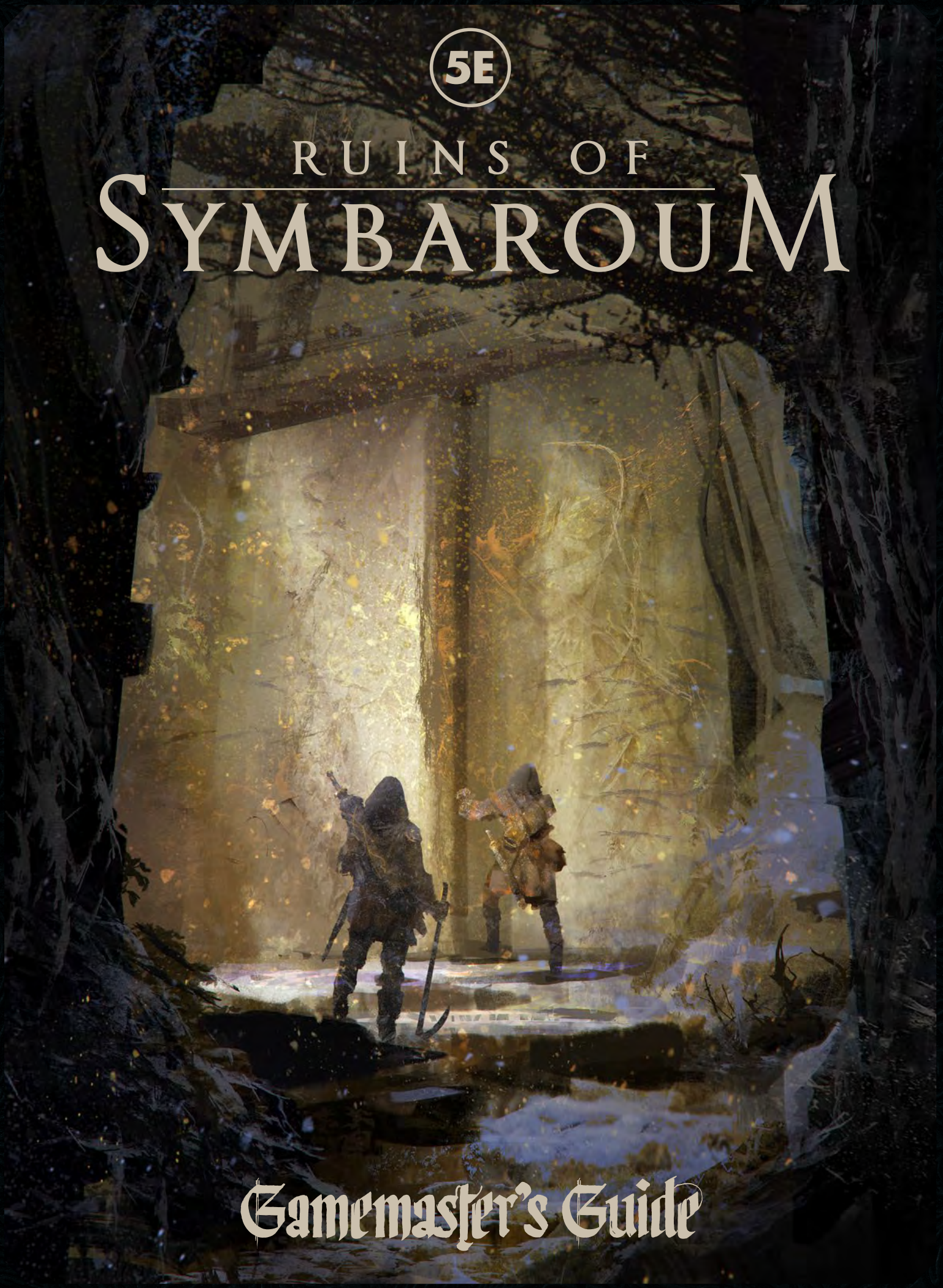
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RUINS OF SYMBAROUM



