

The Howling of Damned Gods



JÄRNRINGEN

Symbaroum

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Introduction

NIGHTTIME DESCENDS LIKE a deep blue veil over the River Veloma and the village of Prios Pass. The snow no longer falls, the wind no longer blows, and a grim calm settles in the shadows of the Titans. Somewhere on the other side of the river is the refugee camp, occupied by Alberians hoping to be welcomed into Queen Korinthia's Promised Land.

Creaking and squeaking, the raft is reeled across the flowing waters, toward the points of fiery light glimmering along the northern shore. The boatman grunts a brusque farewell as he pushes you up on the slushy pier. Now, all that remains is waiting and hoping – waiting in the shadows of the mountains and the towering cliff which raises Baroness Karolia of Meleon's Keep high into the sky; hoping that the incoming caravan has not gotten stuck in the snow. Or worse.

Though you would rather not think about it, you have all heard accounts of what can happen on the journey across the mountains. Predators, bandits, even trolls and elves. Other tales warn of the infectious darkness which many travelers bring along from Alberetor, the diseased south, to the hopeful refugees at Prios Pass.

At the foot of the Titans, near the headwaters of the River Veloma, lies Prios Pass. For almost two decades, the border crossing's restored stone bridge has been the gateway into Ambria. While the flood of refugees fleeing the south has diminished somewhat, the need to control their status grows ever greater as Alberetor darkens, blackens, and dies. Prios cannot protect or heal all his children, and the future looks particularly bleak for those who are branded enemies of the Sun God – in Queen Korinthia's realm, none one has more enemies, or more powerful ones, than the alleged heretic.

The Howling of Damned Gods is an adventure revolving around the Sun Church's attempt to relocate one of Alberetor's most notorious heretics – Elsana, once the Earthmother's high priestess – from her prison in Alberetor to the dungeons beneath the Templewall Cathedral. News of this attempt has

reached a number of other factions: the Sun Knights want the heretic dead, the Sun Church Reformists wish to see her pardoned, and agents from the Realm of the Order want to free the prisoner and bring her to safety.

This initial chapter presents the adventure's background and course of events, and offers tips on how the player characters might be drawn into the story. Then follows three chapters describing the acts of the adventure – a first one that sets everything in motion and gives the characters reason to delve deeper into what has happened; a second that describes investigations which might shed light on the mystery; and a third and final act in which the characters' position on a difficult issue determines who will stand between them and a happy ending.

Lastly, there is an appendix with new rules, after which the book concludes with a number of handouts.

Background

In order to really understand what is taking place at Prios Pass these early winter days, one must look to history. The events are deeply rooted in the barren soil of Alberetor and relate to what became known as the Exaltation (year -5), when the Sun God Prios was proclaimed the One and the Giver of Laws, to the detriment of the pantheon known as the Young Gods.

THE MAKING OF A HERETIC

Prios' exaltation did not go unchallenged. True, most people were indeed willing to obey Queen Korinthia's decree, realizing that the power of the Sun God would be their greatest weapon in the war against darkness. But at the same time, many refused to abandon the faith of their ancestors – either out of devotion to one particular Young God, or because they worshipped the pantheon in its entirety and feared that the unrighteous exaltation of Prios would anger them all.

Within a month, thousands of people had left Alberetor and travelled west, where they eventually established the Realm of the Order. Over the years more would follow, as they could no longer stand having to keep their religious practices secret. But there were some who stayed behind to defend their gods against the new and, as they saw it, distorted version of Prios – once the god of warmth, mercy, and all-embracing love. One of these was Mother Elsana, High Priestess of the Earthmother.

She refused to leave her temple in the capital, Kandoria, and for a time the authorities tolerated her behavior. Soon her open criticism and heretical exhortations became a problem, especially when Korinthia was captured and the need to unite against the darkness grew even stronger. At a public trial in the largest square in the city, Elsana was given a chance to see reason and repent. Instead, she made her loathing for the Lawgiver perfectly clear; she would not even say his name, calling him "*the False God of War*" and "*The Black Sun*."

The crowd roared and called for the heretic to burn, but Abramelin, First Father at the time, did not want to make a martyr of her. Thus, he decided to show mercy: he sentenced her to imprisonment and ordered that, once a year at the summer solstice, she would be given a new chance to renounce her blasphemous delusions. Elsana was put behind bars about a year before the Victory, and has spent her days in the darkness of the dungeon ever since. A player character with the *Loremaster* ability knows

Elsana's name and that she is a heretic; with a successful *Cunning* test, he/she can also recall the aforementioned story.

A SYMBOL OF SIN

Kandoria was long ago devoured by the Gray Death which slowly turns Alberetor into an ashen wasteland, but people still linger in a few places, to prevent others from looting noble homes or destroying holy sites. Now, these too are abandoning their posts, one after the other, due to the lack of clean water and other necessities.

Some months ago, the Curia reluctantly decided it was time to leave Kandoria. The twenty or so heretics still held beneath the temple which before the Exaltation had been dedicated to the Executioner were all sentenced to cleansing by fire – save one. The First Father ordered that Elsana should be taken to Templewall and given yet another chance to repent; with the Templars' departure from the Curia and the Queen's growing efforts to distance herself from the church, the people had to be reminded of what awaits those who turn their backs on Prios' radiance!

The task of bringing the heretic to the First Father's stronghold fell upon a group of four black cloaks, led by Father Mogdas, who had all made the journey across the mountains on several occasions. The Queen was informed of the transport, but was for political reasons unwilling to publicly support or protect it, which meant that the operation had to be kept secret from known threats: the renegade Sun Knights who would love to see the heretic purged by holy fire; the leaders of the Realm of the Order who wish to free their martyr; and traitors within their own ranks who want to get their hands on Elsana for sinister political purposes.

But despite the secrecy, information about the operation leaked to the church's enemies. When the adventure begins, the Templars, the Reformists, and agents of the Order are all present at Prios Pass, but have not yet been detected by the black cloaks who just arrived with their prisoner. The latter are the first to make a move in the fight for the heretical priestess.

THE AGENTS' PLAN

Father Orun of the Executioner's Order leads the two-man effort to free Elsana and bring her to safety. Thanks to a mole within the Twilight Friars' organization, they have managed to obtain detailed information regarding the transportation of Elsana (see the handout on page 39).

Their plan is as simple as it is cruel: to provoke such a dangerous situation at the refugee camp that the guards escorting the prisoner must leave and seek shelter in the nearby monastery, and then stage an ambush by the road along with two fellow agents in the area. This will be accomplished by poisoning the soup which is being served at the camp, thereby turning one or more of the already blight-stricken refugees into raging abominations.

After Elsana has been freed, the three of them will lay low for a few days while the situation settles. Their hiding place is one of the rebel leader Maridja's campsites just north of the border, secured in a negotiation between her and the head of the Order, the Theologist. Maridja, commonly known as the Ice Witch, has really nothing to gain from the agreement, except that it causes problems for the Ambrians.

THE TEMPLARS

The Knights of Dead Prios learned of the prison transport from a spy cell still operating in the old capital of Alberetor. While they lack details such as its destination and whether the Queen has approved it, they know that the prisoner is being transported in an enclosed carriage and that the guards are posing as a master weaver and his apprentices.

Because of their secession from the Curia, the Templars cannot act openly in Ambria, even though many support their cause. Commander Iakobo Vearra has sent three young but bold and loyal knights to Prios Pass, disguised as Alberian

refugees, with orders to slay the prisoner. What happens to them after the mission has been accomplished is of less importance – if they manage to escape with their lives, the pursuit of vengeance will simply continue somewhere else; if they are killed or captured by the Queen's lackeys they will spend an eternity kneeling by the side of Dead Prios.

THE REFORMISTS

The faction promoting change within the Sun Church also obtained information regarding the prisoner transport, as well as its written orders (see the handout on page 27). Father Sarvola and Deseba the Old want Elsana freed, and eventually pardoned; a senior representative of the Earthmother would be invaluable in healing the spiritual wounds of the kingdom.

They notified the Queen, but though she welcomes the idea, she still does not dare to openly oppose the Curia in ecclesiastical matters – the time is not yet ripe. However, the reformists are under the impression that they have Korinthia's implicit permission to act.

Their plan is to identify the transport at Prios Pass and keep an eye on it until it approaches Yndaros. Then they will strike, free Elsana, and bring her to the reformist Count Hastorio Arobel. The mission to locate and tail the prison transport has been assigned to Brother Huberdo. He is their only man at Prios Pass, but if necessary, he may seek shelter (though not receive any public assistance) at the local sun temple.

The Player Characters

AS USUAL, WE hope that this adventure will be playable with any player characters, regardless of their experience, background, opinions, or ambitions. Sure, the theme of the story makes it particularly interesting to use characters with clearly stated views on spiritual matters, and it becomes even more exciting if the gaming group's characters have taken more or less divergent positions in the conflict between the various factions of the Sun Church. But this is certainly not a requirement. Rather, any character who has previously ignored all theological conflicts will, because of how the adventure is designed, most likely be forced to take a stand – something that will enrich and add further depth to his or her personality.

EXPERIENCE & ABILITIES

The Howling of Damned Gods is meant for characters who have amassed roughly 70 to 100 *Experience* points, in addition to the starting level. However,

the opposition may be adjusted to suit characters with more or less *Experience*. Feel free to change the number of enemies present during the encounters and/or the listed abilities for each of the enemies to vary their difficulty.

As for specific abilities, it is (as always) good to have at least one character with the *Loremaster* ability at adept level or higher. Other important assets are the *Medicus*, *Alchemy*, and *Poisoner* abilities, as well as the *Bushcraft* and *Bloodhound* boons, since many challenges involve searching for clues and following tracks. We also recommend the *Contacts* boon, as the right contacts can make it easier to link the characters to the adventure's drama.

INCENTIVES

Before starting the game, you must think carefully about how to make the characters (and players) of your gaming group feel engaged and invested in the adventure. Our main suggestion would be

that they come to Prios Pass to see a close friend or relative (see A happy reunion below), but there are obviously many ways to spark their curiosity and strengthen their resolve. It takes reflection, planning, and adjustments for an adventure, which is designed for a wide variety of players with different play styles, to work well for your particular gaming group.

A HAPPY REUNION

We propose that the player characters have come to Prios Pass to visit a close friend, colleague, or relative, who until now has chosen to remain in Alberetor. We also suggest that this person has sent one (or more) of the player characters a letter, by courier, delivered in a metal cylinder along with a vinegar ampoule meant to render the text illegible if the container is opened incorrectly. Besides the usual pleasantries, the message contains the following points:

- “I have discovered grave misdeeds within [appropriate faction/organization].”
- “I fear for my life; they may come after me at any moment.”
- “Meet me at Prios Pass, and please bring some capable and trusted friends.”
- The date on which the caravan is expected to arrive (no more than a few days after the message is delivered).

This gives the characters a reason to visit the border crossing, and later also to look for the relative's/colleague's journal (which describes some interesting observations). Another advantage of this premise is that the characters do not need to know what the adventure is really about (i.e. the transportation of a convicted heretic) beforehand; instead, they get to discover the backstory through their investigations.

Furthermore, it is likely that the players and their characters will think, at least initially, that what is happening at the refugee camp is somehow linked to the relative's/colleague's discovery. This has two desirable effects – it creates an urge to find out what really happened, and makes the unveiling of the adventure's true plot a kind of dramatic turning point in the story.

The friend/colleague is killed in the beginning of the adventure, before he or she can tell the characters about what was discovered. They should then have enough reason to start investigating the circumstances of that person's death, but if they should require further incentives, the Game Master could add one of the items listed below.

A grave discovery

The relative's/colleague's discovery is irrelevant to this adventure; he or she just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. But perhaps the player characters could figure out what actually happened? Suggestions on the matter can be found on page 32.

The Relative's/Colleague's Letter

As a suggestion, the Game Master could create a handout of the letter delivered by the courier, adjusting it to which character (or characters) the message is addressed to and who the relative/colleague is. Keep it short and make sure to include the four suggested items, as well as a hurried greeting, and end with an appropriately dire closing phrase. It can be made rather elaborately or simply with pen and paper – regardless, it is sure to enrich the gaming experience.

ENEMIES OF THE DARKNESS

Player characters who for various reasons regard abominations, cults, and the darkness of the world as their natural enemies will not need any persuading to take an interest in the adventure. Humans becoming blight-born are bad enough; it being the result of deliberate poisoning is even worse. Obviously, the characters must find and stop the villains before they do something even worse and more innocent lives are lost!

PROBLEM-SOLVERS

After the start of the adventure it becomes clear that the local authorities are in need of assistance – an excellent opportunity for characters who like taking jobs as problem-solvers. Guard Captain Egusta, Field Marshal Beniam Starak or the Queen's Legate, Neiem Kirte, are all possible employers. No matter who contacts (or is contacted by) the characters, their mission will be to identify what caused the tragic events and bring the perpetrators to justice.

MOVING UP THE LADDER

Player characters who are involved, or want to be involved, in a certain faction or organization may see the adventure as a chance to prove themselves. In the beginning of act two, local representatives of the Sun Church (Father Koramej), Ordo Magica (Loria Argom), and the Army/Rangers (Beniam Starak) will arrive at the refugee camp. They all have different reasons for wanting the perpetrator caught, and might recommend the characters for both rewards and promotions, should they agree to help.

Naturally, the Iron Pact and the witches are not present at Prios Pass, but characters who are

allied to them could realize that their leaders would want the case to be investigated and the culprits punished.

A more significant adjustment would be to leave out the happy reunion and the friend/colleague from Alberotor entirely, and instead link the characters mission directly to the prison transport.

Characters who are allies of the templars could be offered the job of killing Elsana; allies of Deseba/ Sarvola could be sent to free the “heretic” and bring her to safety; alternatively, someone within the Sun Church could “sense” that the transport is in need of further protection and send the characters to provide just that.

The Structure of the Adventure

THE HOWLING OF DAMNED GODS is divided into three acts. The first two are quite linear, while the third presents a small adventure landscape for the player characters to navigate if they want to get their hands on the heretic.

ACT I: SILENT NIGHT...

The player characters arrive at Prios Pass and soon learn that the passage to the refugee camp has been temporarily blocked off; a caravan approaches from the south, and the gate will not be opened until the situation has calmed down and the Rangers announce that the village is no longer under threat. It could be up to six hours before they do so, which is why the player characters are advised to wait in some tavern until the gate bell tolls three times. The Queen's Threshold, the Trout, and other establishments are packed with guests, most of them waiting for someone to arrive. The player characters may take a seat wherever there is room, for example by Brother Huberdo's table, or that of some other relevant NPC. When the Game Master deems it appropriate, the bell suddenly tolls. But not three times. It tolls frantically!

They soon learn that an abomination runs wild at the refugee camp. The gate by the bridge to the camp is still sealed, and the village guards have been joined by a troop of rangers who will not let anyone through. The player characters may choose to wait until the situation is under control or try to

reach the other side of the river. With some skillful persuasion, or reckless courage, they might make it in time to help the guards fight off two disoriented, blight-born humans. However, they are unable to save the relative/colleague, who is killed by an abomination – one that seems to have been spawned deliberately. But how? Why? And by whom?

