mosaic pools under beautiful arches of stone.

Grilled trout with spring onions & beets	8 shillings
Nettle soup with eggs	3 shillings
The Crown's apple pie with cream	2 shillings
Tankard of Kurun's Honor (triple fermented)	5 shillings
Cup of stut	1 shilling
A half-bottle of Vearra's Red	1 thaler
Bath session	7 shillings
Double room	12 shillings
Single room	1 thaler

THE HULDRA'S HONOR

For those wanting to be at the center of Kurun's entertainment scene there is no better place than the four-winged building called the *Huldra's Honor*, if the proprietor Derida is to be believed, at least when it comes to the kind of amusements popular among the general public. As a matter of fact, many competitors reluctantly recognize the *Huldra's* special status – although most would not attribute it to the high standards of the inn, but to Derida's network of contacts and her ability to make influential guests keep coming back to spend night after night under its roof.

According to Derida, the key to the establishment's success is her delicious and affordable stut (based on a secret recipe) and that several nights a week she provides entertainment in the form of bards, singers and musicians who, depending on the weather and season, perform in the courtyard or in the hall that occupies an entire wing. And the *Huldra's Honor* has undoubtedly developed a reputation in that area, so much so that musicians from all corners of Ambria go there for a chance to perform at the inn.

In every other respect, the *Huldra's Honor* lives up to its name. Decorated in a style that alludes to life in Davokar,

with trophies from Derida’s time as a fortune hunter, it offers a taste of the great forest that tickles the Ambrians’ imagination without being too vulgar for visiting barbarians. It was as a treasure hunter that Derida acquired the wealth she later invested in the inn, as well as many of the contacts she now uses to increase its popularity.

Whole grilled cormorant with roasted vegetables	4 shillings
Mixed stew	6 ortegs
Vegetable soup of the day with bread	4 ortegs
Tankard of Derida’s Special	5 ortegs
Tankard of Kurun’s Honor (triple fermented)	4 shillings
Tankard of Zarekian Blackbrew	1 shilling
Tankard of Veloum	2 shillings
Bed in dormitory	1 shilling

TAOHAR’S TEA ROOM

Among Kurun’s many restaurants and taverns of classic Ambrian or barbarian character, *Taohar’s Tea Room* on the edge of the Hill of Ynedar is something of an oddity. Named after its owner – a tall, thin, modest man with gray hair – this establishment offers cuisine from Taohar’s home region in the City States. It mainly serves bitter herbal teas along with something sweet, and possibly a small glass of acidic wine from the southwestern lands.

Customers come here not only to fill their bellies, but to tickle their palate and enjoy the sophisticated atmosphere, which is why the establishment has gained popularity as a peaceful meeting place among upper-class youth. Taohar demands a high standard from his customers in terms of manners and appearance, which of course favors the elite. Those wishing to enjoy its delicacies must pass the scrutinizing eyes of Headwaiter Ridelo, and even after that, anyone who does not conform to Taohar’s idea of proper behavior is gently but firmly shown out by the Tea Room’s bouncer, Bulgy.

Goat cheese pie with pear compote	2 shillings
Honey-baked pastry roll	15 ortegs
Pickled mulberries	7 ortegs
Pot of Regol blend (extra bitter)	3 shillings
Pot of herbal tea	1 shilling
Glass of Gremolla (Koralian sparkling wine)	1 thaler

THE WATER HOLE

The *Water Hole* tavern is located in a single-story building in Barbarian Town in northern Kurun. The establishment is run by Hargamon, a former shipmaster and freighter from clan Baiaga, and its interior is inspired by the waterborne culture of Lake Volgoma, with the skin of a

huge garoug mounted on the wall as its most distinctive feature. The food mainly consists of broiled fish or crustaceans served with simple root vegetable purées. The main beverage on offer is actually water, in accordance with barbarian tradition, but of course one may also have a tankard of blackbrew, a habit many barbarians have also picked up in their Ambrian exile. The clientele consists mostly of barbarians, particularly ones who earn their living on the river. But clanfolk from all over Kurun also come here from time to time, as well as Ambrian fishermen and sailors who are attracted by the tavern’s maritime character.

Fish of the day	6 shillings
Boiled crawfish with crisp bread and butter	3 shillings
Spicy clam stew	1 shilling
Tankard of spring water	1 orteg
Tankard of blackbrew (unspecified)	2 ortegs
Tankard of Zarekian Blackbrew	2 shillings

THE SLAUGHTERHOUSE

To people who are not familiar with it, and take a nighttime stroll through Glass Mountain near the western wall, the *Slaughterhouse* may seem like a scary place. The sudden roars of bloodthirst that regularly emanate from the run-down building and echo through the surrounding alleys are enough to make anyone tremble. And in a way, the *Slaughterhouse* becomes no less frightening once you get acquainted with it.

Its bloody one-on-one bouts are arranged during major holidays, every People’s Day and occasionally on other days of the week as well. Aptly enough, the building is in fact an old slaughterhouse – a designation that has endured among the people as a morbid joke, even though the owner, an ogre named Angro, never bothered to name it. But the place should not be confused with places like the Abomitorium in Thistle Hold. The *Slaughterhouse* lacks the professionalism that characterizes such establishments – its fights are brutal affairs for the most desperate. While all bouts are fought unarmed, they usually go on until someone stops moving; lifelong injuries and even deaths are not uncommon among the fighters. Nevertheless, or maybe for that exact reason, the *Slaughterhouse* is popular and draws large crowds, and with the prize money he offers, Angro seems to have no difficulty finding willing participants. Moreover, it is said that several factions among Kurun’s criminal element have interests in the betting taking place on fights and therefore make sure to cover potential losses.

The burly proprietor is himself a scarred veteran of similar activities, and on special occasions Angro still enters the ring. So far he has never been defeated...

Authorities & Factions

THE DUKE

From his castle on Fort Hill, Duke Junio Berakka governs Kurun and all of Narugor. The son of Kandoria's former (and Yndaros' current) Construction Commissioner Jurlio, appointed and elevated to his new position by the Queen shortly after the colonization, the Duke has since been a controversial figure among subordinate noble houses – especially those with a glorious history in Alberetor, like House Argona whose members are descended from the first ruler of the old kingdom. Political experts often claim that this was the real reason behind Berakka's elevation – it gave the Queen an unswervingly loyal watchdog over House Argona, while she herself kept an eye on Vearra in Yndarien.

However, many believe Duke Junio has proved to be as competent an administrator as he was a military commander. Because of the duchy's strategic location on the edge of Davokar, military matters have often been his top priority, although other commitments have not been neglected. The roads are properly maintained and patrolled on a regular basis to keep outlaws away, merchants are often offered good conditions, and the law is firmly enforced.

Junio is quite popular among the people, but as mentioned earlier, the noble houses are less impressed. They think the Duke is too quick to implement his own solutions and restrict the autonomy on which their provinces are based. The notion that Ambria, like Alberetor, is essentially a union of fiefdoms, and that the monarch rules with the blessing of the barons and counts, still persists in the minds of the nobles – even though it may no longer be the Ambrian reality. The lords of Narugor have learned to keep these views to themselves. Formal complaints are occasionally lodged, but often drown in the capital's bureaucracy and are seldom noticed in everyday life. More troublesome for the Duke are the western baronies – Galaldo, Elandel and Haraag in New Berendoria. These have great influence on central Narugor, more so than eastern provinces like Dardall or Elderra, but do not answer to the Duke. And they do not hesitate to demonstrate it. What is more, Duke Alesaro in Sevona is far away and does not seem to think the situation calls for any intervention on his part.

Kurun itself is governed by a council whose members are appointed by the Duke, the local guilds and other influential groups. In practice, however, the council is controlled by the Duke's right-hand woman, Igrena Loramon. The only person powerful enough to change that is probably Ordo Magica's chapter master Argoi, but to the extent that he participates at all in the council's meetings, he seems satisfied with the status quo.

THE NOBLE HOUSES

As already described, the nobles of Narugor hold little power compared to those in other parts of Ambria, and their activities in Kurun reflect this. Several of them have financial interests to protect and must occasionally interact with the Duke regardless of their personal feelings, but other than that the political landscape in Kurun is virtually barren.

Argona is mainly focused on the capital in the south, while the border provinces of Erebus, Elderra, Dardall and Loramon are cultivating their relations with the people of Davokar and Mayor Nightpitch of Thistle Hold. What is left are the distant Gorinder, Salamos and Patio, the latter of which is currently a lap dog of Berakka. The only exception is whiny old Urondo, always ready to point out the injustice done to his house – the fact that he, the man who seized the territory in the first place, was rewarded with a measly barony, while a simple social climber like Junio was allowed to swallow up the entire duchy! But once he starts ranting about his ill-conceived offspring's lack of grit, most bystanders have already stopped listening.

Instead, the House of Nobles is dominated by the aristocracy's social life, where Kurun has become a center for young, fun-loving nobles in the region and something of a marriage market for the families. The proximity to several houses in New Berendoria contributes to this image, as they all have residences in the city, even though they have no formal place in the House of Nobles. Combine this with the Duke's liberal views on what constitutes appropriate entertainment and the access to various luxury goods, and you get a city that is known for its supposedly festive atmosphere.

ORDO MAGICA'S CHAPTER

Kurun is home to one of Ordo Magica's most influential chapters, aside from the Triplet Towers in Yndaros and the order's headquarters in Agrella. It was one of the first chapters established outside the capital, and some would say it predates all the others, as there were wizards present even when Urondo Salamos established his army camp. The Kurun chapter was officially founded in the year 5, in conjunction with the establishment of the duchy of Narugor, and has since been led by the sharp and headstrong Chapter Master Argoi, already a veteran scholar back then and now famous for his studies of Davokar and its trolls. Under his leadership the Kurun chapter has become Ambria's leading institution for the scientific study, examination and cataloging of strange phenomena in the new country. Its members include famous explorers such as Master Karline, who documented the customs of the

northern Clan Gaoia, and Master Lona, who at considerable danger to herself uncovered vast amounts of information about Davokar's king toads.

The chapter archives are open to anyone who pays the fee (a paltry sum of 1 thaler a day) and does not give the impression of being a thief; those who want help finding information can also hire a librarian for an additional 2 shillings per hour. The chapter is less willing to assist with rituals and other mystical powers, however, and securing such assistance requires skillful persuasion and contacts within the order.

Those with personal experience of studying in Kurun tend to view the institution as the spearhead of Ambria's intellectual community and frown upon the political scheming they think characterizes the order's activities in Yndaros. On the other hand, critics argue that the chapter has forgotten what makes Ordo Magica unique; that, should it be allowed to spread, their lack of interest in exploring the mystical powers will lead to the dissolution of the order. It is an open secret that many Ambrians – both within and outside Ordo Magica – would like to see the chapter master replaced, but so far none has dared question Master Argo openly.

THE TROLLHUNTERS

On the west side of Owl's Crest lies the famous Trollhunters society, Kurun's most celebrated and prestigious organization for big-game and monster hunting in Davokar. Its leader is the charismatic veteran Eleono, now retired after losing his left arm in a marlit attack south of the Odama Citadel.

Once a successful trophy hunter, Eleono is now a strong proponent of "scientific hunting," often arguing with Thistle Hold's (in his words) more profit and fame-driven groups like the Red Claw. For this reason, the society is working closely with Ordo Magica on their expeditions. Many of its

members approach the profession from a crasser business perspective, but Eleono's views are supported by Dowager Baroness Edindra Mederen and her son Aldamei, whose influence is crucial in keeping down the society's license fees. And the fact that these patrons are much more interested in killing new types of beasts and unique specimens than selling fey beast claws on Bridge Square strengthens Eleono's position, allowing him to maintain his grip on the Trollhunters.

THE GOBLINS

The tribe of Todrulukku has established a settlement on the hill called Roel's Head just northwest of the city. Located in the woods on the west side, in a shallow dip flanked by tall beech trees, it is home to roughly 100 goblins, including younglings and seniors – all that remains of the tribe after a blight-born serpent ravaged their home in the southern territories of Clan Odaiova. For the past year or so they have lived outside Kurun with Junio's permission, under constant threat of being driven away once the humans get sick of having them around. The head of the tribe is Chieftain Sardukk.

Most of the adult goblins perform manual labor at King Koriano's Shipyard, toiling hard for little pay. This has given rise to a conflict with Master Shipwright Jigeno, who they think is cheating them out of their wages. Recent weeks have seen a growing discontent among the camp's inhabitants, and several smaller groups are planning their revenge on Jigeno. Sardukk would also like to give Jigeno and the humans a slap on the wrist but worries about how they might react. He is therefore urging his more obstinate members to calm down and think things through. Sardukk wants to avoid any backlash against his people, while at the same time strengthening their position in future negotiations with Jigeno. The question is how long he will be able to control his irate subjects.

Adventure Seeds

DESCRIBED BELOW ARE three plot hooks that may be suitable for gaming groups wishing to expand their options for adventure in Kurun or use the city as a base for expeditions.

FINDING KLAVMAN

The player characters are contacted by a person representing the owner of Klavman's, which could be the Maretko family who is described further in this adventure, or the thief queen of Glass Mountain, Vironda. Concerned by rumors that the previous proprietor of the gambling den has returned to Kurun to reclaim his old establishment, the contact asks the player characters to investigate. Their inquiries lead them to a man named Klamandro, recently

arrived from Thistle Hold. Klavman and Klamandro are in fact the same person. On the run from his old creditors, he has spent the past number of years hiding at his wife Aragina's establishment – one of the more prominent inns in Thistle Hold: The Court & Harp. But even there Klavman's past eventually caught up with him, and so he decided to return to Kurun, along with his mistress Sera and Aragina's life savings.

It will be revealed that Klavman is indeed trying to retake control of the gambling den, with the help of criminals from Yndaros, such as Grimorio Abramelin or maybe the aged Merandra. But Klavman's old moneylenders are hot on his trail, informed of the situation by the mysterious "Prince"

in Thistle Hold as revenge for some betrayal or grievance. These people (possibly one of the more prominent dwarven families like Alzerek or Baldysik) want to punish Klavman and usurp his gambling den in the process.

The situation will soon escalate into a struggle between the three criminal groups in the dark alleys of Owl's Crest. The player characters must navigate the quagmire of competing interests to avoid getting caught in the middle and to secure the best possible outcome for themselves – possibly even acquiring their own gambling den in the process.

MONSTER HUNTING

There are rumors circulating in Kurun that a monster roams the Flymarsh, a wetland to the south between the Eblis and the foothills of the Titans. Several smaller ships have gone missing and are believed to have fallen victim to the monster, but so far there have been no survivors to confirm this. An investigative expedition is to be launched and led by the Trollhunters, by directive of the City Council and Ordo Magica. Perhaps the player characters seek out Eleono themselves and ask to come along, or maybe their reputation prompts him to contact them? If they have already established contact with Aldamei Mederen, he might also turn to the player characters and recommend them for the expedition.

Out on the Flymarsh, the trail of a recently sunken sailboat leads deeper into the swamp. Following it, the player characters will find that they are not alone in seeking whatever is hiding there. It seems that a rival expedition is already on-site, trying to reach the target before they do and in the process discredit Eleono badly enough that he can be deposed as leader of the Trollhunters. Perhaps a disastrous outcome to his expedition would be the final nail in the coffin? Meanwhile, the monster they seek turns out to be a king toad which for some reason has migrated upstream from Lake Volgoma to make a new nest for itself. The player characters must now decide how to deal with these threats in order to get out of there alive.