Gamemaster's Guide

5E

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Gamemaster's Guide

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

COVER ART
Martin Grip

ILLUSTRATIONS
Martin Grip
Gustaf Ekelund

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

MAPS
Tobias Tranell

PROJECT MANAGERS
Mattias Johnsson Haake, Mattias Lilja

PROOFREADING
Brandon Bowling, Martin Lund,
Stefan Patey

EVENT MANAGER
Anna Westerling

PR MANAGER
Boel Bermann

STREAMING
Doug Shute, Matthew Jowett

CUSTOMER SUPPORT
Jenny Lehto, Daniel Lehto

SPECIAL THANKS TO
Adam Rawson, Alberto Meoni, Alessio "dottorblaster" Biancalana, Agnese "killbilla" Iannone, Anders, Anthony Reynolds, Ben Fabian, Brad Hawley, Bret Jordan, Bret Smilyk, Caden K, Christer Malmberg, Claus Bo Christensen, Dan 'Credorion' Griffith, Dan Price, Daniel Z., Dillon Burke, Dojean C. W., Dr. Eric Johnson, Ph.D., Edrakerz, Emma Banfi, Eric Thomas Lentz, Erick Christgau, Erick Truman, Etienne Guerry, Gavin Call, Gaz Deaves, Gordon Milner, Guido Conaldi, Guillaume "Lizardman" Moureaux, GuruPhil (The Dark Orb), Ian Bichmann, Ian C. Nodurft, Jacob Ryckman, James L Smith, Jason Beasley, Jaz Darwin, Joerg Peters, Jonathan Pay, Judson Stubbs, Justin Bojarski, Kamil Wicki, Kathleen Kiker, Keith J. Farmer, Kenneth Paul, Kyle M, Kyle Wood, Lorcan Starstrider, Lukasz Hankus, Marco Pagnini, Matteo Chiericoni, Matteo "ZheXian" Saletti-Zampa, Michael Kiker, Michael "Hassurunous" Loubier, Miguel Baluyot, Mike St. John, Narök, Nicolas Belley, Noah Karrer, Olivier Mangeon, Patrick Pryds, Rafael Gutierrez-Torres, Richard "Rick" Moore, Richard Ruth, Robin, father of Logan., Robin Hagblom, Roland Karlsson, Ry Wymer, S. E. A., S. Y. A. Hartmann, Shawn P, Stephan Faber, Steven J Mathis II, Svante Morén, Tim Rudolph, Ulf Möller, Ursur1minor, Yule Panda

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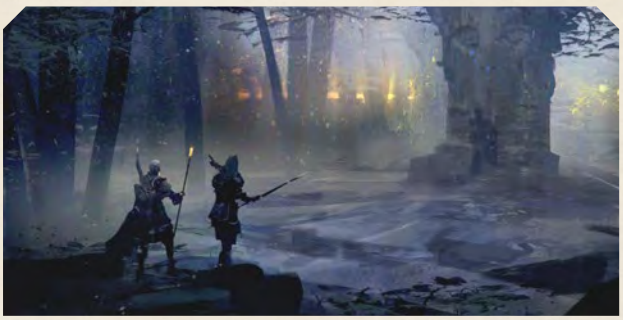
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Introduction

A HEARTY WELCOME to the *Ruins of Symbaroum Gamemaster's Guide*. This book is for you who will lead the sessions around the gaming table; you who will portray the game world, provide its inhabitants with voices and personalities, and design or improvise entertaining, thrilling, unforgettable adventures in Ambria, Davokar and beyond.

This book is an attempt to capture the scope, depth and nuance of the rewarding and sometimes a bit intimidating, or at least overwhelming, role of Gamemaster (GM). The book is structured into five sections – Gamemaster Guidelines, The World of Symbaroum, Expeditions in Davokar, Setting and Adventures, and New and Optional Rules – each focusing on different aspects of what makes roleplaying games the most enjoyable pastime in the world. All rules and guidelines are meant to inspire rather than to instruct. Nothing is mandatory; it is up to you and your gaming group to decide what to adopt, reject, or use as inspiration in creating your own house rules. Only you know what makes Symbaroum appealing to you.

The first section is called Gamemaster Guidelines and provides different kinds of general advice, for instance regarding preparations, special GM techniques, and how to come up with varied challenges for the player characters. Then follows a section that provide deeper insights about what arguably is the setting's most important settlements – the town of Thistle Hold, the capital city of Yndaros and, finally, the cliff of Karvosti, home of the barbarian High Chieftain. The section also introduces three otherworldly settings that you and your players may want to explore, sooner or later: the daemonic Yonderworld, the subterranean Underworld, and the ethereal plane of the Spirit World.

Section three deals entirely with expeditions in the wild, with the main focus being treasure hunts in the dark and mysterious forest of Davokar. The rules and guidelines cover such things as different mission types, movement, supplies, wilderness guides, encounters, and of course treasure to be found. The section also include guidelines for designing interesting ruins and a passage delving deeper into how different kinds of character goals can lead to different types of challenges on the journey.

In the fourth section, Setting and Adventures, we take our own thought and work processes as a starting point for offering advice on the design of game worlds, adventures and adventure chronicles. It also includes a chapter on rewards – arguably, a vital aspect of the adventure design. Aside from advice on how different kinds of players may respond differently to different types of rewards, the chapter presents twenty-six greater artifacts – magical items with great power that also come at a dire cost.

Section five presents a series of specialized chapters that cover different aspects of the game. There are rules for advanced traps, pitched battles, ceremonial magic, along with guidelines for estate management, pact-making, more in-depth social challenges, and troupe play, where each player plays multiple characters over the course of the adventure or chronicle. Finally, at the back of the book, you will find the one-shot adventure Blight Night, to give you an example of how an adventure landscape in *Ruins of Symbaroum* may be designed.