ACT II : OUT OF THE ASHES...

Act two opens with a number of places to investigate. In the relative's/colleague's tent is a journal containing interesting information. The characters may also (either for the Rangers or on their own accord) investigate a pavilion that was set on fire during the abomination attack, and figure out what caused those people to become blight-born (the poisoned soup).

Near the pavilion are some tracks which, if followed, lead to three Templars (one dying and two wounded) who seized the opportunity to attack the heretic's pavilion as the chaos erupted. They ask the characters to help them hunt down the prisoner, but do not reveal who she is, other than “*a heretic with blood as black as tar*.” Even without this information, the characters can figure out that a heretic was held in the burned-down pavilion and that two guards fled south with the prisoner, leaving behind a pair of corpses, most likely black cloaks.

With the help of two terrified children claiming to have seen the Arch Witch, the characters can track down the guards by following their trail along the road to the Twilight Friars' monastery, in the mountains some 20 kilometers southeast of Prios Pass. About half-way there they encounter three beasts feasting upon two seemingly lifeless bodies. These turn out to be two black cloaks; one is still alive and manages to wheeze a few last words to the characters: “*The Night Lady, you must find her, take her to the monastery; by Prios, darkness falls...*”

The prisoner and her liberators can be tracked directly from the scene of the attack to the narrow valley where the Ice Witch has one of her campsites, but that path goes through a challenging ambush. A less risky alternative would be to follow clues back to the village and one of the Order's agents who

Before the Templars' Secession?

This adventure is written to be played after *Karvosti – the Witch Hammer*, which means that the Templars have pledged allegiance to Dead Prios and seceded from the Sun Church's Curia. If the adventure is played before this has taken place, Segri and her fellow knights have been expelled from their order for persisting in their belief that Prios is already dead and that all that remains is revenge. In that case, they receive information about the prisoner transport from a secret sympathizer among the Templar cell in Kandoria.



participated in the attack (something that could also result in a meeting with Brother Huberdo). That way the characters will have less difficulty finding the hideout and not risk walking into an ambush.

ACT III : THE LADY OF THE NIGHT

One way or another, they eventually reach the valley where the Ice Witch's rebels are encamped, and where the heretic and her escort are hiding. The player characters are outnumbered, there are watchdogs roaming the area, and the hideout itself seems to be protected by some kind of ritual.

The player characters must decide how to proceed. They are presented with four alternatives:

negotiation with the rebels, stealthy maneuvers, direct attack (possibly with the help of allies), and simply waiting out their prey. If all goes well, they will eventually come face to face with Elsana and have to make another difficult decision – should they let her flee to the Realm of the Order (along with the two warrior monks responsible for the relative's/colleague's death), or put her in irons and turn her over to someone else?

The latter alternative obviously involves fighting Elsana and the monks. On the other hand, should they decide to let her go, they may first have to help her get past a hostile group which attacks, or possibly waits outside, the rebels' hideout.

The vales of the Titans can be incredibly beautiful, and incredibly dangerous.

Prios Pass

THE BORDER CHECKPOINT by the bridge over the River Veloma was established in the same year the Ambrians arrived in the region. General Karlogoi Meleon was charged with restoring the old fortress and stone bridge found on an island near the southern shore. The village that developed on the island started as a builders' camp, but evolved as the surrounding lands were cultivated and the fortress became the residence of the exalted Baron Karlogoi of House Meleon.

AS THE SOUTHERN gate of Ambria, Prios Pass has suffered all kinds of hardships, the most frequent being the outbreaks of disease in the refugee camp which, at worst, can reduce its population by as much as half. The threat of kotka cats, jakaars, and bands of robbers is particularly great when the freezing cold comes creeping from the north. And though it is less common, the danger of the southern darkness should also be mentioned – it is not unusual for refugees to be tainted by corruption, and small hordes of dragouls have twice wandered through the mountain passes, starving and thirsting. On all these occasions the bridge was closed off and the guards were ordered to kill anything that moved on the southern shore.

Baron Karlogoi died in year 19, on a hunting trip in the mountains, leaving his keep and estate to his daughter, Karolia. Like her father, she leaves the management of the village and the checkpoint to Queen Korinthia's agents, unless the authorities in Yndaros orders otherwise. The only exceptions are the border patrols which she is obligated to maintain and the search for rebel encampments in the mountains. Furthermore, her standing force of thirty riders and fifty archers can be called upon to aid the rangers and the border guards in battle.

OVERVIEW

Prios Pass lies on an island in one of the mountain streams which further north converge into

the River Veloma. In the area where the village is located, the stream is about 250 meters wide. The original suspension bridge was soon replaced by a sturdier structure, thirty meters long, built on foundations whose oldest parts are thought to have been built in Symbarian times. The five meters closest to the northern base of the bridge are made of wood and can be lowered, if necessary, by removing the stanchions using chains attached to a winch in one of the watchtowers.

The four meter tall wall of stone which runs along the island's southern shore is placed by the waterline, which means that those crossing the bridge must go through the gates to proceed into Ambria. Whenever a threat arises, the gate is shut and metal bars lowered in front of it, as archers man the towers and battlements. In truly dire situations, the last section of the bridge is also lowered.

On the northern side of the island are some jetties, the largest acting as a wharf for the ferry which people use to travel the hundred or so meters between the wilds of the Titans and the kingdom of Ambria. Private boats and vessels are anchored by the smaller jetties, alongside two Ranger triremes and a larger galley belonging to the mistress of the fortress.

THE VILLAGE CENTER

Thanks to the border checkpoint, the Baroness of Meleon's fortress, and its proximity to the Twilight Monastery, Prios Pass is relatively well-off. It now has roughly a hundred permanent residents, most

of them belonging to one of three distinct factions: builders and merchants who supply the village with basic necessities; people who own or work at the inns and taverns welcoming newcomers to the Promised Land; and various public officials whose primary function seems to be restricting the number of refugees who are allowed to cross the River Veloma.

Prios Plaza is the hub of the community, surrounded by the Queen's Legation, the Queen's Threshold inn, and two taverns called the Blue Goblet and the Mill. The rest of the village comprises a mix of various buildings, with a few exceptions: in the east, by the river, is the relatively modest tower of Ordo Magica, next to the equally plain sun temple; by the South Gate, the Rangers keep their barracks, stables and officers' quarters; and much of the village's western parts are dominated by The Golden Swan - an inn only open to nobles, either as a first stop upon entering Ambria, or as a comfortable place in which to wait for friends or relatives to arrive.

THE REFUGEE CAMP

By the bridge's southern head lies the refugee camp. Its size varies greatly according to the season, and there has also been a slight, general decrease in the number of travelers venturing through the mountain pass.

The camp's only permanent buildings are the fortifications around the bridgehead and three Ranger watch towers, each normally occupied by four sentries. Other than that, the camp consists entirely of tents, pavilions, and wagons. These are usually positioned outward from the central watch tower, as instructed by the duty officer.

There are two soup kitchens serving hot, flavorful, and free meals three times a day. Bread is included, but those who want their goblets filled

with something other than water must pay a small sum. It is customary for newcomers to buy a pint (or more) of Zarekean blackbrew to celebrate their arrival.

SURROUNDINGS

North of the River Veloma, billowing farmlands stretch as far as the eye can see. House Meleon's crofters and farmers are known for producing good crops and processing them with considerable skill and taste. Their stout, the Titan's Bitter, is widely recognized by connoisseurs throughout the capital, and the region's new signature dish - a trout pâté called Meleon's Temptation - is served in taverns across the kingdom.

South of the river there is nothing but wilderness, apart from a few fishermen's wharfs and hunting lodges. The monastery of the Twilight Friars can be found about a day's march south-east from the village, and about as far to the south-west is an outpost where the Baroness's scholars and a handful of adepts from Ordo Magica are investigating an abandoned mine. The rest is naught but mountains and dales, ravines and groves, predators and plunderers.

Two major bandit groups dominate the mountain road between Alberotor and Ambria. The undead robber baron Van-Rogan torments the west, with his growing horde of enslaved rabble - mostly women and men who have been cowed into submission and, in their desperation, follow the former noble's orders with feigned gratitude. The group of settlers led by Maridja, the barbarian woman also known as the Ice Witch, is by far the larger and better organized of the two. But from their own perspective, neither Maridja nor her followers are plunderers; while they admittedly help themselves to Ambrian wealth from time to time, they are basically rebels who violently oppose the intruders' rule.



Alternative
bandit chief

Van-Rogan is introduced in the adventure *The Promised Land*. If him still living in the mountains does not correspond to the previous experiences of your gaming group, he can easily be replaced with some other undead robber baron.

Perhaps it is the robber baron Nightblade from the Blight Night scenario who now resides in the mountains? Or could it be that the rumors of Baron

Karlogoi's death are exaggerated; that he was murdered on orders from his daughter, but rose again to seek vengeance?



What happens to those who are rejected?

More than half of all hopeful refugees coming in from the south are denied entry into the Queen's new realm. While the reasons for their rejection vary (see the Queen's Legation on page 12), they are all struck by the same terror and desperation that arises from being turned away by the border guards. Roughly a third join the caravans returning south, to seek a new home in Freetown, the Realm of the Order,

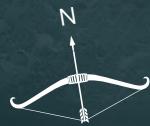
or one of the city states. The rest choose to stay where they are.

Of those who do stay, some join the rebel or bandit groups encamped in the mountains, others establish small and often short-lived settlements in the valleys of the Titans, but most try to sneak themselves into Ambria without the Queen's blessing. Many are killed on the way there, by predators, border patrols, or cold and

starvation. Those who succeed face a perilous existence, in constant fear of being discovered, and must be willing to do anything for food and shelter. In the best-case scenario, they are taken in by some unscrupulous landowner who feeds them in exchange for backbreaking labor while constantly threatening to report them to the Queen's Rangers.

PRIOS PASS

0 50 M



1. The Keep
2. The Golden Swan
3. The Garrison
4. The Legation
5. The Queen's Threshold
6. The Trout
7. The Sun Temple
8. Ordo Magica
9. Watchtowers
10. Soup Kitchen



Adventure Locations

THE FOLLOWING PLACES and establishments in Prios Pass and its surrounding area may be relevant when playing *The Howling of Damned Gods*. The Game Master is of course free to add more locations, and must, as always, be ready to improvise whenever the players act in unexpected ways – which should be expected.

THE QUEEN'S THRESHOLD, INN

Having been in business for seventeen years, Febeo and his wife Eda run the oldest inn in the village, in one of its oldest buildings – a rectangular stone house first built to accommodate construction workers. The kitchen and dining room are located at its center, while a total of twelve rooms can be reached through corridors running towards the short ends of the building. Each bedroom has two bunkbeds, except the four in the corners – more luxurious chambers with only two well-feathered beds each.

Like all innkeepers in the village, Febeo and Eda are obligated to keep a record of what happens at their establishment and report suspicious people and events to the Queen's Legate. But at the Queen's Threshold, it might actually be possible to conduct dubious affairs without being caught, whether it concerns the smuggling of sensitive goods, hidden diseases, or meetings with questionable individuals – the landlady has a taste for fine spirits, and will often try to extort such guests before reporting them to the Legate. By doing so, she has amassed a long list of secrets to be used, if necessary, against an equally long list of prominent Ambrians; a list she keeps in a small, lavishly pearly notebook beneath a loose floorboard in the kitchen.

THE SOUTH GATE OF AMBRIA

North of the bridge is an open space, about ten meters deep and twice as wide, surrounded by a four meter high stone wall with four towers. In times of danger, the five meter wide double gate is bolted, the portcullis is lowered, and the battlements are manned with guards, ranged weapons at the ready. There are also two ballistae mounted on top of the northern towers.

With all this in mind, it would take a lot for predators, bandits, or desperate refugees to attack the village from that direction – nothing but a large and highly organized military force could do so successfully. There have only been a handful of serious attempts over the years. Twice it was dragouls who came swarming across the bridge, and on three occasions the desperate masses at the camp have attacked (probably spurred by someone representing the enemies of the Queen), when the Istaros winter was so harsh that the strait had frozen solid.

To head south through the gate during a crisis, one must either be well-connected or glib-tongued. The only way out is through the large gate, which will never be opened. However, the duty officer may allow people to rappel down the south side of the wall, provided that no enemies are occupying the bridgehead and that the person asking for permission seems capable of dealing with the approaching threat.

THE SUN TEMPLE

The head of the sun temple at Prios Pass is a man named Father Koramei. He is the younger brother of the late Karlogoi, and hence the current baroness's uncle. He is also a gloomy and reclusive individual who early on renounced his claim to the barony. Koramei is assisted by two liturgs and three initiates, and all six are members of the faction within the Sun Church which questions the Curia's interpretation of the Sun God's will and nature. While they keep their skepticism to themselves, Koramei is actually in sporadic contact with Deseba the Old (see the adventure *Wrath of the Warden*). The Curia's black cloaks suspect as much, and keep the temple under surveillance.

The temple itself is not very large, with room for no more than thirty or so people in its light yard. There are also five prayer alcoves and living quarters for the staff. The real jewel of the temple is found in Koramei's private chambers – a bottle containing six drops of Water of the Dusk; a gift from Templewall, to be used in combating the darkness which seeps north from Alberetor.

THE TOWER OF ORDO MAGICA

UA month ago the senile Master Marfal, who until then had managed the order's modest operations at Prios Pass, was replaced by a newly-appointed master named Loria Argom. Having studied under Seldonio himself, she certainly has her qualities, but the Grand Master believed that she needed to "toughened up" a bit, which is why he made her Chapter Master. She is still not entirely comfortable with her new job – barely thirty years of age, she displays great uncertainty and a fiery temperament whenever she is pressured or challenged.

The other masters stationed at Prios Pass are a young ritualist by the name of Toreo and an aged Medicus named Ginda. The latter studies the various diseases carried by refugees from the south, along with two adepts and a group of novices who work in direct contact with the sick. She is always looking to hire new novices – at least one is killed each year, by infections, rashes, or violent outbursts.

THE QUEEN'S LEGATION

The Legation at Prios Pass has a staff of ten people, supervised by the former general Neiem Kirte. Due to injuries sustained in The Great War, the general had to look elsewhere for work, but as he sees it, his transfer to Prios Pass was a promotion – in these troubled times, nothing could be more important than stopping old enemies from infiltrating the new realm! Neiem has a well-founded reputation for being incorruptible, loyal, and unforgiving.

The Legate and his staff decide who does, or does not, become full-fledged Ambrian citizens. Their subordinates conduct thorough interviews and health examinations of all who arrive at the refugee camp, unless they already possess, and are able to present, a document (known as a Queen's Permit) certifying that they are loyal subjects of Queen Korinthia. These days, only skilled craftsmen, farmers, and intellectuals are welcomed into The Promise Land. Apart from nobles, very few are exempted from the screening process. Sometimes a decision can be made in just a few hours, but it may just as well take a week or even a month. Until then, the applicant must remain in the camp, ready to answer any questions that may arise or undergo further examinations.