A SONG FOR THE GUARDIAN

For the past week or so, two young siblings named Arello and Ariana have been a huge hit at the Huldra's Honor. Their beautiful voices accompanied by a single lute are bringing back people's memories of a bygone era, before The Great War, moving them to awestruck tears. The siblings claim to be new arrivals from west Alberetor, as rootless as most people in their position, but blessed with unique talent.

In reality, however, the siblings are spies of the Guardian's cult sent by the Realm of the Order; they are not mystics, although their songs have hidden religious meanings. Their purpose in Kurun is to look for signs that the Guardian once was worshiped outside Lindaros. They are seeking symbols, inscriptions or other archaeological remains that can be documented and brought back to their homeland. Kurun is their first stop before moving on to Yndaros, and they are using their cover as musicians to get into places they want to investigate – like the baths at the Crown or the Tower of Leandro. They usually stay away from other followers of the Young Gods but could make an exception if the situation is desperate enough or the gains great enough.

You could introduce the player characters to the siblings during a visit at the Huldra's Honor, perhaps as part of a different adventure, and have them reappear later on. Perhaps Arello or Ariana seeks them out with some false reason for needing help with something complicated or illegal, like accessing the archives of Ordo Magica. Or maybe another faction on good terms with the player characters has become curious/suspicious and asks the characters to investigate the siblings. The player characters could also have their own suspicions, possibly after hearing some confused old-timer rave about their songs and how they evoke memories of his visits to the Guardian's chapel as a young man. In any case, it will soon turn out that the Royal Sekretorium and possibly the Whip of Prios are also on the siblings' trail. When the truth comes out, the player character must decide whether to let the two agents be arrested by the Queen's people or help them get away.



Paying a Debt

This act starts off the adventure and sends the characters on a search for Belraya. From this point on, the text assumes that the characters' employer is the Maretko family; gaming groups for whom this is not the case should be able to make the necessary adjustments without much difficulty. What they are initially told about Belraya provides the characters with a number of clues to investigate. Below is a schematic representation of the places they can visit and how they are linked.

AS ALWAYS, THE characters may choose their own path to the goal, and the possible measures described below can also provide shortcuts. Regardless of how they get there, the chapter ends with them finding Yndlas and realizing that Belraya is dead.

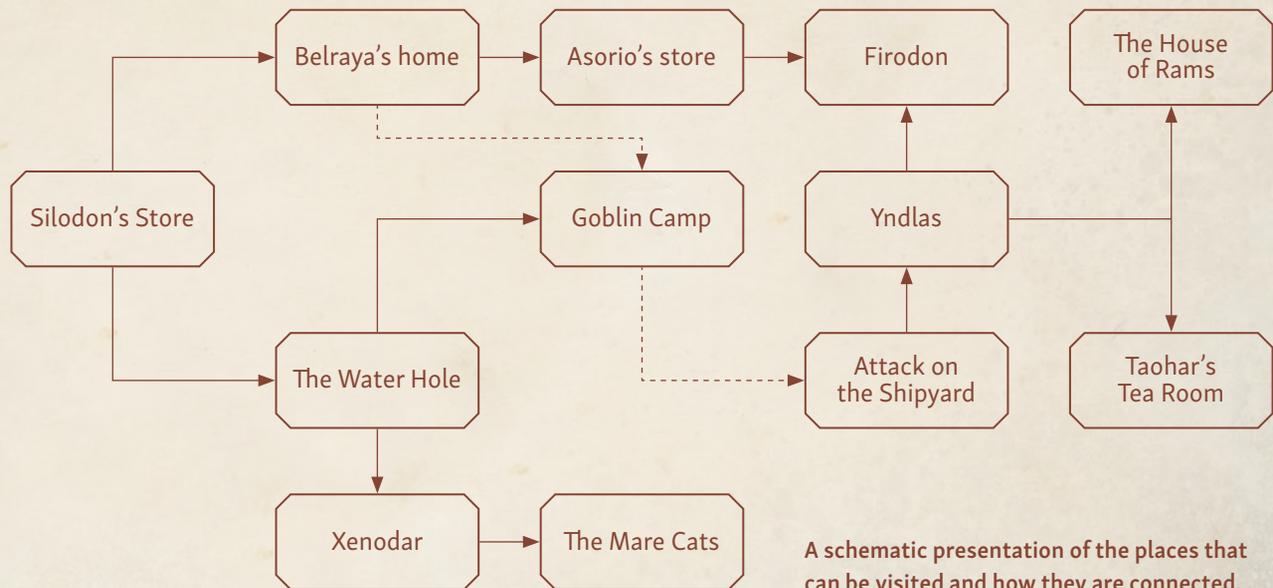
Foreshadowing

GAMEMASTERS WHO ARE preparing in advance would do well to include a scene introducing the characters of Gede, Laranod and Visara in some preceding adventure. It could happen at any time within three months prior to *Retribution* and take place anywhere in Ambria, although the western parts would be particularly appropriate. One suggestion is to add an encounter to one of the player characters' trips. Perhaps one of their horses has wandered off in the night

and is brought back by the three youngsters, or maybe the roles are reversed?

Some gaming groups may find other contexts more suitable, such as a brief exchange one night at an inn or during a dance at the village square.

Either way, the scene should be kept short and focus on adding depth to the participants of the love triangle by portraying them as sympathetic individuals. Let them explain who they are, where they are from, and that they are traveling strictly for pleasure because they want to see the country, but are now heading back to Mederen. Player characters who find this interesting and want to talk some more may also detect a certain emotional tension between the three, though it is still a purely positive one that has yet to reach full bloom. Above all, the player characters should get a chance to recognize their names and empathize with their fate.



A schematic presentation of the places that can be visited and how they are connected.

The Missing Spy

THE ADVENTURE ASSUMES that the player characters will eventually realize that they must get to Mederen quickly in order to stop Visara from using Agan-Re. For this reason, all measures and encounters come with a specified time frame, allowing the Gamemaster to assess the player characters' chances of reaching Mederen in time. In addition to said time frame, the player characters are expected to take a Long Rest each day. If they do not, they suffer one level of exhaustion per day.

The timescale for individual events is merely a guideline and may be adjusted as the Gamemaster sees fit, but keep in mind that this might impact the finale. As usual, the Gamemaster may also choose to ignore the timeline completely (if it suits the group's playstyle) and decide for themselves how the climax will turn out.

GAME OPENING

Timescale: the encounter ends at 10 a.m.

The game starts with the player characters being approached at their place of accommodation by Bardolin Maretko, who presents his case. The Gamemaster must adapt Bardolin's manner based on what best suits the player characters and is most likely to draw them into the adventure.

Bardolin explains that one of his employees, a barbarian woman named Belraya whose knowledge is essential to his operation, has gone missing and that his family needs someone to help them find her. He can tell them that Belraya was last seen at her job at Silando's store, down at the harbor on the west side, in the afternoon four days ago. Two days ago, the dwarves started looking for her without result, and yesterday he decided that the matter was best left to outside problem solvers. Unfortunately, they have not found any useful information at all. Bardolin does not know where Belraya lives; Silando does, but apparently could not find her there.

Bardolin wants Belraya "secured" (meaning captured), but not harmed. Once the characters get hold of her, they are to contact him at the Maretko family residence. If the characters ask for further guidance, Bardolin has nothing to say except that they should talk to Silando.

Bardolin will not mention anything about why Belraya was working for his family, or that her job was to examine potential artifacts from Davokar along with other smuggled goods. He sees no reason for the player characters to know this, nor does he trust them, regardless of why they are willing to cooperate.

INQUIRIES ABOUT BELRAYA AND YNDLAS

Timescale: 3 and 4 hours per attempt respectively

One possible strategy is that the player characters (before or while visiting the other locations) ask the city's inhabitants for information about Belraya, and maybe later about Yndlas. With a bit of luck, it may prove effective – there

is no reason why people would be reluctant to talk about them – but asking around about Belraya also carries a risk that news of their investigation reaches Ilonor, the leader of the local Saarian cell.

Questions about Belraya

A character can attempt a **DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check** to elicit information out of the townsfolk. Player characters with a relevant Boon, such as Contacts (Criminals) or (Barbarian Clans), gain +2 to the check. For each attempt they may also spend 1d6 shillings on small bribes for an additional +1 bonus. The outcome determines the amount of information they obtain. The inquiries can be handled as a group, in which case the players decide which of their characters should make the check, but they can also split up and let each character make an attempt. Regardless of how they go about it and how successful they are, the players are free to make as many attempts as they like.

A higher difference also provides all information from lower outcomes. For each Persuasion check, the Gamemaster rolls 1d6 – a result of 1 means that gossip about the player characters snooping around will reach Ilonor 6 hours later. What happens then is described on page 76 under the heading *Ilonor Picks Up the Trail*.

Questions about Yndlas

Asking about Yndlas is a bit more difficult as fewer people know anything about him, which makes the process more time consuming and requires better results. On the other hand, he is not someone the Saarian saboteurs have paid any attention to, so there is no risk of rumors reaching Ilonor.

A higher difference also provides all information from lower outcomes.

SILANDO'S STORE

Timescale: 1 hour

Located near the docks on the west bank of the Eblis, this store is where Belraya spent most of her time while working for the Maretkos. The establishment handles various goods that have been illegally obtained by the family's business contacts, and it is Silando's job to find suitable buyers. Belraya was specifically used to examine potential artifacts and other antiques to determine their authenticity.

The player characters can talk to Silando, a balding, corpulent Ambrian in his fifties with a thick southern Alberian accent, who has been instructed to cooperate without revealing more than necessary about his illegal activities. He can describe Belraya's appearance and explain that she used to come in almost every day to see if there was any new merchandise, but was otherwise irregular in her habits; that a day went by without them seeing her was nothing extraordinary.

Answers:

QUESTIONS ABOUT BELRAYA

Difference Statement along the lines of...

0-3	Belraya? That barbarian woman hanging around West Harbor, fairly new in town, right? She lives down Glass Mountain. I've seen her a few times at Hargamon's Water Hole.
4-6	I heard she's exiled from her clan. Hangs out with others in the same situation. Usually has a goblin with her too, but oddly enough I saw her alone on Queen Street just a few days ago. Not like she'd find anything in her price range in those parts.
7-9	She belonged to Clan Odaiova, but apparently got on the wrong side of their prickly chieftain Embersind, so that's why she is here in Kurun. She's scraping by doing all sorts of things... Not all of it legal, I bet. Her only real friend is that good-for-nothing goblin, Yndlas.
10+	Belraya, well, she's been seen with some unpleasant types who showed up recently. You know, those refugees from the war up north. Yedes, they say, but I wonder... The kind of people you'd rather not talk about, if you know what I mean? Oh no, I don't know any names, already said too much.

QUESTIONS ABOUT YNDLAS

Difference Statement along the lines of...

0-4	I've seen him out and about in West Harbor, always trying to get some soft-hearted sucker to offer him a beer.
5-7	Yndlas, yeah, he spends a lot of time with that loser Belraya. A strange friendship, but they seem to get along alright.
8-9	He used to live at the goblin camp back in the day, but left his tribe, or maybe they kicked him out? Must have plenty to hide when even his own kind wants nothing to do with him...
10+	An odd fellow, that one. Prefers the company of humans, they say. He's even got his own little place somewhere on Peat Hill, near the Tower of Leandro. You'd think people there would have kicked him out already, but apparently not. Must be keeping a low profile.

Silando does not recall Belraya working on anything unusual recently; on the contrary, the influx of items has been quite low lately. The last time Silando saw her was in the afternoon [four days prior to game start]. Since there was nothing to do, she excused herself and said she would return the following morning. She seemed to be her usual self, if a bit tired and hungover, but that was not uncommon either - Silando is under the impression that Belraya was a heavy drinker.

Silando can tell them in which block of Glass Mountain she lived. He swung by yesterday, and the day before that, but saw no signs of her being home. He does not know anything about Belraya's personal life, habits, social circle or possible reasons for disappearing.

Shortly after leaving the store, the player characters are approached by Esmerda, Silando's 15-year-old assistant and first cousin once removed. She tells them that Silando dislikes Belraya and told her to stay away from the barbarian woman. That is why Esmerda did not say anything back at the store, but the fact is that she occasionally accompanied Belraya to the Water Hole, a barbarian tavern on the west side, across the river from the shipyard. She seemed to have several acquaintances there; Esmerda particularly recalls a tall, gray-haired warrior and a goblin (Xenodar and Yndlas, whose names she cannot remember). Perhaps the player characters can check if someone there has seen her?

BELRAYA'S HOME

Timescale: 1 hour

A walk south from the docks and Silando's, on Glass Mountain, takes the characters to the humble quarter where Belraya lived. If they got a description from Silando, the player characters can easily find the place, otherwise they must ask around the area which takes another 30 minutes and requires a successful **DC 14 Charisma (Persuasion) check**. None of the neighbors have seen Belraya these last few days.

Her room is accessible from the yard via a small, rickety staircase to the second floor. The door is locked, but one can easily force it open - **DC 13 Strength check** - or pick the lock with a **DC 15 Dexterity (Thieves' Tools) check**. It is a one-room residence. In one corner is a small fireplace with a cooking pot and a simple metal chimney, next to a low-hanging shelf that serves as a pantry. Against the opposite wall is a small table and a stool. The inner part of the room is closed off by a curtain, concealing a bed with a small chest at its foot. There is a window by the bed, covered by a shutter. From it you can look down on the street below. The residence does not appear to have been abandoned: things like clothes and dry foods are still there. But at the same time, there are no signs of someone having been there recently: no food scraps lying about and only cold ashes in the fireplace.

The following details of particular interest can be noticed with a successful **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check**:

From a nail next to the fireplace hangs an armlet in the shape of a snake coiled in a circle, artfully twined out of spindly poles, dried grass and similar materials. A person with the Loremaster feature can identify it as a symbol of the world serpent Uron. Barbarians, goblins and Ambrians with good knowledge of Davokar will recognize the typical goblin craftsmanship, where primitive materials of low durability are often used as ornaments. Belraya received the armlet as a gift from Yndlas.

Under the bed the player characters can find a box containing 15 small clay bottles of writing ink. The bottles bear the mark of Asorio (see *Asorio's Store* on page 70). Belraya stole them from his establishment while she was investigating Firodon's identity.

A VISIT TO THE WATER HOLE

Timescale: The Gamemaster decides, but at least 1 hour per visit

At the Water Hole in Barbarian Town, the player characters can easily find someone who knows Belraya and gain information about her goblin friend Yndlas, if they are not already aware of their relationship. With a successful **DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) check** (let the players decide which character should roll) they will also learn that he has left the camp of the Todrulukku tribe and appears to be living somewhere in town.

Visitors at the tavern can inform the characters that Belraya was working for some merchant in West Harbor, that she lived on Glass Mountain, and that she mostly socialized with other regulars. They name Xenodar as one of her friends and describe what he looks like (unless the player characters already got a description from Esmerda). But none of them has seen Belraya for days, most recently [the night three days prior to game start].

If the player characters visit the Water Hole in the evening and inquire about the company she kept and her recent habits, and pass a **DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) check**, they can have a chat with the inebriated Omera. She is a timber worker from clan Zarek, currently employed at the shipyard. She has had drinks with Belraya on a few nights these past months and can reveal that Belraya has lately been talking to some "dodgy people." She thinks they are newcomers from the war-torn north; hard-faced folk with weapons on their belts. These are of course Ilonor and his agents in the city, although Omera does not know it. None of the other guests at the Water Hole want to talk about them – even though no one knows who they are, it is best to watch one's tongue in these turbulent times. If the player characters persist in asking intrusive questions, someone will eventually complain to Hargamon, in which case he throws them out.

At night the player characters can also find Xenodar from clan Odaiova at the Water Hole. He is a tall, rugged, gray-haired warrior with sad eyes, who makes a living as a guard for

various river merchants. He confirms that he and Belraya were friends, even though they have only known each other for three months or so. The last time they met was the night [four days prior to game start] – the night after that he stayed at home, and since then she has not visited the Water Hole. If the player characters ask about her state of mind, or whether she was doing anything specific at the time, Xenodar recalls her mentioning some Ambrian woman she had met, who she never wanted to see again. Or did she want to know who the woman was? Xenodar was not really paying attention. If the player characters have already spoken to Omera and steer the conversation toward Belraya's new acquaintances from the north, Xenodar becomes irritated, claiming not to know anything except that they should not meddle in clan affairs.

Asking around for Belraya at the Water Hole will inevitably lead to gossip about the player characters' curiosity reaching Ilonor 6 hours later. What happens then is described under the heading *Ilonor Picks Up the Trail* (page 76).

THE MARE CATS

Timescale: The Gamemaster decides

Depending on what questions the player characters ask concerning Belraya's social activities, Xenodar may start to suspect them of spying for Chieftain Embersind of clan Odaiova. This is because he belongs to a group of dissident clan members calling themselves the Mare Cats, who have come to Kurun to escape Embersind's political persecution. They are supporters of the rebellious witch Serbaga and are planning raids and operations to further her cause, though their activities have not yet gone beyond conspiratorial meetings. Belraya, who has no love for Embersind, occasionally attended these meetings. Xenodar will therefore interpret the player characters' questions as an attempt to find the Mare Cats, rather than Belraya, and try to discourage them from poking around any further. The Gamemaster decides how intrusive the player characters need to be for Xenodar to react, but should play him as being fairly sensitive to the topic.

If Xenodar decides that the Mare Cats should act against the characters, this will happen two hours after their meeting. They start by following the characters to learn more about them. When the Gamemaster sees fit, a character passing a **DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check** (or a passive Perception 16 or higher) can notice a barbarian watching them in the street, in a square, or in a tavern. After being discovered, this person quickly disappears in the crowd.

The Mare Cats prefer to strike without exposing themselves, and so the Gamemaster may choose one or several of the actions below:

- ◆ Depending on where the characters are staying, one of their rooms could be searched and vandalized. Any valuables will be stolen, but the barbarians will make a point of destroying the furnishings, ripping apart clothes and scattering them on the floor, and so on.

- ◆ One or more of the characters' rooms could be fire-bombed. It could happen during the day while they are out or at night while they are sleeping, depending on how serious the Gamemaster wants the attack to be. If the player characters are not present during the attack, the staff/neighbors of the inn will have extinguished the fire, but any items left behind by the characters will be destroyed. If the characters are on site, the firebomb being thrown through a window is equivalent to an alchemical grenade (see the *Player's Guide*, page 166). Everyone in the room suffers its effect (1d10 fire damage; and also catches fire, taking 1d4 fire damage for 1d4 turns. A burning person can put out the flames by rolling on the ground and passing a **DC 10 Dexterity check**.
- ◆ A player character who is out alone on some errand is surrounded by three barbarian thugs. They assault the character with their fists and deliver a god beating, without using lethal force. Afterwards one of them hisses: "Keep your nose out of clan affairs!" before they run off.
- ◆ The player characters are followed and attacked in some conveniently uncrowded place by fully equipped Mare Cats (**village warriors**, page 192 of the *Bestiary*, twice as many as the PCs with one **village witch**, page 194 of the *Bestiary*). The attackers try to kill them and dump their bodies in the Eblis, but will flee rather than risk life and limb.

The Gamemaster can increase the Mare Cats' efforts by having all above-mentioned incidents take place during the characters' days in Kurun, as long as the barbarians still have reason to believe that the player characters are out to get them.

THE GOBLIN CAMP

Timescale: 2 hours (including the walk to and from the camp)

Regardless of whether the player characters are aware that Yndlas used to belong to the Todrulukku tribe, they are bound to go there sooner or later to find information on him. The goblins are wary of strangers: a group of spear-wielding guards will be watching them while they wait for Chieftain Sardukk to show up. The other goblins keep their distance, grabbing their little ones from the characters' path. Sardukk is a big, strong goblin in the prime of his life and speaks fluent Ambrian, albeit with a thick accent and an occasional word in the various tongues of the trolls and barbarians. Provided that the characters do not behave in an extremely demeaning (Sardukk is used to it), abrasive or aggressive manner, they may present their case to the chieftain. He can confirm that Yndlas was once a member of the tribe and lived among them before he was kicked out. The truth is that Yndlas chose to leave, although Sardukk will not admit it. Then he makes the characters an offer.

As described in the chapter on Kurun, the tribe is in a smoldering conflict with Master Shipwright Jigeno at King

Koriano's Shipyard. Sardukk has now found a way to exact revenge on their deceitful employer, but since the tribe still needs to maintain a functioning relationship with him, the chieftain will not take the risk of letting his own people carry out the operation. This is where the player characters come in. If they agree to execute Sardukk's plan, he will return the favor by taking them to Yndlas.

Should they accept his offer, the chieftain tells them that the shipyard recently received a shipment of planked elm wood which is currently stored in the northern part of the yard, near the construction area. Sardukk's plan is simple: the player characters are to sneak inside and burn down the timber. This would strike a serious financial blow to Jigeno. Also, he would quickly have to replace said timber, in which case Sardukk could offer the tribe's services at premium rates, as the quickest solution would probably be to send workers to the western woods to cut new trees. If asked, Sardukk explains that several of his goblins have already scouted the place during their shifts and assured him that the fire will not spread to the rest of the stored timber. The chieftain can also tell them about the shipyard's security procedures and that a discreet arsonist should have a good chance of avoiding attention. For details regarding the shipyard and its timber supply, see *King Koriano's Shipyard* on page 68.

If the player characters refuse to take on the task, Sardukk will dismiss them with a profanity and have the guard shove them out of the camp. If they complete the mission to Sardukk's satisfaction (destroying at least half of the timber), the grateful chieftain tells them about Yndlas' hideout on Peat Hill (see *Peat Hill* on page 70 and *Meeting Yndlas* on page 70). If just a small part of the timber was destroyed in the fire, the disappointed Sardukk will still reveal what he knows about Yndlas provided that the player characters pass a **DC 17 Charisma (Persuasion) check**.

Other Ways of Dealing with the Goblins

Some gaming groups may prefer to squeeze the information about Yndlas out of Sardukk by other means. Such a development is not covered in this adventure and will have to be improvised by the Gamemaster, with an appropriate timescale in mind. Remember that the chieftain is generally antipathetic to humans (and goblins who consort with them) and will respond forcefully in the event of an open confrontation. Sardukk will not easily submit to extortion, but at the same time he is not going to sacrifice his own subjects to protect Yndlas. In that case, he will likely give in, as long as the player characters are patient enough.



KING KORIANO'S SHIPYARD

Timescale: The Gamemaster decides

The shipyard is located at the north end of Kurun. Player characters who accept Sardukk's mission must find a way to get in there.

Overview

The shipyard is enclosed by a 10-foot-tall fence on the sides that are not protected by the city wall. The only way in and out is a large gate facing the water on the western side of the enclosure. The area inside the fence is dominated by the central construction area, where the skeletons of new ships are taking shape, connected to a canal with a ramp from which boats can be launched and damaged vessels can be brought back for more extensive repairs. Access to the canal is blocked by an iron gate which is connected to the enclosure and can be opened and closed whenever boats need to pass through. To the south of the construction area is a cluster of buildings housing workshops for constructing smaller ship components, as well as a kitchen and dining facilities for the workers. The eastern section contains a large building serving as a lumber mill (all planking and such is done by hand) next to a depot for various types of unprocessed timber.

On the shore outside the enclosure are some docks where ships can come in for minor maintenance, as well as an area for pulling up smaller boats in need of repair.

KING KORIANO'S SHIPYARD

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. Enclosure | 6. Construction area |
| 2. Gate | 7. Canal with a ramp to the construction area |
| 3. Tool sheds, workshops, kitchen and canteens for the workers | 8. Holding area with elm wood |
| 4. Lumber mill | 9. Docks |
| 5. Timber depot | |

0 |-----| 25 m
0 |-----| 25 yards



Security

The shipyard's importance to the Ambrian army has increased with the growing realization that the realm will soon be at war with the northern clans and must therefore maintain control over Lake Volgoma. The increase in military orders is why the enclosure was raised and the security strengthened.

The area outside the enclosure is currently patrolled around the clock by eight guards divided into four units. One unit is stationed north of the canal, another on the west side south of the canal, and the other two along the southern fence. Another six lone guards are patrolling inside the fence. The adjoining city wall is guarded by the Duke's garrison, but of course their attention is mainly directed outward.

It would be easiest for the player characters to sneak in at night by climbing the fence which, after dark, is lit by lanterns hanging from hooks at the top of the fence, 100 feet apart. Each climber must pass a **DC 12 Strength (Athletics) check** in order to cross the wall, and a **DC 13 Dexterity (Stealth) check** to avoid detection.

Player characters who fail will be called out by the guards and attacked unless they surrender immediately. Their objective is simply to drive off intruders, so instead of following player characters fleeing into the city they will summon the City Watch. If the characters are detected as they enter the enclosure, the guards will alert their colleagues and then search the shipyard while informing the City Watch.

Once the timber is in flames, the guards will abandon their posts to fight the fire.

As always, the players may think of other ways to enter the shipyard – perhaps by hiding inside the enclosure during the day while awaiting nightfall, causing a distraction to lure away the guards, or maybe trying to cross the outer wall. The effectiveness of any such plan is determined by the Gamemaster, although it will likely be more complex to carry out than the scenario described above.

The Elm Wood

The elm wood that is the player characters' target was delivered planked and planed to the shipyard. For the next few days it is stored just north of the construction area, as it is intended for the hull of the *Marshal Beremo* – a large sailing ship with 20 pairs of oars under construction, recently ordered by the Ambrian army.

The timber is stacked in a tight pile and covered with an impregnated tarpaulin to exclude oxygen and make it harder for a fire to spread. Gamemasters who so desire can use the following mechanics to determine the success of the characters' attempts.

- ◆ The player characters can set fire to any number of places. Each place ignited must be tended by a player character for one round, unless it is lit by alchemical means, in which case it may take flame immediately. Note that a round is not measured on the same timescale as combat turns, but is significantly longer – several minutes at least.
- ◆ Once a fire has been lit, a player character who has the Bushcraft trait and passes a **DC 15 Dexterity (Stealth) check** can keep it hidden for one round (but not longer). However, a place ignited by alchemical means can never be kept hidden.
- ◆ For every round the fire is left to spread freely, each place that has been ignited adds +2 to the chance of the whole thing going up in flames. For example: with three places having burned for two turns, the chance is 12. If a place was ignited by alchemical means (e.g. fire bombs), the values of that particular place are doubled.
- ◆ Every round a place on fire is not hidden (as described above), the guard patrols can detect it with a successful **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check**. Each additional place that is burning openly gives them +2. However, once a place has been burning for three rounds, the guards will detect it automatically. After hearing the guards' shouts of "Fire!" the player characters have two combat turns to get out of there, after which 1d6 guards will arrive each turn until all 14 are on the scene. The guards will primarily try to extinguish the fire rather than pursue



The shipbuilders of Kurun can be proud of their dockyard – one of the realm's finest!

any escaping player characters. After 10 minutes they are reinforced by a dozen soldiers from the City Watch (the fire is clearly visible from the wall).

- ◆ The work to put out the fire begins immediately once the guards have detected it, so the Gamemaster need only keep track of the number of rounds until that happens. Calculate the chance of the fire spreading across the entirety of the stock as described above and roll 1d20. Success means that all the timber bursts into flames and at least half of it is incinerated. If the roll fails, the guards will get the fire under control and only lose a small part of the stock. Should the player characters confront and defeat or drive away the guards, all timber will be consumed by the flames without rolling for it, in which case no help will arrive in time to save it.

ASORIO'S STORE

Timescale: 1 hour

If the player characters manage to find the ink bottles in Belraya's home, they could ask around for Asorio's ink and paint store (which is not difficult but requires some legwork on the commercial streets in the eastern part of town). The store is located at the corner of Black Lane and Queen Street, and from its window you can see across the street to Firodon's house. Belraya visited Asorio [two days before game start] while she was trying to identify the man who accompanied Visara as she handed over Agan-Re. But she gave herself away, and when Firodon went out to investigate she ran into Asorio's store to hide (to no avail, as Firodon had already recognized her).

Asorio is a thin, completely bald man in his forties wearing a dark apron stained from years of paint and ink. His store is generally considered the best in town, and his customers include Ordo Magica and the local government. He is not familiar with Belraya, but if given a description he recalls her visit, which puts him in a bad mood. She was filthy, brusque and did not seem interested in buying anything at all, and yet she kept asking about his wares. He got suspicious and was just about to throw her out when suddenly his wife was calling from upstairs, so he went up to speak to her. When he came back the unwanted visitor had left the store. Asorio has been missing some ink bottles but does not think they were stolen by Belraya. If the player characters return them to him, Asorio will soften up and express his gratitude. He then adds that the woman seemed to be hiding from someone, constantly looking over her shoulder as they were talking, glancing at the house across the street. Asorio can point out the house he is referring to (see *Firodon Kalalti* on page 74).

PEAT HILL

Timescale: At least 1 hour, possibly longer depending on the characters' actions

The conservative and impoverished district on Peat Hill in the western part of Kurun is where Yndlas is found, which

the player characters can find out either from Sardukk or by persistently asking around town.

Despite the locals being generally suspicious of anything about the new country that deviates from the norm in Alberetor, Yndlas has managed to stay in the neighborhood around the Tower of Leandro for months without being cast out – maybe because of his disgust toward his woodland heritage, or because he is too odd to be considered a threat. For whatever reason, the local inhabitants put up with him. But that does not mean they will protect him from unwanted attention; their reaction depends on who the player characters are. If they appear to be Ambrian nobles, representatives of the worldly authorities or members of the Sun Church, the response is mostly positive (advantage on Persuasion checks), while Reformists and barbarians are met with hostility (disadvantage on Persuasion checks). Other groups are treated with indifference (no modifier for Persuasion checks).

Player characters who ask around for Yndlas/a goblin supposedly living in the area must make a **DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check**. A success gives them the exact location of his hideout. Otherwise the player characters can sit and wait at the *Sunlight* tavern, with a good view of the square in front of the Tower of Leandro. Roll 1d6 for every hour of waiting during daytime (until 9 p.m.) – a result of 1 means that Yndlas shows up on some errand (such as fetching water from the well in the square). The player characters can either catch him or follow him to his hideout.

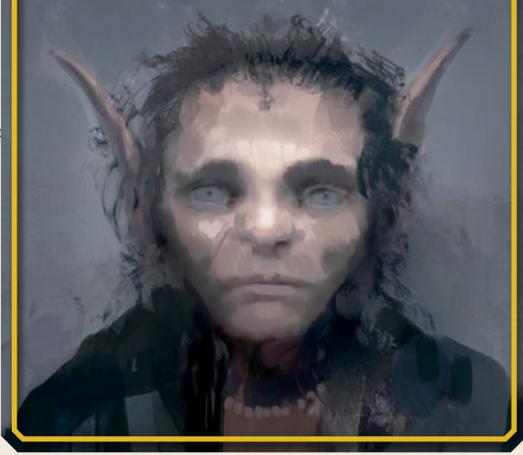
If half or more of the player characters are individuals to whom the people of Peat Hill are hostile (see above), the Gamemaster rolls 1d4 for every half hour they spend in the area – 1 means that a dozen angry locals come to drive them away. They are pushy and aggressive. If the player characters refuse to leave, blows may be exchanged to settle the matter. Use the stats of **farmhand** (see the *Bestiary*, page 197), but unarmed and with the addition of Cheap Shots (see page 215 of the *Bestiary*). Should the player characters draw weapons, the locals will retreat and call the City Watch whose forces turn up 15 minutes later. How the situation develops from there is for the Gamemaster to decide.