Basically, the only chance for contaminated and/or unskilled people to enter the kingdom is the notaries, and brothers, Laras and Demed. For the past two years they have, along with a handful of subordinates, made a profit from selling Queen's Permita to certain carefully selected refugees. They have so far managed to avoid any suspicion, but who knows how long it will be before one of their "clients" suffers a serious case of honesty, or succumbs to a tainting illness they carry?

THE TROUT, TAVERN

The Trout is a tavern near the docks on the north side of the island, and serves some of the best food in the village. Their menu consists mostly of various fish dishes, based on recipes from the port towns of Alberetor. Though the salmon has been replaced by trout from the local river, the fish sticks, pâtés, soups, pies, and cakes still taste very much like their southern equivalents.

The owner, a widow called Madam Flora, may seem like a thoroughly amiable and tender-hearted person, but appearances can be deceiving. Beneath the good-natured surface, she is the leader of a smuggler organization with branches from Alberetor in the south to Karvosti in the north. Most of the smuggled goods – which can be anything from Alberian antiquities to corrupt artifacts from Davokar – will at some point pass through her three-level basement.

The buyers are just as diverse, ranging from unscrupulous barbarian chieftains, via nobles in the capital, to wealthy individuals who have remained south of the mountains. She even has clients in the Realm of the Order and the City States, which means that her racket not only violates the laws of the Lawgiver – it also constitutes high treason.

THE WATCH TOWERS

The Queen's Rangers are responsible for maintaining order and security at the camp south of Prios Pass. They have three watch towers at their disposal, each usually manned by four guards, including the scouts posted at the top of the towers. The central tower has an annex where the Legation staff conducts their interviews and physical examinations, always with at least one ranger present.

The guard force is commanded by Field Marshal Beniam Starak, with the help of his subordinate officers: Captains Elan, Domio, and Egusta. One captain can always be found in the main tower, but when larger caravans are on the way all of them are in place, while the number of ordinary rangers is doubled. Captain Egusta, easily recognized by the scar which runs across her left eye and continues over her mouth and chin, is the most verbal and authoritarian of the three.

THE SOUP KITCHENS

The two soup kitchens providing the camp's residents with three meals a day are managed by the Legation and financed by the Queen. The food is good, nutritious, and free of charge. Those who desire beverages other than water can often find something else to buy, but no more than one bottle or jar per meal – partly because of the meager supply, partly because the rangers wish to avoid any drunken disorder.

The cook Arela served as an army chef during the war and knows how to make good food in large quantities. But she is not as cheery as she once was; the tunes she used to hum among the pots of the field kitchen have been replaced by a constant grumbling and swearing. This is partly due to old age, but also to her infuriating assistants: while the Legate does not skimp on ingredients, he is quite cheap when it comes to paying for labor, which explains why Arela is currently in charge of more than a dozen messy, constantly chattering goblins scurrying about her kitchen.

THE TWILIGHT MONASTERY

That the headquarters of the black cloaks ended up in the mountains was something of a coincidence. The ruin in which the monastery is located was



The Twilight Monastery in snow-laden splendor, echoing with sublime hymns, retaining the darkness of the Eternal Night.

already there, and in such great condition that it must have been built by some lord from Lindaros, possibly as a pleasure palace. In any case, the structure suited their purpose perfectly, not least because of the many, vast cellar levels where the black cloaks now keep their prisoners (and test subjects). The ruin's proximity to Alberetor was also advantageous, as it eased the relocation of books, relics, and already captured victims of corruption from the monastery outside Berendoria.

Visitors are not allowed to see much of the building's interior; even many of those who live and work at the monastery are denied access to certain floors and wings. Behind the imposing gate is a hall where guests are greeted and registered by a clerk. Those who seek shelter from the cold or just want to have a look around are immediately turned away, politely at first, whereupon a squad of black cloaks is summoned to eject the persistent guest. Should the clerk deem the matter serious enough, the visitor is shown to the adjacent audience hall to await a more senior brother or sister. Most people

will never see more than that, as whoever they meet next will most likely be acting as an intermediary between them and the leaders of the monastery.

As one of the Sun God Prios' strongholds on earth, the monastery is surprisingly dominated by darkness. Of course, it is the black cloaks' job to study and understand the dark. In halls deep within the mountain, behind massive iron gates, hideously disfigured humanoids are imprisoned: captive elves, trolls, and ogres in different stages of blight; strange, sentient natural phenomena seemingly teeming with hatred and aggression; even a primal blight beast which the Curia calls the Dragon.

Other parts of the halls contain corrupted artifacts; parchment scrolls and stone tablet describing dark practices or written with symbols which corrupts whoever lays eyes on them; and chambers where the Whip of Prios extract truths from heretics and tainted wretches. The contrast between all this and the magnificent, almost shimmering, hymns heard each day from the chapel is truly breathtaking.

Act 1: Silent Night

THE FIRST ACT of the adventure addresses the player characters' arrival at Prios Pass and the panic that arises as one person, and then another two, are blight-born right in the middle of the refugee camp. The characters can do nothing to change the course of events, but must obviously decide whether to get involved, and if so, in what way. In order to have the slightest chance of helping the residents, they must first make their way through the *South Gate of Ambria*.

Game Opening

AS THE SUN is setting, the player characters arrive on the northern shore of the Veloma River. It has just stopped snowing, and the crisp, cold air has been replaced by a clammy fog. The ground is muddy beneath the melting snow; the wind has turned south-east, but its gusts are still strong enough to make the flags flap and the oil lanterns flicker.

There is not much of a line by the shore, and the player characters may immediately board the barge-like ferry, along with a dozen other passengers (cost: one shilling per person, double for horses and the like, and double again for carts and wagons). The youngsters working the winch look exhausted. They have probably

been hauling the vessel back and forth across the river all day, full of people who have come to meet the awaited caravan.

As they finally reach the other side of the river, they learn that the so called South Gate of Ambria has been closed off. Whether they go there and talk to one of the ten guards, or ask some villager for more information, the situation is explained to them: a caravan is arriving at the refugee camp, and whenever that happens, the gate is sealed until the Rangers have made sure that there is no danger. None are allowed to pass, for their own safety as much as the village's. Besides, it is impossible to find specific people or supply transports before things have calmed down.

The player characters are politely told to wait in one of the inns and taverns. The person they are talking to believes that it may be up to six hours before the gates are opened, which will then be announced by three strokes of the gatehouse bell. All establishments are packed with customers, so the characters must be prepared to share a table with someone.

If the Game Master thinks it appropriate, there could be some empty seats by Brother Huberdo's table. There will not be any in-depth conversations, of course; mostly small talk about the weather, life in the village, and the journey through the Titans. But in case there will be any future encounters with Huberdo (see page 25), it could be good for them to have met him once before.

Meeting with Huberdo

If the player characters should end up at Huberdo's table, it is important that the Game Master portray him as any other visitor – he is just one of many travelers who have come to meet the arriving caravan. He introduces himself as Huberdo and claims to be a notary from Yndaros, sent by Lord Manselm to collect a bundle of legal documents from his relatives in Alberetor. He also complains about the weather and recalls with horror his own perilous journey through the mountains – that was almost ten years ago, and they suffered everything from avalanches and predators to murderous bandits.

Outbreak

WHENEVER THE GAME Master thinks it appropriate, the high-pitched roar of a woman cuts through the noise: "Silence!" A woman is standing by the open door, and when everyone has gone quiet, they can all hear the reason for her shouting. A bell tolls in the distance. But not three times; it tolls frantically and relentlessly.

TO THE RESCUE

The player characters are obviously free to do whatever they like. However, they will probably start with trying to find out what is going on.

None of the civilians know anything about it, but the somewhat inebriated Captain Turgal of the village guard and the rangers who have gathered around the bolted South Gate can tell them the following: *"An abomination came with the caravan; it is on the loose, attacking anyone in sight; the gate must remain sealed until the situation is under control!"*

In order to acquire this information, the characters must first make their way to Turgal, and then persuade him to reveal what he knows ([Persuasive +1] test). Note that his information is not entirely accurate, as the abomination did not in fact come with the caravan.

No matter what the characters say, the gate will remain shut. To get past it they must get in touch with the rangers' ranking officer on site, Lieutenant Androna. Collected and poised, she tells the characters to calm down, ensuring them that her fellow rangers are used to dealing with situations like this. The characters must pass a [Persuasive -3] test to gain her permission, or Androna will adopt a harsher tone: if they try to cross the bridge, she will order her men to shoot them down, for disobeying a direct order and to stop them from getting in the way of her brothers and sisters in arms!

Characters who fail the test but still want to get to the refugee camp have two options. One is to disobey Androna's order, in which case she will let them go (while hurling a few loud profanities their way). However, this could cause problems later on, as they will be wanted for insubordination – if the characters ever return to Prios Pass, they will risk being thrown in jail and sentenced to twenty lashes each (this does not apply to nobles, who get off with paying a 10 thaler fine).

A second option is to procure a boat of some kind and row across the strait, or go where the wall ends and swim to the other side (without weapons or armor). Either way, the characters will not reach

the camp until all three abominations have been killed (see below).

THE ABOMINATIONS

As mentioned previously, the chaos south of the bridge is the result of the Order's agents' plan – to make the black cloaks and their prisoner flee to the Twilight Monastery by causing mayhem at the camp. Knowing that many of the Alberian refugees are on the verge of becoming blight-born, they tricked two of the cook Arela's goblins into pouring large quantities of crushed krusean berries into the soup. The effect was almost instantaneous.

First an abomination is born near the eastern soup kitchen. It causes great damage before people start to flee and the creature can be surrounded by rangers who stay on the defensive while waiting for the captains to join them. The relative/colleague is one of those who cannot escape the abomination's fury and is fatally injured by its claws.

Player characters who persuade Lieutenant Androna to lower them onto the bridge (or simply ignore her order) can reach the camp just as the two captains who are still alive (Domio and Egusta) manage to flank and decapitate the beast. But the danger, it seems, is far from over: screams of panic and blood-curdling roars are heard from the west.

Should the characters choose to accompany the two captains to the western soup kitchen, the terrified cries of fleeing people will soon indicate that two more abominations are running amok at the camp. And sure enough – two battered ranger squads are each fighting a humanoid abomination, roughly fifty meters from each other. The captains charge towards one of them; what the characters do is up to them. If they decide to help, we recommend that they focus on one abomination, and that the outcome of that fight also determines the fates of the captains and their men.

Some gaming groups may want to ignore the abominations entirely and try to locate the relative/colleague instead. If so, they will find him or her dying on the ground near the eastern soup kitchen, beyond saving, but strong enough to utter a few last words: *"My dear. Beware! It is her! I saw her. Shackled. The darkness enchain. The darkness, the darkneee..."*

If the characters choose not to fight the abomination, or if they should all fall in battle, others will rush forth to slay it – war veterans, hunters, and others who realize that the horrid creature must be fought. It will be a long and bloody affair; one of the worst massacres of Alberians/Ambrians since The Great War.



Blight-born human

The woman and two men who suffer the tainting effect of the krusean berries were already blight-marked when they arrived – they had stayed too long in Alberetor's darkness. As they are blight-born, they grow almost two meters tall and are deformed beyond recognition.

Man 1: Bloodshot skin with large, black blisters; cleft, flickering snake tongue; long claws.

Woman: Skin that blackens and falls off in large pieces; bare cranium with horn-like growths; right forearm transformed into a curved bone sword.

Man 2: Albino skin with throbbing, black veins; bright red eyes; abnormally long arms/legs; foot-long, razor-sharp bull horns.

THE FIRE

Regardless of whether it happens during the fight against the abomination or as the player characters are kneeling around the dead relative/colleague, they may all make a **Vigilant** test. Those who succeed can smell the smoke of a fire, and with another successful test they see tiny sparks dancing into the sky from a place further south among the wagons and tents.

It is the prison escort's pavilion that is on fire, set ablaze by the templars after their failed attempt to secure the prisoner (two of the black cloaks had already left with Elsana). Guests at the camp hasten

Manner	Raging, howling		
Race	Abomination (ex-human)		
Resistance	Ordinary		
Traits	<i>Acidic Blood (I), Natural Weapon (II), Robust (I)</i>		
Accurate 15 (-5), Cunning 9 (+1), Discreet 10 (0), Persuasive 5 (+5), Quick 7 (+3), Resolute 13 (-3), Strong 11 (-1), Vigilant 10 (0)			
Abilities	<i>Berserker (novice), Natural Warrior (novice)</i>		
Weapons	Claws/Bone sword/Horns 10		
Armor	2 (<i>Robust</i>)		
Defense	+7, acidic blood 3 damage for 3 turns		
Toughness	11	Pain Threshold	6
Equipment	1D10 shillings		
Shadow	Utterly corroded copper (Corruption: thoroughly corrupted)		

Tactics: The abomination wants to extinguish life, all life; it does not care about its own.

to extinguish the fire before it spreads. Beneath the scorched canvas are a number of clues which the player characters may discover as they start to investigate what has caused all this mayhem, and hopefully learn who is responsible for the relative's/colleague's death.

Act 2: Out of the Ashes

THE SECOND ACT of the adventure starts when the abominations are defeated and things are settling down at the refugee camp. Now it is time for the player characters/players to take the reins, either on their own initiative or on behalf of Captain Egusta.

Investigations

WHEN THERE IS no longer any immediate threat, the player characters are given a chance to look around and assess the situation, possibly after having seen to their own wounds. The scene of the battle now seems eerily desolate. Apart from those who helped fight the abominations and are now more or less wounded, all guests at the camp have fled south in sheer panic, leaving behind half-raised tents and scattered belongings. A few rangers stagger to their feet to help their battered comrades; the two captains who killed the abomination by the eastern soup kitchen falter slowly towards the central watch tower, the woman practically carrying the man.

Ten people lie wounded or dead around the fallen abominations, with very few to help them. This could be an opportunity for the player characters to make themselves useful while at the same time gathering clues about what happened. If they do, use the information listed under the *Soup Kitchens* heading below.

THE WATCH TOWER

Player characters who want to get to the bottom of what happened will probably start by trying to find people who might have some answers. They will not learn much from the surviving rangers who are now busy helping the wounded, comforting the mourning, and soothing those in shock: no one seems to know what caused the massacre. If they persist, the characters are told to ask the commanders, who can most likely be found at the central watch tower.

Sure enough: Captain Egusta is standing outside the tower gate, grunting at the few junior officers who are still fit for duty; Domio is inside, hovering between life and death due to severe acid burns. A successful *Vigilant* test with the *Medicus* ability reveals that

Egusta is pale, in a cold sweat, and probably more badly wounded than she would like to admit.

When the last of the junior officers has left, the characters can take their place. The Captain is definitely not in a talkative mood, but if the characters helped kill the abominations or if one of them explicitly offers his/her services, she can spare a moment – she too is wounded, and her fellow captains are incapacitated, as are many of their rangers; she could certainly use a helping hand.

With trembling voice, occasionally swaying with dizziness, Egusta are able to reveal the following information:

- It appears that the abominations did not come with the caravan. Three seemingly unrelated guests were blight-born almost simultaneously; only one of them came with the latest caravan.
- More than twenty people died; twice as many were wounded.
- Apparently there was a fire somewhere in the camp, but the damage to tents, wagons, and property was otherwise negligible.
- Nothing like this has ever happened at Prios Pass. It cannot be a coincidence; someone is responsible for the abominations' emergence!
- Should the player characters request or demand compensation for their services, she is prepared to pay each of them the standard wage of a ranger: 5 shillings a day. The sum can be doubled with compelling arguments and a successful [*Persuasive +1*] test.