MEETING YNDLAS

Timescale: 1 hour

Yndlas lives in a small annex on the roof around the back of a three-story residential building whose facade is facing the square by the Tower of Leandro. It can be reached by climbing two sets of stairs outside an adjoining building. The characters can step over the banister onto a sloping roof, then carefully cross a short plank bridge stretching obliquely upward over the alley, 30 feet below the daring character, before finally reaching the eaves of the house where Yndlas has his hideout. A ladder lying on the roof tiles will take them to his little shack, built against a broad chimney that rises on this side of the ridge.

Yndlas has never really fit in with his tribe or gotten along with other goblins. When the Todrulukku settled down



outside Kurun he saw an opportunity to find himself a new community, although, as the other members see it, he was banished from the tribe. In Kurun he has eked out a meager living from various jobs while building his little hideout on Peat Hill (because no other goblins would ever go there). Belraya, who he already knew from his time in Davokar, is one of few people he is fairly close to, even though Yndlas is a familiar face in Barbarian Town.

The goblin is fearful of strangers, especially since Belraya died. He is convinced that she was not simply a victim of some ordinary robbery-homicide, which is why he believes the player characters are out to get him. How Yndlas reacts is decided by the Gamemaster, based on the characters' numbers, appearance and conduct. If encountered in the street, he will try to escape at the first sign of danger. Up at his shack he will feel cornered and be more inclined to talk, but also to attack as a precaution. As a last resort he will take the risk of fleeing across the rooftops. If the characters quickly convince him that they are just looking for Belraya and information about her, Yndlas will calm down and reveal what he knows.

What He has to Say

Inside the little shack lies the foul-smelling body of a woman, covered by a blanket. This is Belraya, says Yndlas. He has not yet dared to move her. It is clear that she died from stab wounds to the torso. A person with the Medicus feature who examines the body and passes a **DC 10 Wisdom (Medicine) check** can also determine the time of death.

- ◆ After dark one night [two days before game start], she visited Yndlas on Peat Hill and asked to stay a few nights. She seemed worried that “something was about to happen” and needed to talk about it.
- ◆ Belraya was looking for some Ambrian lady she had met a few days earlier; Yndlas had already heard about that at the Water Hole two nights prior.
- ◆ She described the Ambrian woman as tall, more so than herself (at least five feet eight inches), young and slender, with a thin face, small nose, and with dark hair and eyes. She was wearing a green dress with a red and blue belt around her waist, which according to Belraya was of unmistakably Zarekian design.
- ◆ Belraya said that she had given the Ambrian woman something valuable but dangerous (which seemed strange to Yndlas; what could it possibly have been? Belraya was poor!), and that she felt compelled to tell her about “the true nature of the item” and why she had

been forced to lie about it. Belraya had to track down the woman before the item was activated.

- ◆ Apparently, she had picked up a trail, but the Ambrian woman had “dangerous friends” which caused Belraya to back down. Or were they enemies? It did not sound like Belraya was honest when she called them friends.
- ◆ The next morning [one day before game start] Belraya went out and said she would return in the evening. Yndlas was working that day, carrying bricks for the repair effort at the West Gate.
- ◆ When he came home in the afternoon, Belraya was lying in the same spot as she is right now. Horrified, Yndlas tried to help his friend and managed to wake her up. She pushed a note of important information into his hand and made him promise to find the woman. She lost consciousness shortly thereafter, and a few hours later she was dead.

Yndlas is happy to hand over Belraya’s note (which he is barely able to read) to the player characters. He has been agonizing over it and at one point considered burning it. He is relieved that someone else would assume the burden of fulfilling the promise Belraya extracted from him. The text is available as a handout on page 92, and reads as follows:

The woman

*Has not seen many winters, believed everything I told her
At least five inches taller than me
Dark-haired and slender, dark eyes, rueful look
Expensive dress, Ambrian style
Belt of red and blue, Zarekian leno weave – no doubt about it
Talked like the people here, but seemed to understand
little of our tongue
Visits Taohar’s
The House of Rams – does she live there?*

The man

*Tall, like her
Young, but older than her
Expensive clothes, Ambrian style
He knew, I could see it in his eyes, but was putting on
an act for her
Talked differently
QS and Black LN – probably lives there*

The necklace

*Gold chain and charm, marked with ancient symbol
The runes on the back read “Agan-Re”
It terrifies me. Bottomless, indomitable darkness. Death.
It brings death.
The ritual I was ordered to teach her awakens a primal
power, that much I know. And it has nothing to do with
memories or love, as I made her believe
Who will she give it to? “Before the union is consummated,”
she said. What did she mean?*

Time is Running Out

During the second act the player characters get the chance to uncover information about Visara and her background, and follow her trail all the way to Mederen in an attempt to reach the city before the wedding on Sanctum Agani.

In Belraya's Tracks

AT THIS POINT in the adventure, the player characters are likely starting to understand that they are onto something more than just a murdered artifact expert, possibly something alarming that no one else knows about. While they could just report back to the Maretkos (see *Asking for Help or Doing Nothing* on page 78), there are a number of clues which many gaming groups will probably want to follow up on.

THE HOUSE OF RAMS

Timescale: 1 hour

This building is mentioned in Belraya's note as possibly being Visara's home, which used to be the case. The House of Rams is located on the east side on the outskirts of the Hill of Ynedar, near the castle. It is a beautiful, if a bit small, three-story building of stone. Its name is derived from the sculpted rams on the facade on the corner of the second floor - shipped many years ago from House Mederen's estate in Alberetor. The house is the Mederen family's residence in Kurun, which they decided to purchase despite the city belonging to the duchy of Narugor while their own lord is Duke Alesaro in faraway Sevona. It is used by Baroness Edindra during her occasional visits, and more frequently by her son Aldamei while planning or recovering from his expeditions in Davokar. For the past couple of months, it has been Visara's home as well, as Aldamei's guest.

Belraya managed to connect Visara to the house when she heard her mention it in conversation with Firodon, though Belraya did not understand what it meant until later: "Sure, but I need to pass the Rams on the way back." Finding the house was not a problem, as many people in Kurun know it by that name, and player characters asking around among the city's inhabitants will soon be pointed in the right direction. A person who asks for information and passes a **DC 15**

Charisma (Persuasion) check will learn that the building is House Mederen's residence.

Player characters who decide to stake out the house will learn nothing of value. At most they may see a messenger come and go. Knocking on the door causes Madam Idona to appear in the doorway - a meddling housekeeper who sees it as her duty to protect the noble family's house from unwanted guests. If the characters describe Visara or ask for her by name, she will respond differently depending on who they are and how they behave.

- ◆ If they give a brusque or rude impression - especially if they are commoners, barbarians, or non-humans - Idona curtly replies that she certainly does not gossip about the household and its guests. They will have to take it up with her master, Aldamei Mederen. Alas, the master is unavailable at the moment, and she does not know when he will be back. (He is out hunting in the western woods.)
- ◆ To well-mannered player characters, especially members of the Ambrian aristocracy (the Privileged trait), Idona can reveal that the gracious young woman whom they seek is named Visara, that she is somehow related to the Mederen family, and that she has stayed here a while as the master's guest, but is not available at this time. (Idona does not know anything except that Visara has left the household and when she departed.) If the player character talking to her passes a **DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) check**, Idona says that Visara's mother Perala has been here since yesterday. Should they ask to see her, the housekeeper will relay their request which Perala then accepts.

If the characters get on the wrong side of Idona and are not allowed to enter the House of Rams, Perala will soon approach them on the street after realizing that they are looking for her daughter.



Conversation with Perala

Whether the conversation takes place at the House of Rams or somewhere else, Perala will anxiously ask why the characters want to see Visara. If they just let her talk, she soon expresses her concern. Let the players' questions and reflections guide the conversation. Perala does not know what to believe, and is relieved to be talking to someone interested. What she has to say is summarized below:

- ◆ Perala basically knows the whole background up to the point when Visara leaves Mederen, and is able to recount it, although the most recent twists and turns of the love triangle are unclear to her.
- ◆ When Visara arrived at the residence three months ago she was like a different woman. She had always seemed so happy in Galatro's household, but was now angry and depressed. Piece by piece, Perala figured out that the unfortunate love story was the cause of it all.
- ◆ Visara left for Kurun quite suddenly with Aldamei, but Perala was still pleased with the change, even though she has not heard from her daughter since, except for an ambiguous letter.
- ◆ A few weeks ago, Perala found a bunch of papers hidden away in Visara's room – scattered notes, unfinished poems, and unsent letters to Gedeia and Laranod. They were very dark, filled with anger and bitterness interspersed with frantic expressions of love. Perala was shocked. She did not know what to do – go talk to Visara about it, or hope that her stay in Kurun had straightened her out? Somewhat rashly, Perala decided on the latter and burned all the papers.
- ◆ Shortly thereafter she was informed about the upcoming wedding between Gedeia and Laranod. (Perala knows the ceremony will take place on Sanctum Agani, but does not think this detail is significant enough to bring up.) Worried about how the news would affect her daughter, Perala changed her mind and went to Kurun to see her. Perhaps she could somehow divert Visara's attention?
- ◆ Perala does not know where her daughter has gone, but expected to find her at the House of Rams. She is unfamiliar with Kurun and has yet to find anyone acquainted with Visara, even though her servants informed her that Visara had plenty of social contacts. Right now, Perala is mainly concerned about her daughter's emotional

well-being. She still hopes that Visara's absence is due to some secret pleasure trip or romantic getaway, but worries that she might have done something to harm herself.

- ◆ Perala cannot imagine that Visara would ever hurt Gedeia, Laranod or anyone else in Mederen. In her view, some kind of spectacular suicide would be more likely.

Depending on how invested the gaming group has become in Visara's fate, the Gamemaster may now use Perala as an incentive and/or quest giver. She is at a loss as to how to proceed and could ask the player characters to track down her daughter.

She wants her child safe and secure, and stopped from doing anything stupid. If necessary, she can offer the characters a reward of 10 thaler plus a smooth silver ring (worth 8 shillings), which should demonstrate that, despite her status, Perala is not particularly wealthy.

A VISIT TO THE TEA ROOM

Timescale: 1 hour, or decided by the Gamemaster

By describing Visara, Belraya concluded that the woman she was looking for was probably a regular at *Taohar's Tea Room*. She herself was not allowed inside the elegant establishment, and her stakeout of the building proved unsuccessful (as Visara had already left Kurun by then).

With the help of Belraya's notes the player characters will have no problem finding the place. The Tea Room is well-known in Kurun, at least by name, and they will hopefully have a better chance of speaking to its customers than Belraya did. Getting past Headwaiter Ridelo requires good manners (the Privileged trait or a successful **DC 17 Charisma (Persuasion) check** and appropriate clothing (an appropriate noble's outfit or burgher's dress clothes, see page 174 in the *Player's Guide*). Groups who fail Ridelo's inspection can still bribe their way in: a successful Persuasion check as above and a two thaler bribe will convince him to let in the least shabby player character, while the others have to wait outside. Should none of this work, the player characters must find some other solution, such as sneaking in, creating a diversion or approaching customers as they arrive or leave.

Once inside, the player characters can talk to Temera the waitress, who confirms that the woman they seek has visited numerous times lately, but has not been seen for a few days. Temera does not know her name. If they sit down, order something to eat or drink, and wait, Temera can soon point out a recently arrived customer who may know the person they are looking for. The customer in question is Moreo Salamos, aged 18, accompanied by a blonde woman of similar age and stature. Moreo is vain and susceptible to flattery, and will react favorably to ingratiating player characters, especially if they offer refreshments. He will then tell them what he knows about Visara, though he prefers to talk about his favorite subject – himself – and will do so whenever the opportunity arises.

- ♦ Oh yes, he knows the woman they are asking about. Her name is Visara Mederen, daughter of Aldamei's cousin or something like that.
- ♦ She came to Kurun a few months ago. Moreo has never seen her here before. She seemed to be living at Aldamei's house.
- ♦ Though somewhat unlettered, she has integrated nicely into the city's social life and attracted many suitors. But it is unclear whether there is any inheritance to speak of. Her most ardent admirer was Firodon Kalalti, also a newcomer, from a distinguished Alberian family. Now they are landless, of course – maybe that is the reason?
- ♦ The last he heard was that Visara left Kurun in a hurry. Something about a wedding on Sanctum Agani – presumably back in Mederen? At least he thinks she referred to the place as “home.”

Moreo knows nothing else about Visara's unrequited love or her life in Mederen. If the characters ask if there is anyone else who might know something, he suggests that they either speak to Aldamei or try to get in touch with Firodon.



FIRODON KALALTI

Timescale: The Gamemaster decides

Firodon (use **cult leader** on page 183 of the *Bestiary*) comes from a middle-class family in Yndaros, but has always strived to secure a place in Ambrian high society. His dream of power and fame was the main reason why he joined the corruption-worshipping cult from which he later escaped. As the City Watch cracked down on the cult, its members scattered in every direction, and Firodon eventually ended up in Kurun with the help of the agents from clan Saar-Kahn.

Once driven by a lust for power, Firodon is now motivated by fear – fear of witch hunters and other people hunting down followers of The Eternal Night; fear of the Saarian saboteurs who are holding his life in their hands; fear that the nobles he so desperately wants to surround himself with

Sanctum Agani

Sanctum Agani is one of the Sun Church's most important holidays, where the cult venerates the Lightbringer Agani (after whom the eighth month in the new calendar was named), the Templar who supposedly slew the dark lord Malak. It is also the day when all members of the Church renew their vows to Prios in ritualistic gatherings in temples and monasteries across the realm. In the adventure, the holiday is simply meant to give the players a temporal reference point for an event that is important to Visara, to create the impression that they are running out of time. Sanctum Agani is not one of the major popular festivals, but all Ambrians know when it occurs, as it is celebrated on the same date every year (which may differ between gaming groups depending on when the adventure takes place).

will see through his lies. He used Visara in the hope that doing so would release him from the claws of Ilonor, even though deep inside he knows he will never be free.

The faux nobleman lives in a two-story building on Queen Street across the street from Asorio's store. While situated in the nicest part of town, it is a relatively simple home, which is the standard of living his Saarian “friends” have provided for him. For this reason, Firodon has avoided visits from the city's upper class, as it would wound his vanity as well as his credibility. Hence, no one in his social circle can say exactly where he lives. Even his neighbors do not know his name. Belraya identified the house by accident when, in her search for Visara, she ran into Firodon, whom she recognized and decided to follow. Unfortunately, Firodon recognized her as well and sent word to Ilonor. The latter decided that he could not risk letting Belraya live, and sent out agents to dispose of her. They found her in West Harbor in the morning [1 day before game start] and left her critically wounded, but as mentioned earlier, she made it to Yndlas' hideout before she died.

The player characters will likely find their way to the house once Asorio points it out to them. If they knock on the door, they are answered by Lirol, a former soldier, sellsword and robber currently serving as Firodon's henchman and bodyguard (use **Queen's Spy** on page 200 of the *Bestiary*). He will not discuss Firodon with them or even confirm that he lives there. If they wish to leave a message, Lirol will accept it with a shrug; if they try to get inside, he will use as much force as necessary to keep them out.