Shortly after the fight has been won, more people will gather at the central watch tower. Among these

are Father Koramei, Loria Argom, and Field Marshal Beniam Starak; all of them willing to speak with the player characters and ask for their help in a) shedding light on the current situation and b) bringing the culprits to justice. Furthermore, Egusta will demand that all newly-arrived caravan leaders gather in the building next to the tower, to be thoroughly questioned about who came with them on the journey.

In other words, the central watch tower becomes a place to which the characters may return as they conduct their investigations, to ask questions about matters they do not understand or request help with things they cannot do themselves (performing certain rituals, for example).

THE SOUP KITCHENS

If the player characters start to question or interrogate the camp's residents about what happened, the chance that the interviewee has eaten of the soup is 1-3 on a D6. If so, a successful *Cunning* test with the *Medicus* or *Poisoner* ability, alternatively a [*Cunning* -5] test, can reveal that the person seems to be under the influence of some drug. Should the test succeed with a difference of 3 or more, characters with one of said abilities can also identify the drug in question: Krusean Berries (see below).

People's accounts of what happened just before the massacre also suggest a link between the recent calamity and the evening soup. Everyone the characters talk to mention the following points, though not in the same order:

- The wagons of a large caravan started to arrive by nightfall.
- A group of jesters were performing outside the central tower.
- The soup lines were long; everyone looked forward to the carrot and mushroom soup.
- The newcomers had begun to park their

Krusean Berries

The berries from the Krusean bush can be eaten both fresh and dried, and give rise to a long lasting buzz which may be compared to that of alcohol consumption. The one eating the berries also suffers 1D4 in temporary corruption, which tends to linger in the body (if relevant, the corruption fades with one point every two hours). For this reason, the berries have become popular among people who are charmed by Davokar's darkness and the powers of The Eternal Night. According to rumor, they are also used during torture – the buzz combined with the amassing blackness can get just about anyone to talk...

wagons, raise their tents, and make themselves comfortable.

- Those who witnessed the blight-births also add: *"Suddenly he/she just started screaming, threw the bowl to the ground and... transformed, darkened... like a nightmare..."*

Those who taste and smell the soup and have either the *Medicus* or the *Poisoner* ability must pass a *Cunning* test to identify a) that the food has been poisoned, and b) what poisoned was used.

If any accusations are hurled her way, Arela responds with a severe tongue-lashing: the cook is livid, calling the characters everything from idiots to shameless worms: how can they be so stupid as to think that she poisoned her own soup?! When asked if she has any suspects, it does not take long before she turns her hateful gaze to a couple of goblin boys standing nearby. They act innocent, but not very convincingly – constantly looking around, their eyes flickering, while unsuccessfully trying to whistle. As soon as Arela raises her voice, they immediately spin around and start running.

If the players decide to pursue them, use the rules for Flight & Hunt in the *Advanced Player's Guide* (page 102); the goblins Boa and Tott have Quick 10 (0). Another option is to track them to their hideout – an abandoned wagon at the southern end of the camp. But even if they are found, the goblins have little to say:

- *"It was just a prank; he said it wasn't dangerous, like swallowing itching powder."*
- *"He looked perfectly normal, a bearded human. Brown or black clothes, no weapons."*
- *"He came up to us in the middle of the day. We've never seen him before, or since."*

THE COLLEAGUE'S TENT

The characters might want to go through the relative's/colleague's equipment. Finding his or her tent is not very difficult: all newly-arrived caravan owners have been summoned for questioning at the central watch tower's annex, and characters who are on good terms with Captain Egusta or other authority figures will be allowed to ask them about the relative/colleague.

A woman named Ilva steps forward and says that the relative/colleague travelled with her caravan, but for some reason chose to set up his or her tent far away from the other passengers. The relative/colleague stayed close to the eastern soup kitchen (see the explanation below) while Ilva and the others parked their wagons by the western one. She thinks she knows what the relative's/colleague's tent looks like, and with the rangers' permission she would be happy to take the characters to it.

Aside from one trunk of clothes and another filled with jewels, valuables, and a few family heirlooms such as rolled-up paintings, candlesticks, letters, journals and so on (total worth: 400+1000 thaler), there is only one object of interest among the relative's/colleague's belongings: a logbook.

In it are accounts of both the preparations for the journey and the journey itself. The character who takes the time to look and passes a *Vigilant* test finds a passage written a few days earlier, in much shakier handwriting:

It is as I feared; the Master Weaver and his apprentices in the wagon behind Ilva's are lying. They are guards, escorting a prisoner. A woman. Old and hunched. Pale as sugar. And she saw me. She pierced me with her bloodshot eyes. Just for a second, like the stab of a knife. Or a cut. An intense expression, but what it meant I do not know. Perhaps it was hatred. Perhaps a warning, a threat. For a moment I thought she wanted to eat me. Or maybe it was a cry for help.

I will not get involved. Not tell anyone. Keep my distance. I do not want to know what her eyes were really saying. Death. That is the prevailing feeling: death.

THE PAVILION

Hopefully, the player characters will realize that they should investigate the fire which started during the abominations' rampage; if not, Captain Egusta or some other NPC they speak to could bring it up.

The circular pavilion is about five meters in diameter and torn down, with most of the western side completely destroyed by the fire. By talking to people in the area, the characters can get an idea of what happened there.

- There were four people living in the pavilion: a Master Weaver and his aides. Some can recall that the master's name was Mogdas.
- No one knows what started the fire; there was too much chaos because of all the people trying to escape the abominations.
- When the fire started, some capable residents were quick to act. They took down the pavilion and smothered the fire with damp blankets.
- No one has entered the pavilion since the fire. But there seems to be at least one, possibly two bodies lying motionless beneath the canvas.

There are several discoveries to be made:

A successful Vigilant test by someone examining the ground outside: Someone lost a lot of blood a few meters from the northern entrance; the ground is soaked and sticky. What could be the start of a blood trail is leading west.

A successful [Vigilant -5] test by someone examining the ground outside: There is a small medallion trampled into the ground, and a ripped-off chain a bit further away. It is a simple, round plate of blackened iron. The *Loremaster* ability or a successful *Cunning* test reveals it to be the new symbol of the Templars: the symbol of the Church of Dead Priors.

A successful Cunning test with the Medicus ability, directed at the corpses beneath the canvas: A man and a woman, both in their thirties, killed by sword blows to the neck and torso. Their bodies are muscular and scarred, as if they were warriors rather than weavers.

A successful Vigilant test with the Loremaster ability, or a successful [Vigilant -5] test, directed at the corpses beneath the canvas: Their clothes are actually armor; the kind of concealed armor that is very difficult/expensive to make and therefore only worn by three groups of people: wealthy sorcerers, spies of the Queen, and black cloaks on covert missions.

The Witchsight or Ritualist ability, directed at the shackles found beneath the canvas: They are filled with holy energy. A successful *Cunning* test provides more details – both the *Sanctifying Rite* and the *Judging Bonds* rituals have been weaved over the metal.

The Bushcraft trait/boon and a successful Vigilant test, or a [Vigilant -5] test, inside the pavilion: Marks on the ground suggest that two people have dragged a third one between them; they left through the southern exit; the trail cannot be followed more than five meters, as it vanishes among countless others.

THE TEMPLARS

In a patched tent at the western end of the camp (3x5 meters and high enough for someone to stand upright), the templars Segri Elderra, Arlon Mirelda, and Jelia Oralak have set up base. The tent is also shared by the aged squire Gromeo, who works very hard to serve the three nobles.

Their reason for disguising themselves as refugees has nothing to do with political discretion;

the Templars could not care less about whether their actions will anger the Curia, the Queen, or any other faction – the heretic will die, everything else is secondary. No, they are disguised simply to improve their chances of getting close to the Night Lady without giving her escort time to prepare a defense or escape to some hideout.

It is fully possible for the player characters to follow the templars' blood trail from the collapsed pavilion. A successful *Vigilant* test with the trait/boon *Bushcraft*, or a [*Vigilant* -5] test, is all it takes to find the ragged tent in the west. Moreover, if the test succeeds with a difference of 3 or more, the tracker realizes that the blood must have come from more than one person.

The Templars are in no condition to fight: Jelia has yet to regain consciousness, Arlon has lost too much blood, and Segri has deep stab wounds on her upper arms. In other words, the player characters have every opportunity to approach them, but they must do so on their own, as Captain Egusta cannot spare any men. One strategy could be to wait until the graying old Gromeo exits the tent to fetch some drinking water. If captured and interrogated, he will swear that “his friends” had nothing to do with the abominations, but that is all he will say on the matter – the characters will have to come with him and take their questions to the leader of the group.

Realizing that fighting is out of the question, Segri assumes a diplomatic approach; perhaps the player characters could even be of use to her. She invites them to sit by the fire pit in the middle of the tent, ready to answer their questions:

- Her name is Segri, and she is a servant of Prios; that is all she will say about herself and the people sharing her tent. If the characters show her the medallion they found trampled into the mud outside the pavilion, she just shrugs: *“it must have been dropped by someone else.”*
- There was a prisoner and her escort in the burnt-down tent; and not just any prisoner, but a *“heretic with blood as black as tar; an enemy of the sun and an ally of darkness, who must not be allowed to live.”* She does not mention the heretic's name, nor the offenses she has committed – *“The hag is the Daughter of the Eternal Night, and that is all she is!”*
- When asked if she had something to do with the poisoned soup and the ensuing blight-births, she responds with a dark glare. She and her friends simply waited for the right moment to strike at the heretic; the abominations emerging, and the mayhem they caused, seemed like a golden opportunity.

- But the prisoner was already gone, as were parts of her escort. Segri and her comrades killed two guards after a brief but fierce battle; enraged by the heretic's absence she then smashed an oil lamp, hence the fire.
- If she had to guess, she would say that some other faction wants to free the heretic, and that they are the ones who poisoned the soup. If that is the case, there is a significant risk that one of the greatest apostles of The Eternal Night will soon be at large.
- Finally, she asks the characters to track down the heretic and report back to her (without intervening). With some rest and proper care, she expects that her wounded friends will be up and about within twenty-four hours, ready to resolve the matter.

The Templars

“God is dead, the killers must burn.”

All three of the knights are highborn; they are proud, eloquent, and imposing. But there is also fire in their eyes, a passion most nobles do not possess.

If the characters seek them out directly after the battle, one of them is knocked out and the other two have only 4 Toughness left.

Manner	Calmly fanatical		
Race	Human (Ambrian)		
Resistance	Challenging		
Traits	Contacts (Sun Knights)		
Accurate 10 (0), Cunning 9 (+1), Discreet 5 (+5), Persuasive 10 (0), Quick 13 (-3), Resolute 11 (-1), Strong 15 (-5), Vigilant 7 (+3)			
Abilities	<i>Beast Lore</i> (novice), <i>Berserker</i> (novice), <i>Iron Fist</i> (adept), <i>Man-at-arms</i> (adept), <i>Steadfast</i> (master), <i>Witch Hammer</i> (adept)		
Weapons	Bastard sword 9 (precise), +3 if <i>Berserker</i>		
Armor	Studded leather 3 (reinforced)		
Defense	-3 (+5 if <i>Berserker</i>)		
Toughness	15	Pain Threshold	8
Equipment	1D10 thaler, flagellant whip, symbol of Dead Prios		
Shadow	Golden yellow with streaks and blotches of crimson (Corruption: 3)		

Tactics: The knights of Dead Prios fights with restrained fury and stay together to avoid being flanked; they will unleash their berserker rage and attack with full force if the battle turns against them.

TRACKING DOWN THE HERETIC

The players (and hence, their player characters) will most likely be able to guess that the prisoner has been taken to the Twilight Monastery – where else would two threatened black cloaks escorting a dangerous heretic go in this part of the world?. However, for players who are not fond of guessing, there is a way to verify this and determine exactly which route they took.

Their tracks lead south from the tent, before vanishing amidst numerous boot, hoof, and wheel marks in the mud. If the characters follow the road to the southern parts of the camp and pass a Vigilant test, they can hear a child crying hysterically in the distance.

It is coming from a roofed wagon. A faint light shines through the gaps in the walls, and the wailing of a child is heard from inside, followed by a father's attempt to comfort the youngling.

Into the Mountains

THE PRESUMABLY HUNGRY and exhausted player characters now face the prospect of having to track their prey up into the Titans. They might head back to the central watch tower, to report their findings or hoping to pass the responsibility to someone else. Whatever their intentions are, whoever they talk to, the characters are encouraged to continue their pursuit – all rangers are needed at the camp, to restore order and assist the town watch in manning the South Gate of Ambria; there is great unrest among the refugees, and the guards fear that they might try to force their way into Prios Pass.

And so the characters must leave the troubled refugee camp behind, right away or after a quick meal. Depending on what information they have, they will probably take one of two routes: either they follow the trail off the road, along a winding mountain path, or stick to the road all the way to the Twilight Monastery, convinced that the prisoner will be there.

In the latter (less likely) scenario, the characters learn that there are no newcomers at the monastery, but also that a “smaller, quicker path will take them north toward the river”. Whether they follow the winding path from the monastery or come from the north, sooner or later, they are bound to come across the scene of an ambush.

WHAT HAPPENED?

Just as planned, Elsana's escort was attacked on the path between Prios Pass and the monastery. Aided by two fellow agents, one stationed in the village and the other at the refugee camp, the two warrior monks from the Realm of the Order had set up an ambush.

The siblings Arnas and Anata, eight and four years old, saw the black cloaks dragging Elsana. Anata was terrified and ran straight home, convinced that she had just seen the notorious Arch Witch and that the witch would now come for her. Arnas was just as frightened, but paralyzed. He just stood there, watching, his gaze fixed on the strangers, until his mother came to fetch him. Arnas can therefore confirm that the black cloaks were following the road south-east, but then turned east, proceeding along a path by the river.

With this information, the characters are able to track the black cloaks and their prisoner without having to pass any tests. Without it, doing so requires two successful Vigilant test with the *Bushcraft* trait/boon (or a [Vigilant -5] test) – first to rediscover their trail at the southern end of the camp, and then to notice where they suddenly left the road (see the map on page 24).



A Helping Hand

If the player characters fail to realize that they should try to pick up Elsana's trail by the southern edge of the camp, Egusta could come to their aid. It would obviously be more fun for them to figure it out on their own, but a little bit of help is better than being completely stuck.

In that case, Egusta (or some other quest giver) seeks out the characters to inform them that she has received some potentially significant information: a startled father came to the watch tower saying that his children were beside themselves with fright; they claimed to have seen the Arch Witch.



They overpowered the black cloaks, who put up a short fight before being restrained and strangled. Elsana's handcuffs were removed, and the warrior monks brought her along towards the agreed hideout at one of the Ice Witch's bandit camps. The other agents returned to Prios Pass. Knowing that someone could be trailing them, the monks did not stay to search the black cloaks' bodies or ensure that they were actually dead.