Player characters who somehow get a chance to investigate the house will find most of it empty. The ground floor consists of a bare hall, a kitchen with a root cellar, an empty room, and a smaller room where Lirol sleeps. There is a simply furnished salon on the second floor, along with another empty room and Firodon's bedroom, which is comfortable but not lavish. In a hidden compartment behind one of the wall panels, detectable with a successful **DC 18 Intelligence (Investigation) check**, is a small case where Firodon keeps a few treasures he managed to rescue from the raid in Yndaros: a first-hand description of a dark cult's use of a managaal (for inspiration, see the flavor text in

the *Bestiary*, page 66), a velvet bag of dried krusean berries (5 doses, each causing 1d4 points of prolonged temporary Corruption), and a pouch of 52 thaler.

At this point, the player characters may want to spy on the house and its residents. Firodon spends most of his time away from home, while Lirol rarely goes out at all (unless Firodon is in need of protection). Roll 1d10 for every hour the player characters are monitoring the house.

HOUSE ACTIVITIES

1d10 Notes

- 1 **Between noon and 10 p.m.:** Firodon either enters or leaves the building, to start the day's visits and errands, take a short break, or retire for the evening.
At other hours: nothing happens.
- 2-3 **Between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m.:** Lirol leaves the house on a short errand. He is gone for 1d10 + 10 minutes.
Other hours: nothing happens.
- 4-10 Nothing happens.

If the player characters are watching the house, the one with the lowest Dexterity value must make a **DC 11 Dexterity (Stealth) check** every two hours. Failure means that Lirol has detected them and will inform Firodon as soon as possible, who then (no matter what time it is) sends the bodyguard to notify Ilonor. The Gamemaster decides how this chain of events plays out and how long it takes, depending on the time of day.

If successful, this could provide an opportunity for the characters to follow Lirol to Ilonor's home, although Lirol will be on his guard. For more information on the Saarian agent cell in Kurun, and how they deal with the player characters, see *Ilonor Picks Up the Trail* on page 76. As for Firodon, he will wait for the Saarian saboteurs to deal with the characters, and only if they fail will he himself take action. Firodon might consider an offensive approach if he feels confident that he and Lirol can take out the player characters quietly. Otherwise he will leave Kurun as discreetly as possible and seek refuge somewhere else.

INFORMATION ON AGAN-RE

Timescale: 30 minutes in addition to time spent studying
The players may try to find out more about the artifact mentioned by Belraya, even though they have nothing to go on but the name. The best (and probably only) way forward would then be to study the records in Ordo Magica's archives. Access to the Order's collections costs 1 thaler a day, and the procedure is described as a downtime activity on page 41 of the *Player's Guide*. The research should require at least one day, though other members of the party might visit other locations while academic-focused characters spend their time

in the archives. Finding the journal should require at least one successful **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check**.

Gaming groups who prefer not to do their own research can receive assistance from the librarian, Adept Helea, for a fee of 12 shillings (in addition to the thaler above). She will then ask them to come back six hours later (or the following day if they are visiting the archives in the late afternoon/evening), at which time she can deliver the extract above.

Extract from Master Eulia Vearra's field journal from the excavation of the Cemetery of Eodovar:

Third day in Serliela, year 12

- ◆ **Object:** The structures around the monolith, south of wall segment three
- ◆ **Agenda, team 1 and 2:** Continued clearance of the inner chambers, adept Kinedra in charge
- ◆ **Agenda, team 3:** Patrol, camp duty
- ◆ **Agenda, other order members:** Documenting and cataloging the central rotunda, Master Eulia in charge

Survey of the remaining foundation of the rotunda. Pieces of three chiseled, curved keystones found by the entrance, clear signs that the dome was open to the sky. The north side was likely covered by paintings, traces of ocher also noticeable. The southern half contains a total of 94 identifiable fragments, once artistically cut, most likely from some form of benches judging by the other remnants. Carved symbols or emblems keep recurring in the stonework (reproductions of certain well-preserved specimens are presented in Appendix 9). A hypothetical composition of the symbol based on the material at hand:

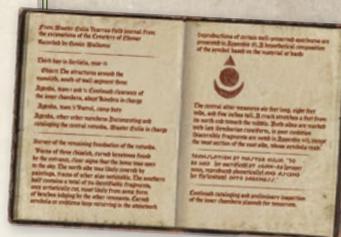
[Symbol]

The central altar measures six feet long, eight feet wide, and five inches tall. A crack stretches 4 feet from its north end toward the middle. Both sides are marked with late Symbarian cuneiform, in poor condition (discernible fragments are noted in Appendix 10), except the west section of the east side, whose symbols read:

[Cuneiform]

Translation by Master Eulia: *"To be wed [or sacrificed] by Agan-Re [proper noun, reproduced phonetically] and ascend [or fly/levitate] into darkness."*

Continued cataloging and preliminary inspection of the inner chambers planned for tomorrow.



You can find the journal excerpt on page 93 in this book.

Ilonor Picks Up the Trail

DEPENDING ON THE player characters' actions, they may sooner or later attract the attention of the Saarian saboteurs. The Gamemaster is free to adjust the probability based on the players' actions thus far, but in the written adventure there are three ways in which this might occur:

- ◆ By asking around for Belraya in Kurun, which causes gossip to reach Ilonor's agents.
- ◆ By asking for Belraya at the Water Hole, where Ilonor has many spies.
- ◆ By prying too deeply into Firodon's life.

When this happens, Ilonor will start by sending one of his agents to locate and identify the player characters. This takes 3 hours, or possibly longer if the Gamemaster thinks the player characters have been particularly discreet. As long as the characters have not visited the House of Rams, Taohar's Tea Room or Firodon's residence, the agents will merely keep them under surveillance. Let the player with the highest Perception skill [passive Perception vs the agent's passive Stealth, if tied do a contested roll] every two hours that the player characters are moving through the city. If successful, the character notices a barbarian in the crowd who seems to be following or watching them. If approached the agent will disappear into the masses. Having been detected once, the agent becomes more cautious and the player characters have disadvantage on any future attempts to detect them.

STRIKE

Timescale: The Gamemaster decides

Once the player characters have visited any of the three places mentioned above, Ilonor starts to worry that his plan for Visara and Agan-Re might be jeopardized, and decides that the characters must be eliminated. But the cell is small, and its mission to gather intelligence is too important to risk unnecessary exposure, so he will mainly be acting through proxies. Ilonor takes two measures. He sends word to Varkon, a bandit leader operating along the road between Galaldo and Elandel, with descriptions of the player characters and orders to keep an eye out for them in the coming days on the way north to Mederen (this is described in greater detail under *Time Is Running Out*, page 72); he also engages the assassin known as Blackslash (page 77) to strike in Kurun. Once he has received his mission, it takes at least 3 hours for Blackslash to make his first move.

Blackslash is an experienced killer who has operated in western Ambria for many years, even though he lacks the finesse of more famous colleagues like the Night Cape and the Violing. His specialty is more spectacular murders whose gory nature is meant to send a message to any allies of the victim. He is engaged by Ilonor through a middleman and does not know his client's identity, which is how he likes it. His mission is primarily to intimidate the player characters,

so after attacking or killing one of them he will await their reaction before striking again. Blackslash uses one of the following tactics to get to them:

- ◆ Player characters who move through the city alone and do not strike him as warriors can be attacked: in a secluded backyard, in a dark alley, or with a stab from a poisoned dagger in the middle of a crowd. He will finish the job if the situation allows him to, otherwise he withdraws.
- ◆ Player characters who move through the city alone and seem to be made of tougher stuff may be lured into an ambush. Blackslash calls out from an alley, claiming to have information about the person they are looking for (he does not actually know anything, except that the characters must be discouraged from finding someone they are trying to find), and then backs into the alley. In the entrance to the alley he has placed a weak mechanical trap (a snare, a **DC 10 Dexterity saving throw** or 6 (1d12) bludgeoning damage) coated with a moderate poison (**DC 15 Constitution saving throw** or 3 (1d6) poison damage and poisoned until the end of the victim's next turn). It can be detected with a successful **DC 18 Wisdom (Perception) check** or by a character with a passive Perception of 18 or higher. A person caught by the trap not only risks poisoning, but also gets stuck in the mechanism. Breaking free requires an action and a successful **DC 16 Strength (Athletics) check**. Once the trap has been activated, Blackslash moves into melee combat and tries to stand his ground.
- ◆ If the player characters consistently stick together, Blackslash will set up an ambush by hiring members of the city's underworld (twice as many as the player characters, with stats as **thug** on page 187 in the *Bestiary*, led by a **robber chief**, same page). They surround and attack the characters as they are passing through some empty part of town. The goons' job is to keep them busy while Blackslash fires poisoned bolts from a nearby rooftop. After three turns they will try to run away.

THE KURUN CELL

Clan Saar-Khan has had a cell stationed in Kurun for the last six months or so, consisting of the leader Ilonor and his three subordinates. Their main objectives are to map Ambrian troop movements and installations of military importance (such as King Koriano's Shipyard), fuel grievances among barbarian newcomers (most of whom belong to clans allied to High Chieftain Tharaban), obstruct enemy activities and gather all sorts of intelligence.

The group is aided by a small number of henchmen – mostly barbarians the cell has some kind of leverage over (like Belraya whom they threatened to report to Embersind), but also a few Ambrians they have managed to recruit through threats and bribes. The snaring of Firodon was

Blackslash

Medium human (Ambrian)

Armor Class 17 (woven silk)

Hit Points 95 (10d8 + 50)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	20 (+5)	20 (+5)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)

Skills Acrobatics +8, Deception +5, Perception +6, Sleight of Hand +8, Stealth +11

Senses passive Perception 16

Languages Ambrian, barbarian

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP, proficiency bonus +3)

Manner deliberately cruel

Shadow patinated copper marked with scratches (Corruption: 3/8)

Equipment 1d10 + 40 thaler, 1d6 + 4 doses Strong poison, 1d4 each of Spore Bombs, Smoke Bombs and Thunderballs, 15 bolts, 3 rubies (worth 15 thaler each)

Backstab (1/turn). Blackslash deals an extra 17 (5d6) damage when he hits a target with a melee weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of Blackslash that isn't incapacitated and Blackslash doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

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

Evasion. If Blackslash is subjected to an effect that allows him to make a Dexterity saving throw to take only half damage, he instead takes no damage if he succeeds on the saving throw, and only half damage if he fails.

ACTIONS

Assassin's Blade. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d6 + 5) piercing damage and optionally 14 (4d6) poison damage and the target must make a DC 20 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned until the end of its next turn. *Concealable:* Blackslash can make a Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check to hide this weapon on his person.

Hand Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d6 + 5) piercing damage and optionally 14 (4d6) poison damage and the target must make a DC 20 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned until the end of its next turn.

REACTIONS

Acrobatic Fighter. Blackslash can make a Dexterity (Acrobatics) check with the attack roll as the DC to take half damage from an attack on a success.

inherited from another cell, but the plan to put Agan-Re in the hands of Visara is Ilonor's own, which he hopes will have a significant impact on Clan Zarek's attitude toward the alliance with Ambria. Given their weak position, the cell prefers to outsource their activities, unless the potential gains are very great or the threat is imminent.

Ilonor lives in a nondescript building on the northwest side of Owl's Crest. This is where Firodon sends Lirol if the player characters decide to follow him. One of his agents lives in the same area, while the other two reside in Barbarian Town.

Ilonor and his agents

Medium human (Barbarian)

Armor Class 17 (scale, Man-at-Arms)

Hit Points 45 (6d8 + 18)

Speed 30 ft.

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

Saving Throws Strength +6, Constitution +5

Skills Athletics +6, Perception +4, Survival +4

Senses passive Perception 14

Languages Ambrian, Barbarian

Challenge 3 (700 XP, proficiency bonus +2)

Manner challenging confidence

Shadow brown like a marsh in autumn (Corruption: 1/5)

Equipment 3 throwing daggers, 2d6 thaler, 3d6 shillings, one small rough ruby (worth 15 thaler)

Axe Artist. If Ilonor is successful with his first axe attack, he can use his reaction to have advantage on his second axe attack.

Man-at-Arms. Ilonor's armor class is improved by +1. He can don or doff armor in half the regular required time.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Ilonor makes two attacks with his double-axe or throwing daggers.

Double-axe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (1d12 + 4) slashing damage.

Throwing daggers. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 20/60, one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d4 + 4) piercing damage

REACTIONS

Two-handed Force. If Ilonor misses a melee attack, he can use his reaction to reroll the attack.

With Knowledge Comes Responsibility

BY THE MIDDLE of Act 2, the players will hopefully understand that their characters are on to some kind of conspiracy, a plan involving dark powers, and that someone does not want them to keep digging. They should also be aware that Visara is on her way to Mederen with a certain item, and that it might play a role in a wedding scheduled for Sanctum Agani, which will soon take place.

Here the player characters must decide whether or not to interfere with this development. Gaming groups who choose to take action may continue their adventure in Act 3; the others will now be offered some suggestions on possible outcomes.

ASKING FOR HELP OR DOING NOTHING

Timescale: The Gamemaster decides

Some gaming groups may not be interested in interfering with Visara's actions, and prefer to hand over the information to other parties, or seek help for other reasons. Listed below are some actions the player characters might take and their possible outcomes.

- ◆ **Contacting the Maretko family:** If the Maretkos are the player characters' employers, it would seem natural to turn to them for help. The characters should then meet with Bardolin at the family's townhouse. He listens carefully to what they have to say and, if they reveal what they have learned about Belraya's fate, thanks them for their service. Any debts to the family have now been paid, and any financial reward promised to the characters is paid in full. Bardolin is pleased to hear that Belraya is dead, likely murdered by some barbarian group whose toes she stepped on. If the player characters start to discuss Visara's departure and the potentially dangerous artifact she might be carrying, Bardolin will callously respond that none of that is his family's concern and that they have no intention of meddling any further. He then has someone show the characters out.
- ◆ **Turning to an allied faction:** Regardless of whether they commissioned the characters' investigation, most factions in the game world should want the characters to

keep probing Visara's activities. Faced with the urgency of the situation, the faction's representatives will urge them to hurry after Visara to Mederen. For most of these groups, sending more competent agents would be too expensive anyway. At most, the player characters can receive a financial contribution of 15 thaler if they seem to need it. The only exception is the Queen's people who, if the player characters need it and it suits their contact, can send someone from the Royal Sekretorium to help them (stats as **Queen's Spy**, page 200 in the *Ruins of Symbaroum Bestiary*).

- ◆ **Turning to the City Watch:** Attempts to alert the City Watch will have no effect on the outcome of the adventure (even though they are very interested in information regarding barbarian cells in the city). Silver-tongued player characters with the proper background (the Privileged feature and a successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check**) may be allowed to make an appointment with the captain, but not in time for it to affect the outcome in any way. It should be clear to the players that this approach is a waste of time.
- ◆ **Turning to the Duke:** Only player characters with the right background (as above; if they are working with Perala she can speak on their behalf) have the slightest chance of being granted an audience with the Duke, which then takes place several days later at the earliest. This course of action is only open to player characters who are close allies of the Queen's people and who use a suitable contact to reach out to the Duke's right-hand woman. In that case, the outcome is the same as for the second entry in this list: they are approached by an agent of the Sekretorium and asked to come with them on an urgent trip to Mederen.

Depending on the players' choices, this could be the end of the adventure. In that case, any other agents that informed factions might send will be too late and the player characters will later hear about the tragedy that took place in Mederen – for more information, see *Aftermath* at the end of Act 3: *The Cost of Jealousy*.

Onward to Mederen!