Now, the question is what conclusions the player characters will draw after having investigated the blood-soaked scene of the attack...

THE SCENE OF THE AMBUSH

In a place where the path is bordered by dense bushes lie two seemingly dead people; an older man (Mogdas) and a younger woman. And they are not alone: three female kotka cats whose pack is hunting nearby have been lured by the smell of blood, and are now feasting on the humans. From a distance, a successful Vigilant test reveals that the man is still alive (faint groans of pain and a chest that moves up and down with every panting breath).

The kotkas will definitely not give up their prey without a fight! The player characters can back away and wait for them to leave, in which case both of the black cloaks will be killed and dragged into the wilderness. But the players would do better to take an offensive approach; if so, the mountain cats will keep fighting until two of them have fallen.

If the characters manage to defeat the beasts (or drive them off), Mogdas is able to wheeze a few last words before he dies: “The murderers ... The Trout

Kotka

The mighty kotka is one of the Titans' most fearsome predators. It has thick winter fur of yellowish white with black streaks across its back, terrible fangs, and claws sharp enough to cut through even the toughest of ogre skin.

Manner	Confident, bold
Race	Beast
Resistance	Ordinary
Traits	Armored (I), Natural Weapon (II), Robust (I)
Accurate	13 (-3)
Cunning	10 (0)
Discreet	7 (+3)
Persuasive	5 (+5)
Quick	11 (-1)
Resolute	9 (+1)
Strong	15 (-5)
Vigilant	10 (0)
Abilities	<i>Natural Warrior</i> (adept)
Weapons	Claws 7, 2 attacks at the same target
Armor	Thick hide 4
Defense	+1
Toughness	15
Pain Threshold	8
Equipment	None
Shadow	Bright green like the leaves of a birch (Corruption: 0)

Tactics: Kotkas tend to hunt in pairs or groups of three adults; they usually sneak up on herds of prey and work together to isolate a single target. They do the same when facing a group of enemies – they focus on one target at a time, trying to gain an advantage through flanking movements. Naturally, they will attack the largest, most tough-looking opponent first.

... at Prios Pass. You! The Night Lady, you must find her, take her to the monastery; by Prios, night falls ...". He cannot be saved; one of the koktas sank its fangs into his neck and took a few, large bites of his thigh and torso.

With a successful *Cunning* test and the *Loremaster* ability, the character recalls having heard about "the Night Lady" – who she was, and the yearly ritual in which she was given a chance to repent (see page 3). Moreover, the following discoveries can be made at the scene of the ambush:

A successful Vigilant test by someone who searches the bushes: Handcuffs matching the shackles found in the pavilion have been thrown in to the bushes. These too have been blessed with the *Sanctifying Rite* and the *Judging Bonds* rituals.

A successful Vigilant test with the Bushcraft trait/boon, or a [Vigilant -5] test: Aside from the prisoner and the dead black cloaks, at least three

people have recently passed this way; there are signs of fighting, or rather wrestling. Three people have continued east from here, most likely two victors of the fight along with the freed prisoner.

A successful Cunning test with the Medicus or Strangler ability, directed at the corpses: Both were strangled with a garrote. Markings on the wrists indicate that the victims were also held in a tight grip, which means that there must have been at least four attackers.

A successful Cunning test with the Loremaster ability, or a [Cunning -5] test, directed at the piece of cloth found in the female black cloak's clenched fist: It is a thick, cotton cloth, white but heavily bloodstained – probably not by the woman's blood, as she has no wounds near the hand. The amount of blood should be enough to create a mystical link (for rituals such as the *Heretic's Trail/Summoning*) or for a bloodhound to locate/identify the wounded.

A successful Vigilant test directed at Mogdas: A thin leather cylinder has been sown into the hem of the man's cloak; it contains a letter with instructions from Brother Eumenos, the leader of the Twilight Friars. However, note that he has not signed the document. A handout of the letter can be found on page 39.

On orders from the Curia

- The prisoner is to be taken to the Templewall cathedral
- Do not gaze into the heretic's eyes; avoid physical contact; do not speak to her
- Non-lethal use of force is authorized
- Our Queen and her administration have been informed; they will neither stop you, nor provide any assistance or support
- Avoid contact with the fallen knights, Sarvola's renegades, and the general public
- In the event of imminent peril, bring the heretic to safety; trust no one but the brothers and sisters of our order.

THE MONASTERY

The player characters might decide to visit the Twilight Monastery. As long as they do not make a really bad impression (for example by accusing the monastery of having caused the blight-births) they may enter the audience hall. After an hour of waiting, Mother Dealia comes to answer their questions. She has very little to say, but listens attentively:

- She is not aware of any prisoner being transported, and sternly insists that no member

of her order would ever use corruption as a weapon, not even in the sacred battle against the darkness.

- She is, of course, familiar with the Night Lady, and can offer the same information as is revealed by a successful *Cunning* test with the *Loremaster* ability.
- When told about the wounded templars, she simply shrugs: *“the welfare of the fallen knights is no longer our concern”*.

If the characters tell her about the Night Lady and what has happened, Dealia will ask them for a favor before the conversation is over. All capable black cloaks, except those needed to keep the monastery safe from external and internal threats, are out on assignments. If the Night Lady is indeed at large in the region, and the characters manage to track her down, Mother Dealia demands that the heretic be brought to the monastery.

She closes with an ill-concealed threat: *“Failure to comply with this request will have consequences; we are the black cloaks, we see all, hear all, and sooner or later, we know all; and we never spare the agents of The Eternal Night.”*

FOLLOWING THE TRAIL

The player characters may try to track the prisoner and her new escort through the mountains. Thanks to the snow, this is not particularly difficult. It takes three successful *Vigilant* tests with the *Bushcraft* trait/boon, or as many [*Vigilant -5*] tests, to find the way to the bandit camp. The first two of these are each followed by a challenge, as described below:

The first stop: The tracks lead past the cave of the solitary liege troll Raharax. The warrior monks snuck past undetected, about ten paces from the entrance, but the scent in their wake caused the furiously famished troll to go outside. Raharax is now crouching in the entrance of the cave, sulking over the wasted opportunity, rubbing the head of his powerful artifact: the long-hammer Thunder.

A successful *Vigilant* test is all it takes for the characters to detect the smell of his fire from a distance; a difference of 5 or more also reveals a tinge of something acrid in the smoke (Raharax). A successful [*Discreet +3*] test allows someone to sneak close enough to see what awaits them – an enormous, curled-up, black shadow against the red glow of the fire.

The characters must make a decision. They can follow the trail, but unless they have plenty of food to offer in return for safe passage, the reckless,

ravenous troll will attack. Another option is to simply go around the cave in a large circle. They will not have any problem rediscovering the tracks, but then again, that is something the Game Master could choose not reveal beforehand.

Raharax

“You give food, or you are food!”

Until thirteen days ago, Raharax was the master of four rage trolls, six goblins, and eight enslaved humans. It was a glorious time. His minions brought him food, instilled respect in the local beasts, and let themselves be dominated as all minions should. But one day everything was lost; an avalanche buried all of his followers, and Raharax was the sole survivor – not counting the two human slaves who have since lost their lives to still his terrible hunger.

Raharax with company

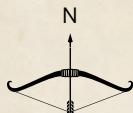
Should Raharax not pose enough of a challenge on his own, a number of goblin minions could have survived the avalanche (2-4 depending on the desired resistance). If so, they have the stats of a Fortune Hunter (page 215 in the Core Rulebook).

Manner	Menacingly indecisive		
Race	Troll (Liege troll)		
Resistance	Strong		
Traits	Armored (I), Long-lived, Natural Weapon (I), Regeneration (III), Robust (II)		
Abilities	Alchemy (novice), Berserker (master), Exceptionally Strong (master), Two-handed Force (adept)		
Weapons	Thunder 12 (bastard weapon, massive, precise)		
Armor	Troll skin 7 (regenerates 4 Toughness/turn, except damage from fire or acid)		
Defense	+4		
Toughness	18	Pain Threshold	9
Equipment	Crude alchemical equipment, the long-hammer Thunder (see page 35), jar of assorted coins (worth: 369 thaler)		
Shadow	Crimson with faint streaks of rust (Corruption: 0)		

Tactics: Liege trolls without weaker creatures to command often lack their usual arrogance, and that is certainly the case with Raharax. On the other hand, he is absolutely famished. If the characters stand their ground he will hesitate and use gestures to demand tribute (i.e. food). But if the troll is offered too little, or nothing at all, his appetite gets the better of him; the same happens if the characters turn their backs on him or start to back away.



0 15 KM



The liege troll is determined to rebuild his following, but cannot shake the feeling that the mountains want him to fail. Moreover, starvation has made him dizzy. He only fights when victory seems certain, or when he is completely overcome with rage.

The second stop: The trail continues north from the cave, and when the player characters have passed their second tracking test they reach the River Veloma. In the mountains, the river is narrower and its currents stronger, but luckily the trail leads to a ford where the characters can wade through calm, knee-deep water. What they do not know is that some of the Ice Witch's rebels are posted on the other side of the ford, to warn the camp up north of hostile bandit groups, ranger patrols, and packs of predators. The five guards are also capable of attacking (and defeating) smaller groups of threatening creatures.

Four of the five have the stats of a Robber, page 211 in the *Core Rulebook*, with the addition of *Shield Fighter* (novice): Damage 5, Defense +2. The fifth, who is the leader, has stats as a Robber Chief, page 211 in the *Core Rulebook*, but with (corruption: 1) and *Ritualist* (novice: *Faraway Writing*) instead of *Dominate*.

If the player characters expressly state that they pause on the southern side of the river to scan the far riverbank, they may detect the threat. Those who pass a [Vigilant -3] test will notice a well-concealed hut in one of the trees forming a grove about ten paces from the river. There are several ways to overcome this challenge.

Sneaking: Under cover of darkness it is possible to cross the river without being detected. If the characters do so individually they must all pass a [Discreet -1] test; if they move as a group only one

test is required, from the character with the lowest *Discreet* value. If they are detected, the guards will fire their crossbows.

Attacking: The players could of course let their characters attack the guard post. They might even find a way to shield themselves from enemy projectiles for the two turns it takes to reach the tree hut – allow them to be creative and reward all good ideas!

Running: Another feasible (but possibly less attractive) alternative is to rush straight across the river and find shelter on the other side. It is a distance of roughly 40 meters, which means that they could make it in two turns, if they spend both their actions on movement. During the first turn, one crossbow bolt will be fired at them; during the second there will be 1+1D3 (=D6/2 rounded upwards) bolts.

Keep in mind that if the characters choose this option, and continue forth without neutralizing the guards, the people at the Ice Witch's camp will be warned of their arrival (through the *Faraway Writing* ritual, known by the leaders of all bandit groups).

Swimming: If the characters go a few hundred meters upstream, a person with the *Bushcraft* trait/boon may swim across the twenty-meter-wide river and attach a rope on the northern side, making it possible for the others to cross. Because of the currents, a successful [Strong +5] test is required by both the swimmers and those using the rope. Those who fail are swept away by the currents and take 1D8 damage, before they can clamber up on the northern riverbank (*Armor* protects as usual).

THE TROUT

The Realm of the Order has long had a handful of secret agents stationed at Prios Pass. Their main

objective is to seek out refugees and persuade them to travel west to “*the free Realm of the Order*” rather than becoming “*slaves to the will of the heretical House Kohinoor*” – preferably capable and vigorous individuals, but all whose applications for a Queen’s Permit have been denied are welcome. They also stand ready to participate in other kinds of operations, armed or otherwise.

The agent who has been in the village the longest without being discovered or killed is a woman named Marella, working as a kitchen maid at Madam Flora’s tavern, the Trout. The player characters can trace her there thanks to the bloody cloth found at the scene of the ambush, in the female black cloak’s clutched fist – it is a piece of the apron which Marella wore underneath her coat during the attack, bloodied from a cut on her thigh. For the next few days she will be limping in a way which is detectable with a successful *Vigilant* test.

There are two ways for the player characters to find Marella: either by using rituals such as *Summoning* or *Heretic’s Trail* (note that she crossed water twice on her way back to the Trout from the scene of the ambush), or by borrowing one of the rangers’ bloodhounds (with or without involving a ranger). A bloodhound that smells the cloth and is guided through the village will pick up Marella’s scent, provided that it comes within twenty paces of the Trout. As for the *Summoning/Heretic’s Trail*, the ritualist master Toreo is willing to lend his expertise for only 12 thaler.

If the characters can identify Marella and take her aside for questioning, she just might crack – her weakness, if anything, is that she really likes being alive and finds it difficult to withstand psychological pressure. With credible threats, an equally credible promise of safe passage, and a successful [*Persuasive +3*] test, the whimpering agent divulges the following:

- She works for the Realm of the Order.
- Normally, her job is to persuade suitable people to choose the Realm as their new home, rather than Ambria.
- She is sometimes ordered to execute certain refugees from the homeland who try to enter Ambria.
- Two days ago she was contacted by a Father Orun of the Order of the Executioner. He had a letter from the Theologist, asking for her cooperation.
- She, Orun, and two others she did not know set up an ambush for two black cloaks and their prisoner; the attack was successful, apart from the fact that she was stabbed in the leg.

- She do not know the identity of the prisoner, but knows where to find her and Orun; they have been allowed to hide at one of the Ice Witch’s bandit camps, about a day’s march east of Prios Pass. Orun told her how to get there, in case he felt the need to summon her (how he would do that he did not say, but probably by using the powers of the Executioner).

BROTHER HUBERDO

If the player characters stop at the Trout before they head for the Ice Witch’s camp, they will be contacted by Brother Huberdo. He simply walks up to them in the street, stops them, introduces himself as Huberdo, and asks if they have time to talk.

Being the only reformist operative on site, with his mission about to fail, Huberdo needs help. With faith in the grace and guidance of Prios, he turns to the people he saw rummaging around the burnt-down tent after the abominations’ attack, well aware that they could be his death. His trust in the Sun God does not stop him from looking nervously about as they talk – something that can be detected with a successful *Vigilant* test.

Unless the characters have other suggestions, he takes them to the village sun temple. He enters the antechamber, turns left into a corridor, and continues through the third door on the left. They reach a bare prayer alcove, no more than 3x3 meters, meant for two meditating people at the most. But there is room for more, as long as they remain standing.

Worried that Mother Elsana will soon be out of reach, or that her abductor means her harm, Huberdo tells the characters everything he knows:

- He starts with the background – the exaltation of Prios, the resulting protests, Elsana’s imprisonment and the call for her public repentance.
- He then tells them about himself, and stresses that there are many others like him: people within the church who fight to reestablish the old interpretation of Prios’ will, and thereby let “the Prios of War” pass into oblivion. The only person he will mention by name is Father Sarvola.
- His mission is to make contact and secretly trace the prison transport. Using a mind stone he reports back to his brothers and sisters in Yndaros; the plan was to have Mother Elsana freed near the capital and brought to safety until she is pardoned.
- Finally, Huberdo asks the characters to help him; to find and free the falsely accused heretic, and join him in escorting her to Yndaros.