HOW LONG THE player characters have taken so far in Act 1 and 2 will now greatly impact their options. There are two main routes to choose from: the high road leading northwest across the plains, or the waterway to Haraag before continuing west to Mederen. These routes and their respective challenges are described below.

Player characters with the proper background will presumably be aware of the different routes; if not, they only need to ask around Kurun a bit (which takes 30 minutes) to learn the broad strokes.

THE HIGH ROAD

The shortest route to Mederen is the high road leading to distant Sevona in the west. It passes through the smaller towns of Galaldo and Elandel as well as a number of villages. The various legs of the journey are described below. Use the expanded rules for *Forced Ride* in the Appendix to determine how long it takes to cover each distance.

During the journey the player character must take a *Long Rest* each day or suffer exhaustion, supplemented with a couple of short breaks for another 2 hours during the day.

Sleeping outside means that they must also spend 2 hours preparing and breaking camp. Thus, the maximum travel time per day is 12–14 hours, although pushing riders and horses that hard can be hazardous. The season, the length of days, and the Gamemaster’s judgment determine how many hours per day the player characters can actually spend traveling.

Transport

To have a chance of reaching Mederen in time, the player characters must ride at high speed and probably change horses along the way. If they do not have horses, they must start by purchasing some in Kurun. Luckily, horses are sold most days at the cattle market outside West Gate, even if the selection is not always ideal. The player characters can get whatever they need in 1 hour, but must then pay 1.5 times the price listed in the core rules (including saddle, bit and bridle) for a quick deal. If they do not pay extra, these errands will instead take 3 hours.

Fresh horses are for the most part available at roadhouses outside the smaller towns.

- ◆ The player characters must spend half an hour on discussions and practical matters, paying 1d6 + 4 shillings for the trade.
- ◆ If the horse being replaced has suffered an injury on the road, the new one will cost another 2d6 + 3 thaler.
- ◆ Switching horses is also possible in the villages along the road, but the conditions are more irregular.
- ◆ A village only has 1d6–1 riding horses available. Every other horse will be a draft horse.
- ◆ Finding the horses and their owners takes 1 hour and requires a successful **DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) check**, but all player characters may try simultaneously. Every time they succeed with a difference of 5 or more, the character gets hold of another owner willing to make a trade.

Leg 1: Kurun–Galaldo

Distance: 12 miles

Timescale: Depends on speed

Initially the road runs northeast through the flatlands along the west bank of the river Eblis. Galaldo is a small fortified town on the west side of the river, and the seat of the noble house of the same name. By the north gate lies a

Quick Costs

As a quick rule of thumb, draft horses are 25 thaler, a common horse is 30 thaler and riding horses are between 40 and 50 thaler as a base price. Gear for a draft horse is 7 thaler and for a regular or riding horse the cost is 12 thaler. Draft horses can manage a maximum of 4.5 miles per hour or a steady day at 20 miles per day. Regular horses are 5 miles per hour and sustain 25 miles per day. Riding horses can do about 6.5 miles per hour at speed or 30–35 miles per day.

roadhouse called the *Wayfarer’s Boot* (colloquially known simply as “*The Boot*”), run by Stablemaster Nihea. There the player characters can switch to fresh horses and spend the night if they wish.

Leg 2: Galaldo–Elandel

Distance: 21 miles

Timescale: Depends on speed

From Galaldo the road turns west across the rolling landscape of the barony, where one can sometimes find groves of trees trapped between the fields and farms. Between the two towns lie the villages of Bedstraw (after 6 miles) and Pineburn (after 11 miles). Bedstraw is a small farming village whose only establishment is a smithy. Player characters wishing to spend the night here must settle for a farmer’s barn. Pineburn is a bit larger and boasts a small inn whose proprietor, Origan, offers travelers a bit of food and a tankard of stut. Here the players may sleep on the floor of the common area if they like.

Elandel is somewhat smaller than Galaldo and surrounded by a simple embankment with a moat. But on a hill south of town rises the baron’s great castle, whose keep towers over the high walls – a strong refuge for the people in times of war. Fresh horses and a place to sleep can be found at the roadhouse known as the *Axe & Jug*, located in the town square in central Elandel, where stablemaster Alveo presides.

Varkon’s Vandals

As mentioned under *Ilonor Picks up the Trail* on page 76, the cell leader may have sent word to the **robber chief** Varkon (page 187 of the *Bestiary*) who haunts the road between Galaldo and Elandel. Information from the Saarian agents has benefited him greatly in the past, even though he does not know its true source. And even if he did, it would hardly make any difference. Varkon has been asked to keep an eye out for travelers who look like the characters, and is promised a bonus if he stops them from continuing north, in addition to any valuables the victims might be carrying.

Unless the player characters are actively avoiding the high road, the bandits will spot them from their outlook an hour or two outside Pineburn. They will then lie in wait where the road cuts through some low hills and the bedrock protrudes from the ground in the form of solitary rocks. First, they attack from a distance with their bows, in the hope that the characters will take cover, before rushing into melee against a hopefully decimated enemy. Player characters who push their horses to escape the ambush must survive three turns of enemy fire before they are out of range. The **robbers** (page 186 of the *Bestiary*) are twice as many as the player characters, half of them archers and the other half melee fighters, led by Varkon himself. Their morale is fairly high, but once half of them have fled or fallen, the rest will lose courage and retreat.



Varkon and his vandals fear no one,
and with fair payment they never give up.

If the player characters have encountered another robber chief during previous adventures, such as Mal-Rogan from *The Promised Land*, Nightblade from *Blight Night*, or maybe Harbassas from *The Bell Tolls for Kastor*, it might be a good idea to use that person instead of Varkon.

In case the characters would escape or avoid his ambush, Varkon has sent out a group of brawlers (**thugs**, page 187 of the *Bestiary*) – as many as the player characters – to prepare another surprise for them in Elandel (which means this incident is not affected by what happens to Varkon during the ambush). The brawlers are watching the *Axe & Jug* and will recognize the player characters if they stop by. The bandits will then approach them with the intention of starting a fight, either in the taproom in the evening or out in the yard as they are switching horses. Their main task is to cause such a ruckus that the Town Watch will be forced to intervene, though they will not hold back from beating the characters up.

If the fight lasts more than 3 turns, Elandel's guard force will show up and arrest the troublemakers. Player characters who refuse to come with them must fight their way out of Elandel. As long as they have not killed anyone, it is also possible to bribe their way out of the situation by paying 5 shillings per character and having their spokesperson pass a **DC 15 Charisma (Perception) check**. If they do neither, the characters will have to spend 6 hours in custody (a root

cellar) before the captain sees fit to let them go. Alternatively, if they were arrested in the evening, they are released at 9 o'clock the following morning. If any of the characters are suspected of murder, they will instead be incarcerated for 48 hours, after which the guards will conclude that the deceased was the one who started the fight, and a wanted outlaw at that, and the player characters are released.

Leg 3: Elandel–Mederen

Distance: 40 miles

Timescale: Depends on speed

From Elandel the road continues north through hilly farmland, which slowly rise into harsher and less populous moors and ranges, before the terrain levels out into desolate plains in the northern parts of the barony. When the player characters cross the border into Mederen's lush regions, they will once again be passing fields and villages. Only a mile or so beyond the city of Mederen looms the edge of Davokar.

Outside Elandel the travelers will first (after 4 miles) pass a small settlement called Birch, barely even a hamlet (only 1d6–3 horses available if the characters want to switch), followed by Jorma (after 8.5 miles), located on a hill at the edge of the moor. In Jorma the characters can make a stop at the inn of *The Shepherd's Crook*, where meals are served



by the barbarian innkeeper Unna. She also has a few rooms available for rent, as Jorma sees a fair share of traveling merchants due to its large production of wool.

From there on, the characters will not pass any villages until they reach the barony of Mederen: first Glava (after 30 miles), which is Visara's hometown, though the characters will probably never realize it. Glava boasts a staging post and a smithy, where riders can switch to fresh horses and have their wagons repaired. The staging post, run by the aged Kalivar and his daughter Ilena, serves as a roadhouse but has only 1d10-1 horses in its stable (half riding horses and half regular horses, page 197 of the *Bestiary*). Between Glava and Mederen lies the village of Rud (after 36 miles), a fairly large settlement which, because of its proximity to the city, has no establishments for passing travelers.

News on the Road

Visara did not leave much of an impression when she passed through a week or so earlier, but if the characters ask about her and offer a description during one of their stops, the Gamemaster can roll 1d6. If the result is a 6, the person they are talking to recalls such a woman passing through there not too long ago.

If the characters have reached the village of Glava or Rud in Mederen, it is possible that questions about a wedding

and/or an event taking place on Sanctum Agani will also yield interesting information. No one will link this to Visara; however, news has spread that the mayor's daughter is to marry the son of a barbarian chieftain, and that the ceremony is scheduled for Sanctum Agani.

THE WATERWAY

Traveling on the river Eblis to Haraag, on the edge of Davokar, and then west to Mederen, is a somewhat longer journey than the one on the high road, but not necessarily slower. It is more comfortable and avoids at least some of the dangers that an hours-long forced ride entails. Furthermore, Kurun is the hub of much of Narugor's and New Berendoria's trade on the river Eblis, both upstream to Agrella and downstream to the settlements around Lake Volgoma, all the way to Sevona - in recent years even to the Arch Bridge and Karvosti. Hence, if the player characters should lack a boat of their own, there are plenty of ships that can take them to Haraag. Vessels heading north can be found every three hours between 6 a.m. and noon (later departures would mean too many hours of nighttime sailing, which is normally avoided on the river). The first option is a barge named The Almara.

The Almara, Sailing Barge

In their initial inquiries, the player characters can learn that the *Almara* will soon set sail downstream. They are told to seek out Skipper Lorimando, and by speaking to him they can easily catch a ride to Haraag. He charges 4 shillings per person and 8 shillings per horse - however, humans and animals alike will have to stay on deck for the duration of the journey, regardless of weather. The only thing that might be a problem is if the player characters are known sympathizers of Queen Korinthia. In that case Lorimando, whose family has always supported House Argona, turns sour and suddenly remembers that he does not have room for them after all. The player characters must then take the high road or wait 3 hours until they can board the *Drudge*, a barge commanded by Skipper Oremo. Otherwise the conditions are the same.

The *Almara*, named after the former Alberian queen from House Argona, is a barge both long and wide, with two masts for square sails, intended for calmer waters but able to handle a bit rougher streams as well. Lorimandro's destination is Jakaar at the mouth of the Eanor river, where he will fetch timber for masts, harvested from the tall pines of Davokar. Other groups than the player characters are also traveling with the *Almara*: a band of mercenaries on their way to offer their services to the chieftains in Tharaban's alliance, two liturges returning to Haraag after a visit to Kurun's sun temple, and a merchant from Salamos who, along with their helpers, is heading to Haraag on business.

Leg 1: Kurun-Galaldo-Haraag**Distance:** 42 miles**Timescale:** 9 hours

In Kurun, the Eblis flows wide and calm, slowly winding its way north toward Lake Volgoma. Bad weather can make the passengers' experience less pleasant, but will not have any significant impact on the travel time. Traffic on the river is heavy with cargo barges as well as smaller rowing and sailing boats of Ambrian design. Occasionally barbarian ships, with their long oars, can also be seen.

The player characters can just sit back on deck and enjoy the view of the Ambrian landscape as it flows by: small groves, fields, hamlets and fishing villages. 2 hours into the journey the *Almara* makes a short stop at a pontoon jetty outside Galaldo to unload three large crates onto a waiting wagon, before continuing downstream. The closer they get to Haraag the less populous the landscape becomes, and toward the end of the journey they can see Davokar form a dark line on the horizon. Finally, the *Almara* docks in the small port of Haraag just outside the eastern gate, where it will be anchored for the night. The crew starts tending the ship while the other passengers get off.

In the southern part of Haraag is the *Windsteed Inn*. There the characters can spend the night and switch to fresh mounts or buy horses if they so wish. The people of Haraag are known for their horse-breeding, and *Windsteed* is a hub for many buyers. A purchase (regardless of the number of animals) takes 1 hour and is made at 0.9 times the price listed in the rules.

An Assassin on their Heels

If the player characters acted against the Saarian saboteurs in Kurun, one of Ilonor's hired assassins may be following them and will turn up in the guise of a traveler on board the *Almara/Drudge*. Blackslash has likely already been killed or exposed himself in such a way that the characters will recognize him. In that case he is replaced by a colleague known as the Wraith Owl. She is short and blonde, wearing a town girl's bonnet and an inconspicuous dress. Statwise, she is identical to Blackslash, without the hand crossbow. Instead she has three throwing knives (+8 to hit, 1d4 + 5 piercing damage).

During the journey on the river, the Wraith Owl will approach the player characters and play up the chatty nervousness of a keen but inexperienced traveler. Her cover is a visit to Kurun to meet her future husband, a dull man proposed by her parents. She may also flirt with a player character who appears to be interested. The purpose of all this is to make the characters relax and reveal something about their plans. Unless something unexpected happens, the Wraith Owl will wait until they reach Haraag before making her move.

As they disembark, the assassin asks if she may offer something to drink as a thank you for keeping her company. If the characters accept, she will lead them into a side room at the *Rays of Prios*, a tavern just inside the town walls, and go to order some drinks. She returns with a glass each of Vearra's Red on a tray. Each cup of wine is poisoned, two of them with a weak poison and the rest with a moderate one. The Wraith Owl will try to grab a cup laced with weak poison, to which she has developed a resilience (the Poison Resilient boon). Player characters who drink from the wine and have the Alchemy or Poisoner feature can make a **DC 18 Wisdom (Perception) check** to detect the poison, in which case they have advantage on any required saving throws. The Wraith Owl waits to see how things play out – if the player characters seem badly affected, she will stay to finish the job, otherwise she will flee and make no further attempts to kill them. If the characters refuse to drink, she will make up some excuse to get herself out of the situation. The assassin will flee if she is attacked.

Should the player characters not accept the Wraith Owl's invitation, she may decide to attack one of them with a poisoned dagger, but only if she can lure the victim away from the others or create a similar opportunity. If the right moment never comes, the Wraith Owl will not make any further attempts.

Leg 2: Haraag-Mederen**Distance:** 43 miles**Timescale:** Depends on speed

The plainlands, with their moors, ranges and pastures, stretch all the way from Haraag to Mederen, though the barony's population is concentrated around the two main cities. From more elevated positions, the characters can see Davokar rise like a wall in the north, but only once they approach Mederen does the proximity to the forest become apparent.

After leaving Haraag the player characters pass the villages of Hillfield (after 5 miles) and Alderby (after 10.5 miles). The latter has a small guesthouse where travelers can spend the night and cook their own food for the price of 2 ortegs. Once in the barony of Mederen they reach Oswood village (after 32 miles) before finally passing Stillthorpe (after 38 miles). Oswood houses the *Inn of the Queen's Banner*, a local meeting point where travel-worn player characters can find both food and shelter.

News on the Road

Visara traveled to Mederen on the high road through Elandel, which means that characters who chose this route have nothing to gain from asking questions about her. However, gossip about Gedea and Laranod's wedding has spread to Oswood and Stillthorpe, and if asked about it the villagers can provide general details regarding the event, including that it will take place on Sanctum Agani.

The Cost of Jealousy

In this final act the player characters get the chance to prevent the catastrophe which Visara threatens to unleash, or at least deal with the consequences of her actions. Everything will depend on how quick they have been during the previous acts of the adventure.

In Mederen

Timescale: 30 minutes

Mederen is a typical Ambrian border town, not unlike Thistle Hold, only much smaller. It is surrounded by a wooden wall reinforced with stone foundations, with a gate to the north and another to the south. The town center is the Great Square, where one finds the town hall and the mayor's residence, as well as a sun temple and the homes of important merchants. Otherwise the town consists of two or three-story buildings of typical Ambrian architecture.

Mederen is governed by a council of prominent individuals that appoints its own mayor (who for the last decade has been Galatro), who must then be approved by the ruling family. But Baroness Edindra has little interest in the town. Her family's residence is a castle a few hours ride west along the highroad to Sevona.

Other than locally, the town is of little commercial importance. Sure, there is plenty of game and timber in nearby Davokar, but for logistical reasons, most of that traffic takes place on the river Eblis. The only area in which Mederen has gained something of a reputation is as a base for monster hunting in the forest, mainly because of Aldamei's interest in the matter.



Visara is a well-known face in Mederen, and the wedding has been the talk of the town for several weeks. Player characters asking around for or describing her, or seeking information about the wedding, will get the information they need in half an hour – both regarding Visara and how/where the wedding will be conducted.

WHAT IS THE TIME?

How quickly the player characters made it to Mederen will have a decisive impact on the adventure's finale. The wedding begins on the afternoon of Sanctum Agani, four days after the game's start, and Visara performs the ritual to activate the curse of Agan-Re at 8 p.m. that same day. In other words, the situation will be different depending on what time it is. The possible scenarios are presented below:

Arrival before Noon on the Wedding Day

Player characters who manage to reach Mederen this early will find that the celebrations have not yet started, although the practical preparations are underway at the wedding venue at the edge of Davokar. Characters with questions about Visara are directed to Mayor Galatro's townhouse in the Great Square, where she has been staying since her return.

As long as they do not behave in a hostile or offensive manner (or seem like they cannot be trusted), the player characters will be allowed to see Visara in her room. There they can confront her about Agan-Re. At first, she will deny everything, but if they pressure her with details they learned in Kurun, she will soon break down, hand over the artifact, confess and reveal the full background of her unrequited love. Visara will agree to anything the characters say – even if that means being handed over to cultist-hunting groups like the Whip of Prios – with one exception: she refuses to share the instructions given to her on how to use the artifact. Otherwise she seems almost relieved that she can no longer go through with her plan. If the player characters leave her alone, she will quietly and immediately leave Mederen and go to her mother's home in Glava.

Arrival between Noon and 8 p.m.

In the afternoon the ceremony begins. The guests gather at the wedding venue (see description below), and during these hours the town is unusually quiet, except for the long tables placed in the Great Square where the mayor is offering food and drink to the townsfolk, in honor of his daughter. Player characters asking around are directed to the wedding venue at the edge of the forest, where Visara, the bride and groom, and most of Mederen's prominent inhabitants are gathered, along with distinguished guests from Clan Zarek.

Arrival after 8 p.m.

Shortly after 8 p.m., the first wave of people fleeing the rampage of the blight born Laranod start to arrive in Mederen:

Finale at the Wedding Venue

Timescale: 15 minutes (for the ride there)

Half a mile or so northwest of Mederen, just outside the great forest, the wedding venue has been set up in a large meadow between some low hills. The place was chosen because of what it symbolizes: the border between Ambria and Davokar, and the marital union between the two peoples. The meadow is surrounded by trees, except to the south, which provides good shelter from the wind. Fire pits have been dug, long tables set, and a small stage built for the orchestra. At the west end, under some tall oak trees, a pavilion has been raised for the bridal couple.

Over 200 wedding guests are mingling in the meadow, a third of them barbarians from Clan Zarek and the rest Ambrians – children, young and old, men and women. They are dancing, drinking and eating snacks prepared by the bakers and chefs of Mederen. In the evening the Zarekian firemasters start grilling freshly caught game for dinner, and the blackbrew is flowing. Both groups have ten or so warriors present, but these are as involved in the festivities as the other guests.

RESOLUTION**Arrival before 7 p.m.**

During these hours, Visara is found in the middle of the party. She has put on a cheerful facade so as not to raise suspicion. She has given Agan-Re as a wedding gift to Laranod, who wears it around his neck, which the player characters should have a chance of noticing. The ceremony is conducted in the afternoon by Liturg Odarea and the witch Marlomon, after which the festivities begin.

A conversation with Visara will at this point be more confrontational than described above, especially as she will want to keep up appearances in front of the many witnesses who are likely to be there. The player characters must apply more pressure in order to crack her, in which case she finally

drunk, confused and utterly terrified, some of them with fresh scratches or blight marks. The player characters could encounter some of them at the north gate. They will be rambling, crying, praying to their gods and raving about a monster from the forest attacking the partygoers.

Later Arrivals

If the player characters reach Mederen this late, the tragedy has already struck and all survivors have made it back to town. These people can tell them roughly what happened. Characters who wish to examine the scene of the attack are free to do so, but no one will come with them. Questions about Visara will likely reveal that she was among the dead, along with the bridal couple, Mayor Galatro, Chieftain Ingorod and many others.

breaks down and confesses. As described above, she puts herself at the characters' mercy, but would very much prefer not to have to confess her betrayal before Gedea and Laranod.

If the player characters leave her alone, she will try to slip away and perform the ritual that activates Agan-Re, possibly a bit earlier than planned. Keep in mind that Gedea, Laranod and Galatro will side with Visara in a conflict with the player characters, who might even be escorted away from the event by a group of heavy-handed barbarian warriors. If so, the characters will have to sneak back and spy on Visara to have a chance of stopping her.

Arrival before 8 p.m.

This late in the day, Visara will have slipped away and hidden under the trees on the north side of the meadow, with a view of the wedding venue. There she waits for the right moment to begin the ritual, which is when the bride and groom retire to the pavilion to consummate the marriage in accordance with Zarekian custom. This happens just before 8 o'clock. They later reappear before the people as an officially wedded couple, and the real feast begins. The reason why Visara has chosen this moment is her own sense of drama and the hope that Laranod suddenly becoming a stranger to Gedea at that particular point will increase her loathing for him.

No one will be able to find Visara at this time. The other guests are not particularly worried, but if the player characters can get through to the high-spirited Galatro and explain the situation, a **DC 17 Charisma (Persuasion) check**, he can send five of his servants to help them look for Visara, even though he does not fully believe their story. Make three **DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) checks** for the character with the highest Perception, with advantage due to the others helping them. Success means they have found Visara. She will then cancel the ritual and escape into the forest. The

Gamemaster decides whether or not the player characters have any chance of catching her. Failure on all three checks indicates she has completed the ritual.

Arrival after 8 p.m.

At this point Visara has unleashed the power of Agan-Re and unwittingly caused Laranod to become **blight born**. He immediately rips his beloved Gedea to shreds before indiscriminately attacking the other guests. For maximum dramatic effect, the Gamemaster can let the characters arrive just as the blight birth is complete.

Otherwise the characters will mainly face the devastation, terror and chaos spreading across the wedding venue, with the raging abomination at its center. As it tears through the crowd, the creature's corruption spreads to its victims, and some of those who are not instantly killed turn into abominations themselves (use **blight-born humans** on page 122 of the *Bestiary*). They contribute to the mayhem by attacking the guests and each other. The Gamemaster can let the player characters witness a blight birth as a result of the creature's corrupting attack, as an early warning. There will be 1d4 + 1 blight-born guests moving around the area at any given moment.

The guards are initially too inebriated to fight the monsters, so if anybody is going to intervene, it will have to be the player characters. In that case, they will be assisted by one additional guard per turn from the third turn onward (until five guards have joined them). These have stats as a **village warrior** on page 192 in the *Bestiary*.

Witnessing the result of the artifact's power, Visara's mind will be torn apart and send her fleeing madly into the woods. There she will take her own life by hanging herself from a tree branch. The player characters can find her body there once the dust has settled.

Arrival after 9 p.m.

At this point all surviving guests have fled and only the **Laranod abomination** remains, feasting on the warm flesh of the fallen. The other abominations have been destroyed. Among the victims are Gedea, her father Galatro, Laranod's father Ingorod and many other distinguished individuals from the region. The player characters can either fight the abomination or flee back to Mederen.

Arrival after 10 p.m.

By now the abomination has disappeared into Davokar, and all the player characters see as they arrive is the scene of a gruesome slaughter.

Blight-born Laranod

The young barbarian warrior has turned into a bony monstrosity, almost nine feet tall, with overgrown, fang-toothed jaws, elongated arms and fingers ending in sharp claws.

Blight-born Laranod

Large abomination

Armor Class 20 (natural armor)

Hit Points 157 (15d10 + 75)

Speed 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
27 (+8)	20 (+5)	21 (+5)	2 (-4)	17 (+3)	7 (-2)

Saving Throws Str +13, Dex +10, Con +10, Wis +8

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison, psychic; bludgeoning, piercing and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, poisoned

Skills Perception +13, Stealth +10, Survival +8

Senses passive Perception 23

Languages —

Challenge 16 (15,000 XP, proficiency bonus +5)

Manner aggressive beyond reason

Shadow black like bog sludge at night (thoroughly corrupt)

Equipment Agan-Re around its neck

Acidic Blood. A creature that attacks Laranod with a melee weapon takes 1d8 acid damage and 1d4 temporary Corruption from its blood splattering onto their body.

Regeneration. Laranod regains 9 hit points at the start of its turn unless it took radiant damage since the beginning of its last turn.

Wave of Corruption (Recharge 5–6). Laranod can use its bonus action to cause each creature within 60 feet of it to make a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw or gain 1d4 temporary Corruption.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Laranod makes two attacks with its sharp claws and one attack with its fang-toothed jaws

Fang-toothed Jaws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +13 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 19 (2d10 + 8) slashing damage

Sharp Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +13 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d4 + 8) slashing damage and 1 temporary Corruption.

REACTIONS

Bleak Scream. When struck, Laranod can let loose a scream that darkens every creature's heart. Each non-abomination, non-undead creature within 60 ft. of the beast that can hear must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw, taking psychic damage equal to their total Corruption on a failure or half that amount on a success.

Aftermath

VISARA'S FATE

If the ritual was never performed, Visara's fate will largely be in the hands of the player characters. Other people in Mederen will forgive her, without understanding the magnitude of what she was tricked into doing. And if the disaster does occur, Visara administers her own punishment as described above.

If the characters hand her over to a group like the Whip of Prios, she will be executed for her association with The Eternal Night. The execution will take place in public – once the exhausted Visara has confessed her crimes before the crowd, she is burned at the stake.

Should the player characters decide to let her go, Visara will retreat to her mother's household in Glava and stay there a while. She realizes that her friendship with Gedea and Laranod can never be mended, and that she has lost Gedea forever. What happens next is for the Gamemaster to decide, based on the premise that Visara is prone to extreme behavior. She could be overcome with guilt and commit suicide, or go all the way and join a darkness-worshipping cult, possibly through her contact with Firodon. Or perhaps she makes a complete turn in the opposite direction and becomes a fanatical witch hunter, fearful of her own inner weakness.

THE FUTURE OF CLAN ZAREK

If the player characters fail to prevent the blight birth, regardless of whether they manage to slay it later on, the Saarian agents will set their plan in motion. The result of

their scheme is not covered in this adventure, but must be decided by the Gamemaster based on what best suits their own campaign. As a suggestion it will not lead to any seismic changes in the near future; a solid majority of the local chieftains remain loyal to Monovar, though it is possible that some smaller groups turn against him, thinking that it was his policy toward the Ambrians that caused the tragedy at the wedding. There is also an opportunity to engage the players: perhaps a representative of clan Zarek or the Council of Mederen seeks out the player characters and asks them to track down and destroy the abomination?

FURTHER ADVENTURES

Aside from the future role of Visara and the hunt for the abomination, there are two clear adventure seeds to which the gaming group can return if so inclined. First, they can dig deeper into the activities of the Saarian saboteurs in Kurun, and possibly get a chance to expose or eliminate Ilonor's cell. Second, the player characters may be interested in Firodon's background. Perhaps there is a trail leading all the way back to Yndaros and the dark cult he was once a member of?

Other ideas, if the player characters managed to prevent the tragedy at the wedding, could be that Chieftain Ingorod asks them to help combat a beast (for ideas, see the *Bestiary*) which is ravaging the territory of his tribe. Perhaps the noble Aldamei Mederen would be willing to sponsor such an endeavor if the monster is rare enough?



Appendix

New Rules

THE FOLLOWING ARE additional optional rules that can be used to support the adventures.

THE DANGERS OF THE DARKENED LAND

The Corruption eating away at the old country of Alberetor is almost imperceptible in the region around Sarli, manifesting itself in infertile soil, scarce wildlife, and of course the occasional outbreak of undeath. The rumored horrors of the darkened south are noticeably absent.

The following effects apply:

- ◆ On the first day of the month, each character must make a **DC 10 Constitution saving throw**. On a failure, one of the two following consequences apply:
 - ◆ If the character has 1 or more points of temporary Corruption then 1 point of temporary Corruption is converted into 1 point of permanent Corruption. This can never occur more than once a month due to this effect.
 - ◆ If the character does not have any temporary Corruption they instead gain 1 point of temporary Corruption.
 - ◆ Whenever the characters consume food or drink from the local area (i.e. not prepared rations) they must make a **DC 10 Constitution saving throw** per meal. On a failure, they gain 1 point of temporary Corruption. A character that has the Bushcraft feature or who is proficient in Investigation or Perception has advantage on the saving throw.



FORCED RIDE

The speed at which the player characters travel is important to the adventure *Retribution*. Therefore, we introduce these rules to make their journey to Mederen more varied and exciting, replacing the rules for Forced Ride and Death Ride on page 34 in the *Player's Guide*. As always it is for the Gamemaster to decide whether to use this version or the simpler one in the *Player's Guide*.

How far and fast the characters can ride is determined by a number of properties possessed by the horse and the rider.

- ◆ Each type of horse has a speed listing, which we have presented in two formats: a maximum speed that can only be maintained for a few hours at most, and an average speed which represents a steady but safe pace with appropriate rest, water and feed breaks.
- ◆ Each kind of horse has a statblock, including a Constitution modifier or saving throw value (the horses we are referencing are not proficient in Constitution saving throws and so these are the same values in this case).
- ◆ For the first required saving throw of the day, the rider may use their Constitution saving throw instead of the horse's value. All other saving throws are made by the horse until it and its rider are able to rest.

Types of Horses

The table below gives various horse types and their information. *Note:* Battle-trained horses (used by the Pansars and other special military units) and warhorses (used by ordinary cavalry units) are not usually available for civilian purchase.

Riding at Speed

If you wish to ride your horse at speed (the faster rate, given in miles per hour) then the horse must make a **DC 10 Constitution saving throw** after each hour. After three hours, the DC increases by one for each hour you continue to travel at speed.

If the saving throw is failed, the horse has suffered an injury (see the table to the right).

EXAMPLE: *Orlan is concerned about arriving in Mederen in time. He chooses to take chances and push his horse at speed. His horse is an ordinary one, as seen on page 197 of the Bestiary. After the first hour he can make a Constitution*

saving throw using his value of +5 and easily passes. He covers 5 miles in the first hour. He continues for two more hours, each time the horse making Constitution saves using its +2 value, gaining a total of 15 miles. After that, the first three hours are used up and the next saving throw is at DC 11. The horse passes and he gains 5 more miles. The next save is at DC 12, The horse fails and Orlan will need to roll on the minor injury table. Since the saving throw is at the end of each hour, Orlan covered 25 miles in five hours but unless he can get a new horse today, he won't be able to travel any more until tomorrow.

Riding at Pace

When you ride at pace, you travel for the entire day, making the distance given. At the very end of the day, you must make a single **DC 10 Constitution saving throw**. On a success, the horse is fine and will be able to travel tomorrow. On a failure, roll on the injury table.