Act 3: The Night Lady

WHETHER THE **PLAYER** characters rely on their ability to track the prisoner through the mountains or take the detour through Prios Pass, they will eventually arrive at the Ice Witch's camp where Elsana and the monks are hiding. How they proceed from there is completely up to them; as usual, the Game Master must be prepared to reward clever plans/initiatives, and punish the foolish.

The Bandit Camp

THE ICE WITCH and her rebels have ten or so campsites, some larger than others, scattered across the mountains south of Ambria. This particular base is their most advanced one, actually established within the Queen's borders.

The camp is situated in a nearly round mountain basin, formed by a stream which for hundreds of years has eroded the limestone. The bottom is between 140 and 160 meters in diameter, and at ground level, the only way in is through the tree-laden ravine where the stream flows south toward the River Veloma. The surrounding cliffs are more or less steep, but can certainly be climbed. The only exceptions are the northern ravine and the practically vertical cliff to the east, in which caves were carved centuries ago, their entrances about ten meters from the ground.

There are about twenty permanent residents, mainly old people who no longer have the energy to move between different campsites and prefer to live in actual houses rather than tents or huts. Mountain goats are kept in a large, fenced-in area in the north, and in summer smaller crops are grown in the basin, especially on its southern slopes.

Aside from the fortified posting by the ravine in the south, the camp is guarded by four battle-trained jakaars who roam free among people's homes and along the perimeter. Of course, they are particularly alert at night.

Ravine and guard post

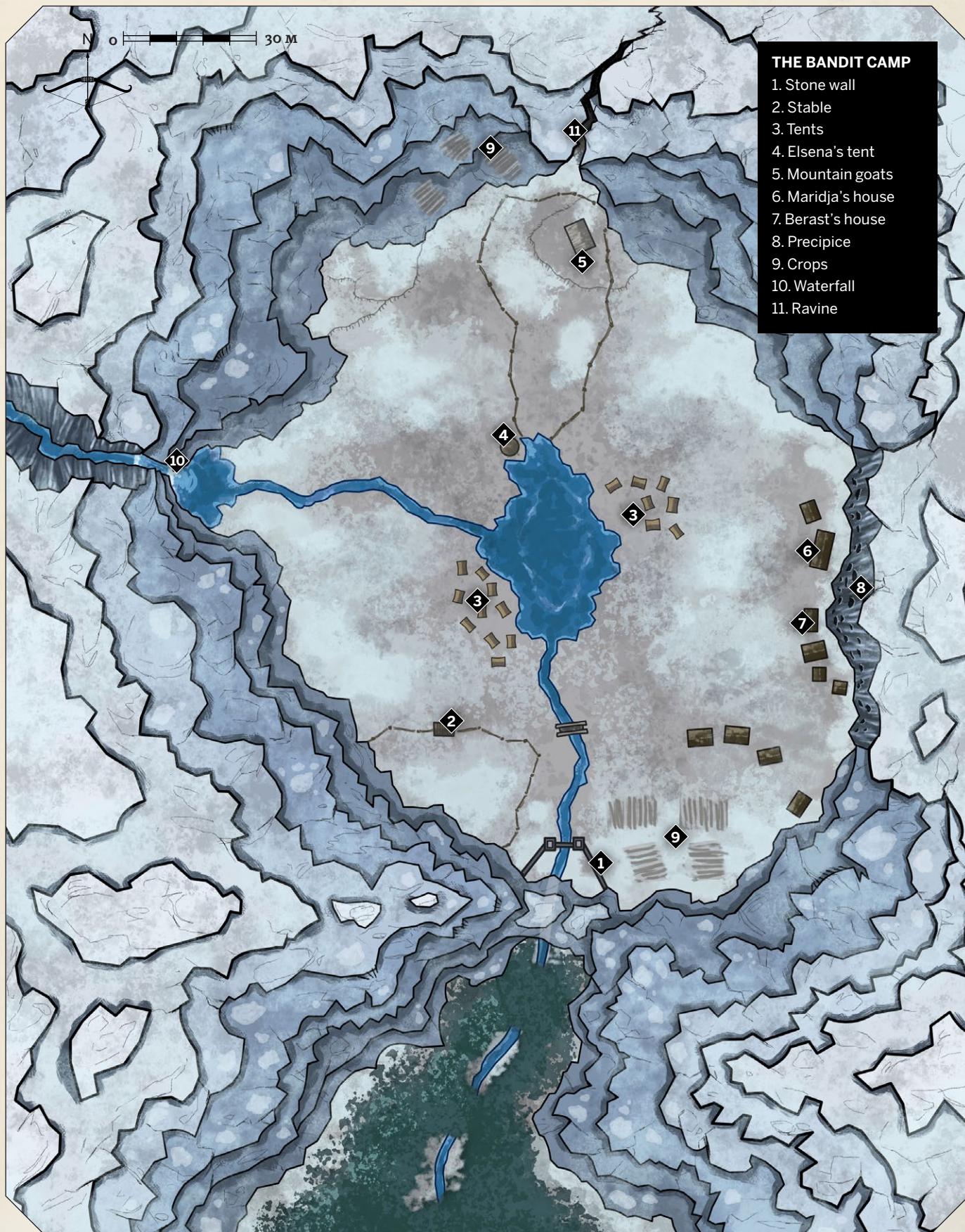
The ravine in the bisected cliff which the locals call The Kid Horns is almost five hundred meters

Jakaar, battle-trained

Battle-trained beasts are quite common among the clans in the region, and none more so than the wolf-like jakaar.

The barbarians have tamed these large canines for centuries, and for members of clan Odaiova it is common practice for every family to have at least one jakaar, to safeguard them at night and keep them company during the waking hours.

Race	Beast
Resistance	Ordinary
Traits	<i>Natural Weapon (II), Armored (I)</i>
Accurate 11 (-1), Cunning 7 (+3), Discreet 10 (0), Persuasive 5 (+5), Quick 13 (-3), Resolute 9 (+1), Strong 15 (-5), Vigilant 10 (0)	
Abilities	<i>Bodyguard (novice), Iron Fist (novice), Natural Warrior (adept)</i>
Weapons	Bite 5, 2 attacks at the same target
Armor	Wolf hide 2 (flexible)
Defense	-3
Toughness	15
Equipment	None
Shadow	Lush green (corruption: 0)
Tactics: The jakaars roaming the ravine are trained to mark anyone they do not recognize, by barking and trying to stop the intruder from escaping. They do not attack until they themselves are attacked, or one of their human masters orders them to.	



The Ice Witch

More information on the Ice Witch and her followers can be found in the third part of the *Throne of Thorns*, which focuses mainly on Yndaros. For the time being, know that Maridja is beginning to lose control of her rebellious robbers, primarily because she is starting to lose herself...

deep and overgrown with trees and underbrush, with flat slopes in both the east and the west. With a starting width of a few hundred meters, the ravine narrows until it finally ends in a cliff – or so it seems. Down by the ground there is a three-meter-high (and equally wide) tunnel leading into the basin where the rebels are encamped.

On the far side of the tunnel is a stone wall, three meters high, with a sturdy, two-meter-high double gate. The posting is manned at all times by five sentries, two of them up on the balustrade which runs along the inside of the wall. They have the stats of a Robber, page 211 in the *Core Rulebook*, with the addition of *Shield Fighter* (novice): Damage 5, Defense +2.

Stable

A small stable and a pen where visiting rebels can leave their horses.

Tents

Visiting rebels pitch their tents, made from hides and pelts, around the pond in the middle of the basin. Fires for cooking and social gatherings are lit spontaneously, depending on the current number of guests and where they make their provisional homes.

When the player characters arrive, 26 of the Ice Witch's followers are gathered there (along with 14 children and elderly people), most with stats as described above. However, five of them have the stats of a Robber Chief, page 211 in the *Core Rulebook*, but with (Corruption: 1) and Ritualist (novice: *Faraway Writing*) instead of *Dominate*.

Crops

In summertime, crops are grown in the basin, mostly the kind that can survive in the shade – cabbage, onions, beets and turnips. Those that require more sunshine are instead planted on the northern slopes.

Wooden houses

At the eastern end of the camp are ten modestly sized houses, made from wood with roofs of turf. Most are inhabited by the basin's permanent residents, while the others are used entirely for storage.

The largest one is the longhouse where Maridja and her followers stay whenever they visit the camp (during the adventure they are busy elsewhere). The smaller building next to it is the home of the camp's chief, Berast, and his family.

The precipice

There is a 70-meter-long section in the east where the mountain wall is extremely steep and up to a

hundred meters high. Roughly ten meters from the ground are a number of cave openings, leading into a large network of tunnels and grottos – some created naturally, others with pickaxes and sled-gehammers. Sturdy wooden ladders lean against the openings, to be used as an escape route in case of emergency. The caves are easily defended, with enough food and water supplies to withstand a longer siege. In truly dire situations it is possible to raze the entrances and flee downwards, into the Underworld – dangerous, precarious, and largely uncharted, but better than awaiting certain death.

No one knows who created the tunnels, or why, and the basin's current inhabitants do not care. Whoever they were left behind several mosaic walls and floors, now ravaged by time, and other walls with cuneiform symbols which would no doubt interest the wizards of Ordo Magica, not to mention treasure hunters in search of ancient riches and knowledge.

Elsana's tent

As outsiders, the agents of the Realm of the Order are only welcome at the camp because Maridja has given them permission to hide there. They have been assigned a spot by the pond, near the goat enclosure; they keep to themselves and plan on doing so for their entire two-week stay. The tent is protected by the *Sanctifying Rite* ritual, which blocks the use of rituals like *Clairvoyance* and *Summoning*.

The round tent has a diameter of five meters, a single entrance (toward the pond), and inside a curtain divides its interior into two sections. Elsana lives in the one to the left from the entrance, and the warrior monks Orun and Adelena in the other. Their agreement with Maridja allows them to share the other residents' food and supplies; nevertheless, they try to make do with what they have to avoid unnecessary conflicts.

One monk is always on watch throughout the night, guarding the others while they sleep and keeping the fire alive inside the tent, in a pit roughly a meter from the entrance (the curtain starts yet another meter further in).

Elsana, priestess

"You reap what you sow."

After more than twenty years in the dark, one would expect Elsana to be a broken woman. But she is a daughter of the Earthmother, and as such, she spent her captivity in her mother's embrace. Sure, her body may be weak, her skin as pale as snow. But in her mind she is still the same – a priestess who, with unshakable faith, is ready to fight for the restoration of Prios. For that is her conviction: the

sun priests and the theurges of today are the true heretics; their interpretation of Prios is a false god and a breeder of evil.

Elsana wants to go with Orun to the Realm of the Order, but if someone convinces her that the Reformists exist and are working together with Queen Korinthia, she may be persuaded to stay in Ambria. Going back to prison is not an option; she would rather spend eternity in her mother's embrace.

Manner	Grim and suspicious		
Race	Human (Ambrian)		
Resistance	Strong		
Traits	Privileged		
Accurate 9 (+1), Cunning 11 (-1), Discreet 10 (0), Persuasive 15 (-5), Quick 5 (+5), Resolute 15 (-5), Strong 7 (+3), Vigilant 10 (0)			
Abilities	Anathema (adept), Blessed Shield (master), Blessings (master), Earth Shot (master), Earthbinding (adept), Exceptionally Resolute (adept), Loremaster (master), Ritualist (adept: Exorcism, Sanctifying Rite, Purging Fire)		
Weapons	None		
Bepansring	Blessed robe 2 (flexible)		
Försvar	+5		
Toughness	10	Pain Threshold	4
Equipment	None		
Shadow	Various shades of golden brown, like fire reflected in a gold nugget (Corruption: 0)		

Tactics: Elsana is no stranger to combat; she spent years at the front during the initial stages of The Great War. If there is time, she surrounds herself and nearby allies with a *Blessed Shield*, after which she tries to *Earthbind* as many enemies as possible before crushing them with her mother's *Earth Shots*.

Strategies

HOW THE CHARACTERS approach the camp depends on whether they have tracked the fugitives through the wilderness or pressured Marella into revealing the camp's location. If they go through the ravine, those who sneak close enough to notice the tunnel and the guard post must pass a *Discreet* test to avoid being detected; if they come from up on the slopes a [*Discreet* +3] test will suffice, as long as they explicitly state that they are being careful.

Note that the latter alternative gives them a chance to do some reconnaissance before they act.

The Warrior Monks

"Rest in peace."

Both Orun and Adelena belong to the Order of the Executioner and were sent by the leader of the Order's Land, the Theologist, to free Elsana. They are willing to die to complete their mission, convinced that Elsana's freedom will please all the Young Gods, including the Executioner, as well as the long-suffering population of their realm. The only person who could persuade them to lay down their axes is Elsana herself.

Manner	Serious, vigilant		
Race	Human (the Order)		
Resistance	Challenging		
Traits	Contacts (the Order of the Executioner)		
Accurate 13 (-3), Cunning 7 (+3), Discreet 5 (+5), Persuasive 9 (+1), Quick 10 (0), Resolute 11 (-1), Strong 15 (-5), Vigilant 10 (0)			
Abilities	Bodyguard (adept), Feat of Strength (novice), Man-at-arms (adept), Recovery (master), Steadfast (master), Two-handed Force (adept)		
Weapons	Executioner's Axe 7 (deep impact, unwieldy, massive)		
Armor	Blessed robe 3 (flexible)		
Defense	0		
Toughness	20	Pain Threshold	8
Equipment	Field equipment, food, 5+1D10 silver coins (equivalent to thaler but carrying the symbol of the Young Gods, the Aureola)		
Shadow	A dull, pale yellow, like unpolished brass (Corruption: 0)		

Tactics: The monks will focus on protecting Elsana. If one of them is badly injured, he or she may withdraw from the battle to recuperate (Recovery).

If they watch the camp for at least an hour, they may all make a *Vigilant* test. For each character that succeeds, one of the following pieces of information is revealed:

- Watchdogs (*Beast Lore: Jaakars*) are prowling the perimeter, two groups of two beasts each.
- A person (Orun) whose earth-brown robe differs from what everyone else is wearing, emerges from the isolated tent north-west of the pond, near the goat enclosure.

- Two young men are each carrying a crate of supplies from one of the wooden houses in the east toward the isolated tent. They spit repeatedly into contents of the crates, smirking maliciously.

When the characters have gained an overview of the camp's activities they must decide how to proceed. Below are four alternatives; should your gaming group come up with something else, you must try to keep up and adapt to whatever situation arises!

ATTACKING

Characters who appreciate a good fight may suggest an all-out attack against the camp. This could actually succeed – with the help of the enemy's enemy!

One option is to contact the Rangers and Captain Egusta at Prios Pass. Reinforcements have already arrived at the village in the form of returning patrols; a larger force is on its way from the capital's garrison. She may even let the characters decide the fugitive's fate, if she is given information regarding the Ice Witch's whereabouts and allowed to arrest the criminals who poisoned the soup with krusean berries.

The second obvious choice is the Twilight Monastery. Mother Dealia can, on short notice (24 hours), summon a force of forty black cloaks and ten theurges to apprehend the fugitive. However, this would give the player characters very little control over what happens to Elsana.