INJURY TABLE

1d8 Injury Effect

- 1-2 The horse is winded and must recover and can do nothing more than a slow walk (1 mile/hour) for the next hour.
- 3-4 The horse has stretched some of its muscles to the point of pain. It can do nothing but a slow walk (1 mile/hour) for the next 1d4 + 1 hours or until after it takes a rest.
- 5-6 The horse gets a rock in its hoof, a painful wound that needs tending, or something similar. The distance covered during that hour is halved as a result of the stop.
- 7 The horse has a sprained muscle and cannot be ridden for the rest of the day. It can walk, unmounted, at a rate of 1 mile/hour.
- 8 The horse has sustained a major injury and cannot continue. It needs 1d6 + 1 days to recover. If the saving throw was failed with a natural 1, the horse is mortally wounded or has died (from the injury directly or fatigue). The rider takes 1d6 bludgeoning damage if they fell from the horse.

HORSE TYPES

Type	Cost (thaler)	Constitution Saving Throw	Movement Speed	Riding at Speed	Riding at Pace
Draft Horse	25	+1	40	4.5 miles/hour	20 miles/day
Ordinary Horse	30	+2	50	5 miles/hour	25 miles/day
Riding Horse	50	+1	60	6.5 miles/hour	35 miles/day
Battle-trained Horse	300	+2	60	6.5 miles/hour	35 miles/day
Warhorse	200	+1	60	6.5 miles/hour	35 miles/day

Artifacts

ARGONDIN'S BANE

(RARE, +2 SPEAR, RADIANT DAMAGE)

Argondin lived in Sarli at the time of the Alberian unification, and while the realm grew strong and powerful, its border regions remained unsafe. When a band of robbers from the First Realm invaded the landscape, Argondin led one of the militias in an attack against them. But he and his men were surrounded and Argondin was captured. When the intruders threatened to kill him if he did not denounce the Lifegiver in favor of their own dark gods, Argondin calmly refused, confident that the Sun would banish the darkness. Furious, the leader of the barbarians took Argondin's own spear and drove it through his neck. Shortly thereafter the enemy was driven off by Telgon I of Sarli. The legend of Argondin's sacrifice lived on and the spear that claimed his life was brought as a hallowed weapon to the monastery of Maral the Bright, to inspire the Lifegiver's followers.

Argondin's spear is short, roughly two paces long, and made entirely of bronze with a long blade. There are decorative etchings along the shaft and the spearhead is covered in ancient runes. For a user attuned to the weapon, it does radiant damage instead of piercing.

THE STONES OF REDIM

(UNCOMMON, REQUIRES ATTUNEMENT)

Redim's background is lost in myth, but it is said that he lived in Maral's village in the south and that he opposed the future Lightbringer's attempts to find a new home for the people, dismissing Maral's visions as madness and arrogant vanity. Yet he reluctantly went along for the journey north, only because his wife trusted in Maral's vision. Legend has it that Redim was one of the guides who led the people into the arid valley where they almost perished. After everyone had been saved by Maral's sacrifice, Redim repented and followed Maral's path to Sarli more faithfully than anyone. There he became the leader of the congregation in both worldly and spiritual matters, and supposedly delved deep into the mysteries of early theurgy.

In a box of darkly varnished wood is a cylinder of cracked leather, surrounded by four smooth, round stones, all engraved with sun symbols. The cylinder contains a scroll written in spidery letters. The text works as a ritual codex for the *exorcism* spell, but combined with the stones it also constitutes an artifact that allows the person bound to it to perform the ritual unschooled.

Requires: An hour to read the codex

Corruption: 1d6 + 5 temporary Corruption

THE SWORD BLUETONGUE

(RARE, +2 FENCING SWORD, DEEP IMPACT)

The sword Bluetongue, named after the blued steel from which it was forged, has been with the leaders of House

Sarli for over two centuries. Its origin is shrouded in mystery, but the weapon was won by one of the Sarli knights on a battlefield somewhere in the east. It is a mastercrafted fencing sword with the qualities Deep Impact and Finesse.

Paralyze

When dealing damage to an enemy, the person attuned to the sword can activate the weapon's draining powers, which makes the blade vibrate with energy and causes the victim's legs to shake and their muscles to cramp. The target takes 1d4 necrotic damage and must pass a **DC 15 Constitution saving throw**. On a failure, the target can either move or take an action (but not both) on its next turn.

Requires: Bonus action

Corruption: 1d4 temporary Corruption

AGAN-RE (UNIQUE)

The artifact comprises a gold neck chain with a round charm. The front is marked with an abstract symbol, the back with ancient runes. These can be read as "Agan-Re" by a person with the Loremaster feature that passes a **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check**.

An expert can tell that the item is of Symbarian origin. Given its powers, it may have been used for ritualistic blight births, as the Symbarians seemed to worship such creatures. Otherwise the history of the artifact is shrouded in darkness, other than the fact that only the most depraved sorcerers of Symbar could have made such an item.

Corrupt

By performing the ritual that activates the magic of Agan-Re, a mystic can channel Corruption from the surrounding area into the wearer, who then suffers 1d6 points of temporary Corruption per turn until they become blight-born. The recipient can try to resist the effect each turn with a successful Constitution saving throw. The DC is 10 plus the victim's current Corruption total. But the process is painful and confusing, and gives the wearer disadvantage on the saving throw. If the wearer has the presence of mind to remove Agan-Re, or get help in doing so, the effect is canceled.

Requires: a bonus action to speak the activation phrase

Corruption: 1d6 temporary corruption

Note: The instructions given to Visara count as a ritual codex, even though they are not written down. She thinks the artifact will make Laranod forget about Gede and stop loving her, and that activating it on a day when their love is particularly strong (such as their wedding day) will enhance the magic. But these are all lies made up by the Saarian saboteurs and fed to her through Belraya.

The monastery chronicle

Moral the Bright Chronicle

14 Verion, year 360 after the Prophet

Our new baron has been in low spirits since his father's death. He talks more and more about a future elsewhere, about his children deserving a different life. This may be common thinking among the people, but we are surprised that it has affected our rulers. Truly their minds are fickle.

27 Verion, year 360 after the Prophet

Last night we could see fire in the sky. There was a terrible blaze somewhere in the western hills. In this drought a forest fire would be unfortunate. Today we received word that Tarkomal was on fire. Leaving immediately to help the injured. Many people are said to have perished.

5 Konelia, year 360 after the Prophet

Today the Prior returned from Tarkomal with a troubled mind. The baron refuses to let his wife and brother rest in the crypt, burying them instead in Ogdeno's provisional tomb. In our view they are all resting with Prios, but nevertheless, this is a worrying departure from tradition.

26 Konelia, year 360 after the Prophet

The Prior was summoned to Tarkomal for some urgent matter, most likely regarding our chapel there.

2 Leandro, year 360 after the Prophet

The Baron and his family are leaving Sarli for Ambria. Our Prior's request that he stay and care for what remains of his people fell on deaf ears.

16 Leandro, year 360 after the Prophet

They are gone. Ydemo came from the village to report that he saw them leave.

13 Serileia, year 371 after the Prophet

Today Singalea and the novices returned from Tarkomal with what they could salvage. Our Prior was pleased, but still not satisfied. He says that we are running out of time and must finish the task before the snow falls. We owe it to the dead, and there may not be time after the winter.

30 Serileia, year 371 after the Prophet

Our Prior left the monastery with Firego and Singalea. They hope to reach the Sarli crypt and be back in two days. Ralea wanted to go with them, but was told to stay behind.

3 Morangal, year 371 after the Prophet

It has been four days, and our Prior and the others have yet to return. The snow falls outside.

4 Morangal, year 371 after the Prophet

It has been five days, and our Prior and the others have yet to return. The snow falls outside.

5 Morangal, year 371 after the Prophet

Today the expedition returned. Singalea was in good spirits, but our Prior was exhausted and Firego seemed ill. The snow caught them by surprise and they got lost. They reached the lowland a full day's march further east, and had to find their way back through untrodden terrain. Still, they accomplished everything they set out to do and the dead now rest where they ought to.

6 Morangal, year 371 after the Prophet

After an arduous journey Singalea, Firego, and I reached the crypt of House Sarli. The snow fell heavy around us once we reached higher ground. We found the crypt sooner than expected, however, and got to work. I placed Orlano's casket in the main chamber where it belongs, along with abandoned heirlooms that befit such a lord in such a place. Orlano and Letira were laid to rest in the chamber of their own line. The other artifacts shall remain here, so they can survive at least as long as the monastery.

In case some member of House Sarli should want to visit their ancestors' tombs, or the Lifegiver should shine upon us and bring life back to this land, I shall now record the way to the crypt, as there are few of us left who remember it. Follow the River Sidra north until you pass its second tributary, the first from the left. Roughly 200 double paces north from there you will see the hills rise above the forest. Continue straight to the northwest, without straying into the woods, and you will reach a point where the rocks protrude from the ground. From there the path continues northwest, then north toward the crypt. It is run-down and poorly maintained, and has been so for decades, but we left sun-shaped cairns to show the way.

1 Ofeliya, year 371 after the Prophet

Firego died last night. The fever got him. May he forever kneel by the Lifegiver's side.

9 Andonia, year 372 after the Prophet

Today Elando went down to the village. He says he shall not return. Our Prior urged him to stay, but let him go.

16 Elisal, year 373 after the Prophet

Today Kalea reported that everyone in Shoreby has decided to make the journey west. In the evening, Ydemo came and asked all of us to join them. He will stay the night.

17 Elisal, year 373 after the Prophet

Ydemo returned to the village. None of us went with him, though some think we should.

22 Elisal, year 373 after the Prophet

Now Prior Karkoli, Balmeo, and I - Singalea - are the only ones left. The other three left us, even though Karkoli begged them not to. He and Kalea have spoken in private for many hours these past days - in the end they mostly shouted at each other. She walked away even though she was in tears. The others looked mostly relieved. Karkoli says that the Chronicle is my responsibility now that Febria is gone. I shall try to honor that responsibility.

13 Leandro, year 373 after the Prophet

This year the harvests are poorer than ever. If things have not improved by the start of Fuedar's month, our larders will be empty by fall. Now that I think about it, that is precisely what Ydemo said.

29 Leandro, year 373 after the Prophet

We are discussing how to proceed, but are getting nowhere. My suggestions about seeking help in the west are being ignored.

Karkoli says he does not want to leave the monastery under any circumstances, and Balmeo seems indifferent and retreats to the scriptorium unless he is forced to stay. Perhaps I must go alone if we are to make it through the winter, but then, how would they survive back here if I left, if ever so briefly?

Irena's map



Dviriv Jaofar's
 The Soun of Rariv - how she like there!

The woman

Has not seen many winters, believes everything I told her
 At least five inches taller than me
 Dark-haired and slender, dark eyes, rueful look
 Expensive dress, Ambrian style
 Belt of red and blue, Zarebian leno weave - no doubt about it
 Talks like the people here, but seems to understand little of our tongue

The man

Tall, like her
 Young, but older than her
 Expensive clothes, Ambrian style
 He knew, I could see it in his eyes, but was putting on an act for her
 Talks differently

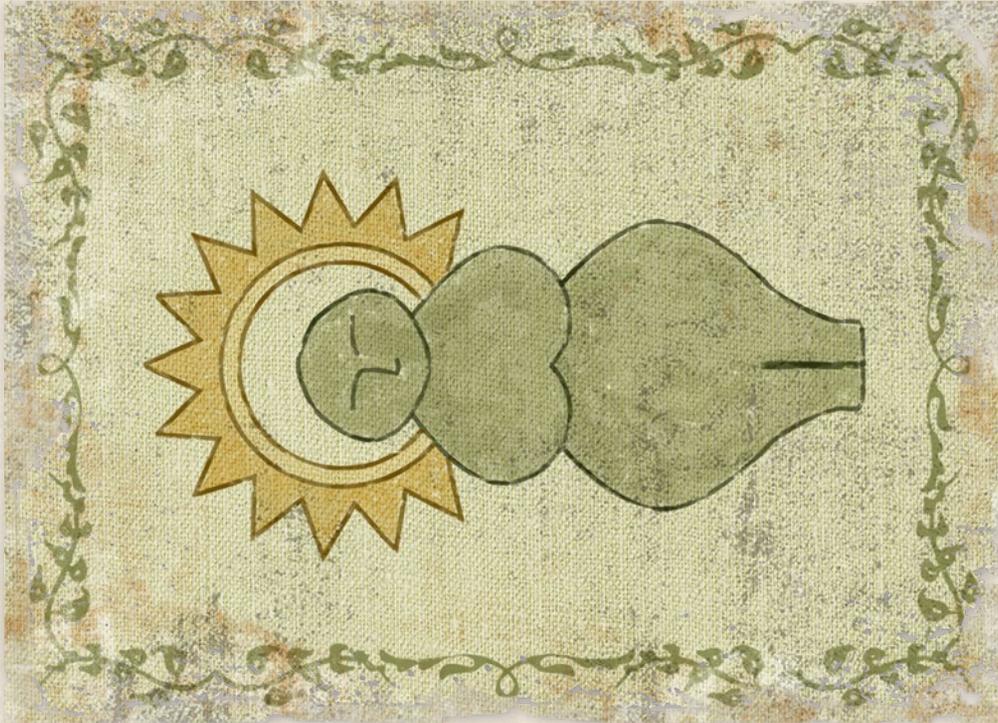
NS and Black LN
 - probably lives there

The necklace

Gold chain and charm, marked with ancient symbol
 The runes on the back read Agan-Re
 It terrified me. Bottomless, insomitable darkness. Death. It brings death.
 The ritual I was ordered to teach her awakens a primal power, that much I know. And it has nothing to do with memories or love, as I made her believe

Who will she give it to? Before the union is consummated, she said. What did she mean?

Cloth with Lyra Symbol



From Master Eulia Vearras field journal from the excavations of the Cemetery of Edovar
Recorded by Novice Walkomo

Third day in Serliela, year 12

Object: The structures around the monolith, south of wall segment three

Agenda, team 1 and 2: Continued clearance of the inner chambers, adept Rhinedra in charge

Agenda, team 3: Patrol, camp duty

Agenda, other order members: Documenting and cataloging the central rotunda, Master Eulia in charge

Survey of the remaining foundation of the rotunda.

Pieces of three chiseled, curved keystones found by the entrance, clear signs that the dome was open to the sky. The north side was likely covered by paintings, traces of ocher also noticeable. The southern half contains a total of 94 identifiable fragments, once artistically cut, most likely from some form of benches judging by the other remnants. Carved symbols or emblems keep recurring in the stonework

(reproductions of certain well-preserved specimens are presented in Appendix 9). A hypothetical composition of the symbol based on the material at hand:



The central altar measures six feet long, eight feet wide, and five inches tall. A crack stretches 4 feet from its north end toward the middle. Both sides are marked with late Symbarian cuneiform, in poor condition (discernible fragments are noted in Appendix 10), except the west section of the east side, whose symbols read:

TRANSLATION BY MASTER EULIA: "TO BE WED [or sacrificed] BY AGAN-RE [proper noun, reproduced phonetically] AND ASCEND [or fly/levitate] INTO DARKNESS."

Continued cataloging and preliminary inspection of the inner chambers planned for tomorrow.



Kurun

0 |-----| 100 m
0 |-----| 100 yards





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WITH THE RUINS OF SYMBAROU M GAME LINE, the acclaimed setting of *Symbarou m* comes to the world's most popular roleplaying game rules! This book presents two medium level adventures to be played using the special rules created as an addition to the *5th Edition OGL ruleset*.



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