The players might think of other suitable allies. For example, the three templars have recovered well enough to hire a group of veterans among the people at the refugee camp and, at the very least, create a diversion by charging through the ravine, while the player characters find another way in. But the knights have one condition: the heretic dies, or the characters will have made enemies for life.

We suggest that the allies, whoever they are, take on the robbers while the characters deal with Elsana and the warrior monks. The Game Master gives a summary of the larger battle, and the characters' failure or success determines the outcome of it all.

Veterans

"I have fought for my place in Ambria!"

Segri Elderra persuades 15 newly-arrived war veterans to join her in battle against the heretics, by promising to vouch for them as they apply for a Queen's Permit. Given the Templars' secession from the Curia this will hardly make any difference, but the veterans do not know that. They will do everything they can to earn the noble woman's recommendation!

Manner	Excessively proud	
Race	Human (Ambrian)	
Resistance	Ordinary	
Traits	Contacts (the Ambrian army)	
Accurate 15 (-5), Cunning 7 (+3), Discreet 5 (+5), Persuasive 9 (+1), Quick 11 (-1), Resolute 10 (0), Strong 13 (-3), Vigilant 10 (0)		
Abilities	<i>Man-at-arms (adept), Recovery (novice), Shield Fighter (novice)</i>	
Weapons	Sword 5	
Armor	Chainmail 4	
Defense	-3 (shield)	
Toughness	13	Pain Threshold 7
Equipment	Jug of liquor (for the nerves), 1D6 shillings	
Shadow	Scratched and dented copper (corruption: 0)	

Tactics: The veterans have seen plenty of combat and will not back down from a fight. But they lack finesse, and might well surrender – cursing bitterly – if they believe the opposition to be too great.

NEGOTIATING WITH THE CAMP CHIEF

Camp Chief Berast is not thrilled with having freeloaders around – they put further strain on the already scarce winter supplies, without pulling their weight at the camp. And while he himself finds it tolerable, many of his people do not, which could become a problem.

The clan may be led by Maridja, but it is certainly not a dictatorship; the camp chiefs are quite free to govern their settlements as they see fit. Moreover, Berast is already displeased with Maridja for having restricted their freedom to plunder along the River Noora and sending them less supplies than previous winters. But he is a greedy negotiator, which the player characters will soon learn.

If the characters approach the camp through the ravine without appearing threatening, the guards at the posting will seize their weapons and take them to Berast's house; if they also explain the reason for their visit and ask to be kept away from Elsana and the monks, the guards will lead them in a quarter circle along the mountain wall.

As long as they offer him something valuable in return, the Camp Chief will let the characters do whatever they want to Maridja's guests. He simply orders the rest of the camp not to interfere with what happens on the north-western shore of the pond. Their bargaining chips may include a large

sum of thaler, an artifact, or information regarding (and help to attack) a place full of something he wants or needs.

Should Berast's stats become relevant, use those of a Guard Warrior on page 216 in the *Core Rulebook*, but with *Vigilant* 7 (+3), *Persuasive* 11 (-1), and the addition of *Leader* (novice).

SNEAKING

People who are good at moving stealthily can enter the basin at night and head straight to Elsana's tent – advisably by rappelling down the crack in the far north and subsequently sneaking through the goat enclosure. The Game Master will have to decide what *Discreet* tests the characters must pass depending on how they choose to approach the camp. As a suggestion, the example above would first require a successful *Quick* test not to fall while climbing (1D6 damage)

and then a *Discreet* test not to agitate the goats into making noise and drawing the attention of the four jaakars roaming the area.

Should there be screams, turmoil or fighting as the characters enter the tent, it will take 1D4+1 turns for the jaakars to arrive, and another 1D4+1 turns for four guards to come running. 1D6+1 turns later, the tent is completely surrounded by the Camp Chief and his warriors.

WAITING

Another viable option (albeit a less epic one) is to sit back and wait for the fugitive and her escort to leave the camp. This will take ten days, and should not be entirely uneventful – although they are in Ambrian territory, the border regions are not without dangers, particularly in winter when packs of predators are sometimes seen as far north as on the southern shore of the River Doudram.

Face to Face

WHAT WILL HAPPEN if/when the player characters find themselves in a negotiation with Elsana and her escort? Such a situation could arise regardless of the strategies described above: following a negotiation with Berast, after one or more player characters have snuck up to the tent, or in the area outside the basin where the characters are lying in wait. Conversation could even be an option during a full-scale attack, for example if one of the opposing parties is (for the most part) defeated.

THE NIGHT LADY

How the player characters' conversation with the Night Lady develops is largely up to them, but it is also important to keep in mind what Elsana hopes to accomplish and to what extent she is willing to compromise. The Game Master may assume the following:

- Elsana wants to live; having been imprisoned for more than two decades she wants to spend her final years in freedom, doing everything she can to vindicate herself.
- Vindication means crushing the image of Prios which now dominates Ambria; the one she refused to accept and still considers a heretical distortion devised by warmongers and power-hungry nobles (especially House Kohinoor) to subdue the people.
- Going back to prison is not an option; she would rather fall into “*the Mother's embrace*” (i.e. die).
- She likes the idea of contributing to the development of the Realm of the Order, but more than anything she wants to see the Prios of War and all his apostles fall.

This she will work towards, either through the agents of the Order or by working directly with Deseba and, eventually, the Queen.

A FINAL BATTLE

If the player characters meet with Elsana under peacefully circumstances and allow the heretical priestess to choose her own fate, the Game Master should consider presenting the gaming group with a final challenge: a hostile military force that comes between Elsana and her freedom.

Whether this is even possible, and if so, who the attackers are, depends on the characters' previous actions. If the characters attacked the bandit camp along with allies who have their own plans for the heretic, it is of course those very same allies that have come for her now. The black cloaks and the templars want her captured/killed, while the Rangers hold her and her escort responsible for the massacre at Prios Pass, or regard them as foreign spies (in other words, they will not honor any previous agreement).

Otherwise, the characters could have been trailed after having met with representatives of a certain faction and happened to rouse suspicion – the snow-covered ground makes it possible to track someone over long distances, thereby avoiding the risk of detection. For example, the black cloaks could have followed them after a visit to the Twilight Monastery or the Sun Temple. Other possibilities are that the templars had Gromeo, the Rangers or some other scout, follow their trail; if so, the templars will be coming for the heretic and the

Rangers will be determined to wipe out everyone living in the camp.

How such a scenario transpires and develops must be determined on a case-by-case basis, but as a suggestion, the characters and Elsana could receive a timely warning – Berast's scouts have spotted the approaching (or awaiting) threat, and are kind enough to notify them. In the battle that follows, the characters must fight the enemy leader

and his/her closest warriors, and the outcome of their battle determines what happens to Elsana and the warrior monks. Appropriate resistance for the characters could be:

- One Templar and PC number of Veterans (page 23)
- One Ranger Captain and PC number of Rangers (page 212 in the *Core Rulebook*)
- PCx2 Black Cloaks (page 214 in the *Core Rulebook*)

Aftermath

THE HOWLING OF Damned Gods is an adventure where the player characters must take a stand on issues that concern many of Ambria's powerful and influential factions. It is up to the Game Master to decide what consequences their choices and actions will have, perhaps based on the rules for Scheming described in *Karvosti – The Witch Hammer* (see pages 58–60).

After a few initial words on the allocation of *Experience*, we offer some suggestions on how different outcomes might affect the fates and future adventures of the player characters. Last but not least, we want to share some ideas for further adventures, based on the characters, locations, and events featured in *the Howling of Damned Gods*.

EXPERIENCE

If one assumes (as suggested in previous adventures) that each header in the adventure text constitutes one scene, *the Howling of Damned Gods* should provide the player characters with between 14 and 17 *Experience* points. However, the outcome may vary depending on what route the characters take in the second act and how they tackle the challenges at the bandit camp. The amount of *Experience* earned may also be adjusted according to the preferences of your gaming group, should you want to speed up or slow down the characters' progression.

ELSANA'S FATE

As long as there are witnesses to spread the word, the player characters' actions during this adventure will most likely affect their relations with many of Ambria's powerful factions. This mainly depends on what happens to Mother Elsana at the end of the story.

Killing the priestess will certainly please the templars, but anger almost everyone else, though for different reasons and to varying degrees. No one will be more outraged than the leaders and agents of the Realm of the Order, followed by the Reformists within the Sun Church (Deseba, Sarvola, and by extension the Queen). The Order will put a price on the characters' heads, while the

other factions become significantly more difficult to deal with in future meetings and negotiations.

On the other hand, should the characters arrest the heretic and turn her over to one of the Ambrian factions, this will obviously evoke different reactions depending on who gets her (except for the Realm of the Order, which reacts as mentioned above). Leaving her with the black cloaks will infuriate the templars and the Reformists, and vice versa. Note that characters who have encountered the sun knights at the refugee camp, but still deliver Elsana to someone else, will become their mortal enemies for life.

Finally, the characters might choose to let Elsana go. Should this become known, it could make their future lives in Ambria much more complicated. The Sun Church will call them “*the sons and daughters of the Night Lady*” and brand them heretics. The templars agree with this judgement. The Reformists (including Korinthia) understand and accept the characters' decision, but are still disappointed to have lost such an important ally. The only ones celebrating are the people of the distant Realm of the Order, which will probably be of little benefit to the characters.

FURTHER ADVENTURES

In the wake of the adventure, there are several seeds that can be cultivated into adventures of their own. The abovementioned reactions to the characters' handling of Elsana could result in them being hunted or wanted in a way that forces them to act. There is not much to be done about the templars, but perhaps the Sun Church can be appeased into retracting their accusations of heresy if the characters perform some task “*in the name of Prios*” – for instance hunting down a wanted cult leader or a raging abomination.

The caves at the bandit camp can also be used as a basis for further adventures. The characters may want to head down and explore the Underworld, or interpret the paintings and mosaics on the mountain walls which could lead to an interesting



treasure hunt, in the mountains or further north. Perhaps one painting describes the grand palace from which the lord of the region fled during the fall of Symbaroum?

Last but not least: if the characters have come to Prios Pass to meet a relative/colleague, they could obviously dig deeper into the “grave misdeeds” he or she claims to have discovered. Perhaps a more

thorough examination of his or her belongings reveals clues about the misdeeds in question? Perhaps the characters are approached by people who know that they were contacted by the relative/colleague – to ask for help, or to silence them? They could even travel across the mountains, to the relative’s/colleague’s former home in the withering Alberetor, in the hope of uncovering the mystery.

Appendix

THIS CLOSING CHAPTER contains new rules that are relevant to the adventure, but also a more detailed presentation of the Young Gods. The Game Master is welcome to use the latter to create homebrew adventures, or as inspiration when creating heretical NPCs. Of course, the information will also be interesting to those who wish to understand the history of Ambria and the current conflicts within the Sun Church.

ABILITY: BLESSINGS

Blessings represent the mystical tradition taught and practiced by all mystically inclined priests from the faraway Realm of the Order. In essence, it combines powers from both *Witchcraft* and *Theurgy* with a variety of blessings unique to the clergy of the Young Gods.

Note that the tradition itself will be described in more detail in future books.

Novice **Action: Special.** The priest no longer suffers permanent Corruption when learning blessings at Novice level, nor when learning the rituals of the tradition.

Despite this, the character has no protection against the temporary Corruption that comes from performing the blessings and rituals of the tradition.

Adept **Action: Special.** The priest no longer suffers permanent Corruption when learning blessings at Adept level. The Adept has also learned to use the holy powers and rituals according to the will of the gods, and now only suffers one (1) temporary Corruption when performing them.

Master **Action: Special.** The priest's profound insight into the divine increases the effect of all healing and holy powers by 1D4, including damage dealt against Abominations and Undead. The priest suffers no Corruption when learning blessings at master level.

MYSTICAL POWER: EARTH SHOT

Material: A holy symbol

With wild gestures and chanting song, the mystic can make the earth itself attack those who threaten a servant of the gods – rocks are pulled from underneath soil and grass, and hurled forcefully at the unrighteous target.

Novice **Action: Active.** The mystic pulls a sharp-edged boulder from the earth and hurls it at a target. With a successful [Resolute←Quick] test the attack hits, dealing 1D8 damage.

Adept **Action: Active.** Like Novice, but the mystic pulls 1D4 boulders from the ground, which may be hurled at either one or multiple targets. Each rock counts as a separate attack.

Master **Action: Active.** Like Adept, but instead of boulders, swarms of smaller rocks are hurled forcefully at the victim/victims. The projectiles are small and sharp enough to hit their target through tiny gaps, creases, and cracks, thereby ignoring Armor.

MYSTICAL POWER: EARTHBINDING

Material: A fistful of soil

Stone, soil, plants and ore can bind those who threaten a servant of the gods. The mystic can let the unrighteous sink into the ground, deep enough to prevent all movement, possibly in such a tight grip that it harms the target.

Novice	Action: Free. Once per turn, with a successful <i>Resolute</i> test, the mystic can let a target sink into, and get stuck in, the ground. The bound creature is unable to move, but may use ranged weapons and mystical powers. The creature remains bound until the mystic loses concentration or fails a <i>[Resolute-Strong]</i> test.
Adept	Action: Free. Once per turn the mystic can establish a chain of earthbinds. If the mystic manages to bind a target with a <i>Resolute</i> test, he or she may attempt to bind another one, and so on until an attempt fails. Affected targets remain bound until the mystic loses concentration or fails a <i>[Resolute-Strong]</i> test.
Master	Action: Free. Like Adept, but the ground is clamped so tightly around the victim's legs that he or she also takes 1D6 damage per turn (ignoring <i>Armor</i>).

ARTIFACT: THE LONG HAMMER THUNDER
No one knows the origin of the long hammer named Thunder by its current owner. Raharax found it shortly after having woken from his latest hibernation, in the nearby cocoon of a troll who clearly had not survived its transition from rage troll to liege troll. Perhaps the hammer comes from Küam Zamok, but if so, it must have been forged in Symbarian times and brought to the dwarven

realm by its founders as they fled the downfall of the empire.

Like other weapons of its kind, the massive, yet flexible Thunder has the qualities *Bastard Weapon*, *Massive*, and *Precise*, but the negative quality *Unwieldy* has been removed (value: 500 thaler). In addition, the hammer comes with two special abilities for its wielder to make use of:

Armor breaker: The master who has bound the hammer to himself/herself may after each attack, successful or parried, attempt to crush the enemy's metal armor or shield. The attempt is performed like an extra attack – damage is rolled as usual; if the outcome is higher than the armor's *Armor* value, the *Armor* value is permanently decreased by 1D4. If the outcome is 6 or higher the attack renders the enemy's shield completely useless, forcing its user to throw it away.

Armor breaker can be used repeatedly against the same target.

Action: Reaction

Corruption: 1D4

Synchronization: If its master has the *Hammer Rhythm* ability, Thunder can adopt perfectly to the user's and the enemy's movements and hit with maximum effect. The synchronization deals +1D6 damage and lasts until the scene ends or the master changes target.

Action: Free

Corruption: 1D6

Before the Young

No one ever talks about what existed before the Young Gods. In the public mind it was a time of chaos, destruction, and perpetual torment; a time when survival was all that humans could hope for. To the theologians of Ordo Magica the question is irrelevant. But if one pushes them and demands to be told why the Lifegiver, the Pathfinder, and the others are called the "Young", they will probably answer that the gods were named in relation to the raging creatures who dictated humanity's early existence, eons ago, before the cultures of Symbaroum and the one by the eastern sea flourished and died.

The Young Gods

THE GREAT WAR brought about a radical change in the Alberians' attitude toward religion and spirituality. Before the war, people worshipped a pantheon of godlike principles called the Young Gods, whom they believed could help them through the challenges of everyday life. Sometimes the gods would demand something in return – a small offering, a prayer (sung or spoken), or a promise of future deeds – but they were not worshipped, and were generally regarded as sympathetic to their human devotees.

Most of this changed with the war. Just after King Ynedar's death the sun priest Abramar had a revelation. He never doubted that it was the Lifegiver who visited his dreams, even though the god referred to himself by one of his older names: Prios – the First/Highest/One; a name that had already been reestablished by the nobles of the congregation called the Vestals of Prios. Inspired by his revelation, Abramar wrote the Lightbringer – a book that describes Prios' nature and sets out the laws of the sun.

Five years later, in the middle of a meeting with her war council, Queen Korinthia of Kohinoor

collapsed. As she regained consciousness, the Queen announced that Prios had come to her with word of Father Abramar's writings and offered his assistance in their righteous battle against darkness. But the Lifegiver also let her know that he was dying, and that he needed the humans' help to grow well, free, and strong. Most importantly, the people had to abandon the Young Gods (except Prios); for according to the Lightbringer, these were merely aspects of the Eternal Night, sent to steal the power that comes from human faith and belief. In short: Prios seemed like humanity's only chance to defeat the creatures of the night, but in order for him to aid in their battle against the Dark Lords, all Alberians would have to submit themselves to his laws, fulfill their duties with diligence and zeal, and put their trust in the priesthood of the Sun.

Before long, their society as a whole had been reformed. The bond between the Sun Church and the crown was strengthened manifold; for instance, the Queen and her administration adjusted the laws of the land in accordance with Prios' decrees. And

what is more, she established an order of warriors to serve his church: the Knights of the Dying Sun, also known as the Templars.

However, on a personal level, the enthusiasm with which the Exaltation was received varied greatly from person to person. The vast majority wholeheartedly welcomed the Sun God's promise of assistance, and did everything they could to contribute to his recovery and strength. Many others did their best to appear obedient, while secretly remaining devoted to the Young Gods. But there were also those who refused to submit and chose to flee what they considered a lie devised to enslave the people. Some even went so far as to publicly denounce the Queen as a heretic and a mistress of evil.

This section presents the greatest of the Young Gods, more thoroughly than the introduction found in the adventure *The Bell Tolls for Kastor*. Aside from describing the character, domain, and symbols of each respective god, we provide examples of places in Ambria where their presence remains strong. Worshipping one or more of the Young Gods is a crime, in both a legal and ecclesiastical sense, but since notorious heretics like Sarvola and Baron Mergai Dekanor have still not been punished, more and more people are following their example. Unfortunately (for them), it is often much more difficult to escape the stake if one lacks both powerful friends and massive public support...

PRIOS

Symbol: Sun or a bundle of sun rays

Name variations: The names Lifegiver and Sol/Sola are often used by those who still worship the older version of Prios.

Domain: The spark of life, the hearthfire, and universal love

Practice: People worship the Lifegiver in the hope of increased fertility (both in humans and livestock), answered love, and relief from spiritual and physical

ailments. To this day, many believe sunshine to be the best cure for all sorts of maladies. The Lifegiver is also regarded as a just defender of the sanctity of life, often worshipped by poor people praying for their daily bread and improved health.

Present-day worship: Father Sarvola at Thistle Hold is obviously the Lifegiver's most famous representative in contemporary Ambria, but his revived doctrine has spread to other parts of the kingdom as well, and gained ground within the Sun Church itself. Even Queen Korinthia has secret plans to renounce the Lawgiver in favor of the Lifegiver – if only to get rid of the ambitious First Father Jeseebegai. It should also be mentioned that Duke Ynedar of New Beretor is growing increasingly convinced that "*the Prios of War*" no longer has a place in the Ambrian realm; the Exaltation was a necessary evil during the war, but the time has come for the Sun to once again shine upon all its children.

THE EARTHMOTHER

Symbol: Goblet or a well

Name variations: Aside from the variation Mother Earth, the Earthmother is sometimes referred to by her older names; Mylla and Torva.

Domain: Nature, harvest, and safe childbirth

Practice: The Earthmother is worshipped in times of sowing and planting, as well as during pregnancies and childbirth. It is also believed that she can still earthquakes, heal sickly or unfruitful lands, and correct disturbances in the seasonal rhythm.

Present-day worship: Large parts of the Ambrian population are farmers, either working their own lands or those of wealthier landowners. It must be very rare for such people, even those living in Prios Domain, not to give the Earthmother a thought while sowing their crops. Since the templars razed the free settlement of Earthmoor to the ground in the year 17, there have been two major cults in Ambria – one in Kurun and the other centered around Count Hastorio Arobel and his estate, located near the river Noora's inlet into the Doudram. Both are unknown to the public and strongly (and secretly) opposed to the Curia's interpretation of Prios' nature and laws.

The Punishment for Heresy

In today's Ambria, to publicly worship the Executioner or the Pathfinder is to be a cultist. The law, the Church, and most of the country's population agree that such actions contribute to the weakened condition of Prios and the spread of darkness. Children may get off with a severe caning; everyone else who proves guilty of idolatry must face the purging flames of the sacred stake. Officially, this applies to nobles and common folk alike, but in the nobles' case it is remarkably common to have been tricked or seduced by some lowborn heretic – who must therefore take the noble's place at the stake.

THE EXECUTIONER

Symbol: The double-axe as a stylized rune

Name variations: The Executioner is sometimes referred to by older names such as the Punisher, the Hangman, or simply Death.

Domain: Punishment, honesty, and just or natural death.

Practice: The Executioner is worshipped in times of turmoil and war, by warriors hoping for a glorious death and by civilians hoping to survive. Elders and

their relatives pray when someone is dying, and the Executioner can supposedly help victims of crime to hunt down the culprit, and bring vindication to the wrongly accused.

Present-day worship: Aside from quiet prayers, whispered out of habit or precaution, there are currently a handful of groups exclusively devoted to the Executioner. One such is the Yndaros-based Headsmen – a secret society of twenty or so like-minded individuals, led by Captain Andonio of the city watch. Its members always wear full executioner's robes when attending gatherings or performing assignments, and therefore do not know each other's real identities; should someone be captured, or the group infiltrated by spies, the others need not fear being exposed. The group's mission is twofold: to counteract the Sun Church and its heretical interpretation of the Executioner, and deliver justice where the law cannot. The latter often involves punishing nobles who have escaped justice because of their status – either through physical beating or destruction of property.

THE PATHFINDER

Symbol: A triangle of twigs

Name variations: As one of the most beloved of the Young Gods, the Pathfinder has been given many names over the centuries: the Seeker, the Gamekeeper, the Trapper, to name a few.

Domain: Luck, hunting, and safe travel

Practice: The Pathfinder is worshipped in all things belonging to his domain – when embarking on journeys of any length, hunting game or birds, and in all situations where the outcome can be attributable to chance (for example during different kinds of games and contests).

Present-day worship: In the shadow of Sarvola and his attempt to reestablish Prios as the god of universal love, Thistle Hold is the place where the Pathfinder's following is at its strongest. Many merchants are secretly selling triangle symbols to gamblers and fortune hunters, and with the right contacts (and attitude), one may be invited to one of the feast-like masses which are sometimes held in Davokar. The fact that the Rangers have occasionally raided such gatherings only seems to have increased their popularity – even though a handful of mass participants have been arrested and burned at the stake.

THE WIDLING

Symbol: A braid

Name variations: The Wildling is sometimes referred to as the Artist or the Dreamer, depending on which aspect is cherished the most.

Domain: Passion, inspiration, and visions

Practice: The Wildling is mostly worshipped by artists in need of inspiration, but sometimes one can also hear authorities at different levels whispering prayers to the god of inspiration, asking for guidance and help in solving difficult situations, whether social or practical in nature.

Present-day worship: The feasts sometimes held to honor the Pathfinder are nothing compared to the parties of the Wildling. In Agrella, a large group of artists and freethinkers arrange so called Wildling Feasts, behind closed doors and shutters. Vast quantities of intoxicants and recreational drugs are consumed, tales are told, songs are sung, and the nature of existence is dissected. Rumor has it that many of Ordo Magica's scholars often attend these events; even that the former archmage Elionara Yellowcat is one of the organizers. The First Father has recently ordered tougher measures to be taken against gluttony and promiscuity, and the burning of a heretic archmage would of course please him enormously.

THE ARCH-BUILDER

Symbol: An arch or an open gate

Name variations: Craftsmen of different kinds sometimes give the Arch-Builder names with the epithet "the Greatest": The Greatest Mason, Potter, Builder, Seamstress, and so on – or simply the Great Creator.

Domain: Creation, building, and forging

Practice: In Alberetor, the symbol of the Arch-Builder could be found in every craftsman's workshop, but ordinary people also prayed to the Great Creator before tackling the day's reparations, constructions, and handicrafts. The Arch-Builder arch is never seen in contemporary Ambria, but the whispers can still be heard in smithies, bakeries, and at construction sites.

Present-day worship: The elitist craftsmen's order known as the Higher Academy was dismantled as a result of the Exaltation, at least officially. The members who remained in Alberetor repented publicly and declared the order dissolved, but their passion for free creation never waned. According to Prios (of War), the craftsman's task is to cultivate nature in a way that benefits humanity; the Higher Academy claimed the right to cultivate for the sake of cultivating, and perfect the raw material irrespective of utility or worth.

Today the Higher Academy is legendary among craftsmen, and its aim often a secret ideal. And of course the organization does live on, in the shadows. For most people its existence remains an unsubstantiated rumor, but for one or two craftsmen a year the rumor is confirmed. They are invited to the order's headquarters in Mergile, where they

must pledge allegiance to the Arch-Builder and condemn the “laws of the Curia” before twenty or so members and the current head of the order, the Master Seamstress Alma.

THE SEAFARER

Symbol: A ship or an anchor

Name variations: Older names like the Mariner or the Helmsman are sometimes used by Ambrians who remember the coasts of Alberetor; younger people use the Seafarer.

Domain: Sea travel, fishing, and storms

Practice: Usually, the Seafarer has to make do with a quiet prayer before the boat or ship goes to sea, but sometimes he is also presented with offerings in the form of pastries, flowers, or a few drops of blood. Longer prayers and promises of future gifts might help when trying to calm a raging storm (on both land and sea).

Present-day worship: All Ambrian vessels are marked with at least one discreet Seafarer symbol – the Sun Church can hardly accuse someone of heresy because of an anchor carved into the hull. But some sailors are still fully convinced that their welfare depends on the Seafarer’s favor. One such example is the crew of the two-masted river boat Esmeralda, led by Captain Madero. Madero is one of those who think that the Lawgiver was invented by the crown to force people into submission, and his (carefully selected) crew always gather in the captain’s cabin before embarking on a longer journey, to pray to the Seafarer and his brother Sol for favorable conditions. As soon as the Esmeralda leaves the dock, a ceremonial goblet of blood is poured over the railing – something that, were it ever discovered, would definitely constitute heresy.

THE GUARDIAN

Symbol: A wall or a tower

Name variations: The Mason is sometimes used when defenses are being built, while those who keep sensitive secrets or engage in secretive activities may appeal to the Veiler or the Shadow.

Domain: Protection, safety, and secrets

Practice: It was common practice in Alberetor to carve the Guardian’s symbol into the bases of walls and towers, and honor him with work songs during the construction. Secret items or documents were thought to be extra safe when covered by a veil embroidered with one of the god’s symbols.

Present-day worship: One could always go to the Guardian’s temple in old Alberetor for help with hiding objects, documents, and other things best kept secret. This tradition lives on through secret temples in Yndaros and Thistle Hold. In the latter

case, the aged Father Marald runs a hidden chapel in his basement inside Haloban’s ring, near a tavern Brew. And below the basement are three more levels, full of items that have been left in his care. Their owners never contacted Marald directly, but through one of his three initiated followers – two women and a youngling who are very careful about whom they offer the Guardian’s services. The question is how long it will be before the chapel is discovered.

THE HOSTESS

Symbol: An eye or a butterfly

Name variations: Alternative names such as the Lover, Desire, and the Temptress are mainly used by those who focus on giving and receiving pleasure.

Domain: Cookery, beauty, and pleasure

Practice: A pinch of salt or sugar, an extra flower in your hair, or a careful breath in your lover’s ear is all it takes to receive the assistance of the Hostess.

Present-day worship: In Yndaros a group of young men have rallied around a distorted interpretation of the Hostess. They all come from humble backgrounds, and most of them spend their days as builders, waiters, and dockworkers. But twice a year they gather in a shrine devoted to the Temptress (actually a decorated warehouse) to prepare for “the Night of Conquest”. Their goal is to sneak into some fancy event and find themselves a wealthy man or woman to lead astray; as they reunite the following day, the one who can boast of having received the most extravagant lover’s gift has earned the right to call himself the Temptress’ Ward. So far, all victims have kept quiet about what happened (probably out of shame), but that luck is bound to run out sooner or later.

RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

The examples of present-day worship mentioned above all refer to groups that are focused on one particular Young God. In old Alberetor the gods were often worshipped as a family, rather than as individuals. Their holy places were not called temples, but temple cities, regardless of whether there were several buildings or just one – the largest ones in Kandoria and Berendoria consisted of a magnificent building for each of the gods. In fact, such communities also exist in today’s Ambria, though rarely in its largest cities.

One example is the Temple of the Many, a congregation in Kastor whose members gather underground to hold mass. The Temple of the Many, once common in the south, can be found in other places as well – mainly rural villages in the duchies of Kasandrien and Narugor. In many cases even the local sun priest has joined the congregation, which would of course never be tolerated if the Curia ever found out about it.

It is as I feared: the Master Weaver and his apprentices in the wagon behind. They are going. They are guards, escorting a prisoner. A woman. Old and hunched. Pale as sugar. And she saw me. She pierced me with her bloodshot eyes. Just for a second, like the stab of a knife. Or a cut. An intense expression, but what it meant I do not know. Perhaps it was hatred. Perhaps a warning, a threat. For a moment I thought she wanted to eat me. Or maybe it was a cry for help.

I will not get involved. Not tell anyone. Keep my distance. I do not want to know what her eyes were really saying. Death. That is the prevailing feeling: death

On orders from the Curia

- The prisoner is to be taken to the Templenvall cathedral
- Do not gaze into the heretic's eyes; avoid physical contact; do not speak to her
- Non-lethal use of force is authorized
- Our Queen and her administration have been informed; they will neither stop you, nor provide any assistance
- Avoid contact with the fallen knights, Sarvola's renegades, and the general public
- In the event of imminent peril, bring the heretic to safety; trust no one but the brothers and sisters of our order