All in all, we hope this *Gamemaster's Guide* will help make your gaming sessions even more entertaining and memorable. And not only that: we hope that being the Gamemaster for *Ruins of Symbaroum* will feel more inspiring and rewarding, in the planning phase as well as when you are running adventures with your friends at the gaming table.

Mattias, Mattias & Jacob



SECTION 1

Gamemaster Guidelines

It should have been the simplest of excursions, but the expedition to the ruins of old Odaban ended in disaster. Already at dawn on the fourth day we encountered a wounded rage troll, struck by more than a dozen elven arrows and eager for company on the road to the beyond. He made two of my friends tag along; another two followed the day after, victimized by a fever caused by the rage troll's bites. And before we had traveled half the distance to our destination three more were dead. Keros was lured into a treacherous quagmire by fairies one night; Fabia's arm was severed by a blight-stricken elk and she bled to death; and our goblin guide, Lurks, took his own life after having received the deadly gift of a poisonous tricklesting.

By then only me and one of our sellswords were still alive. My hope had fled, my heart welcomed death as a dear old friend. But the warrior dragged me south, forcing my legs into action. His will burned hot and yet his effort would have been pointless, were it not for another fiery flame. When my strength was all but drained he took me on his shoulders and carried me up, step by step, branch by branch, along the stem of a towering pine. And as we reached the top he slapped me across the cheek, pointing to the south. There, still far away, flamed the fire that gave me strength to carry on – the Beacon of Thistle Hold, a bonfire raised above the moonlit ocean of leaves, calling me to safety and warmth and a bolstered mattress. That is how I survived, as so many before me. Mayor Nightpitch's sanctuary is the harbor of all explorers and fortune-hunters, from which we embark on our journeys and towards which we then strive. Back home.



AS GAMEMASTER (GM) for *Ruins of Symbaroum*, it's your job to bring the setting to life. Don't worry! This book will help you do this. This chapter will provide a basic overview of the GM's roles and responsibilities and give you basic rules and options for the general mechanics of 5e.

The Gamemaster is the window to the setting of Symbaroum, and the only way the players can "see" through this window is by your descriptions and any supporting materials that you use. For example, you can describe an ogre with words, but holding up one of these books or a zoomed-in image from a PDF on your tablet can show the players what an ogre of Davokar looks like.

The base cycle of the game is that you'll explain what is happening to the players, ask for their actions, help them implement their actions using the rules and fair judgment, and then present the new situation to the players, once again asking for their input. You keep doing this until the game reaches a natural conclusion or you run out of time in the session. (Many adventures require multiple sessions to complete their story.)

You will want to have a good handle on the rules, studying both this book, the *Player's Guide* and the relevant sections of the *Bestiary* for the game situation at hand. However, no one should expect you to be an expert, and sometimes the rules (purposefully) leave the answer vague, because the only one who knows the exact situation in some circumstances is you. That means that when you're uncertain about a rule, you're free to make a decision on the spot. You also are free to change your mind after you do research. A good way to handle this is to say something along the lines of, "Right now, I'm going to give you my best guess. I'll try to look things up after the game and let you know if there's a better answer for the next time this comes up." That way players know your current rule will stand for the game, but you're willing to change it if new information comes to light.

You also must be fair to the players, which does not mean being nice to them (nor should you be purposefully mean). Instead, if you are adjudicating a scene that has a dangerous monster or situation, you should use the rules provided. The monster, trap, or other danger should do the specified amount of damage, use any additional features to its advantage and generally act in an appropriate fashion (e.g. smart enemies should be highly tactical, try to avoid dangerous situations and be willing to retreat when the situation warrants). That said, the goal is to build a satisfactory story with your players – if you realize during the game that you've miscalculated the group's combat capability or they don't have a way to solve a puzzle or situation you've created then taking it easy on them is just helping build the best game for the players.

Running the Game

THROUGHOUT THE YEARS that we at Free League Publishing have played roleplaying games, we have often returned to a number of principles that we consider to be signs of good game-mastering. From these principles you can derive a series of tasks that the Gamemaster has to handle. It is important that these are taken seriously, if the shared experience of the game is to turn out to be rewarding for everyone involved. It may seem like a daunting list, yet we think that trying to embrace as many of these as possible is well worth the effort.

Of course, as a Gamemaster, you are free to pick and choose from among the following ruminations, preferably after talking to your gaming group and coming to a conclusion as to which ones you will be using.

Before the Session

MAKE THE ADVENTURE YOUR OWN

If you, as a Gamemaster, run an adventure or an adventure setting written by someone else (by us at Free League, for example) it is important to read the manuscript from cover to cover, but even more important to read it pen-in-hand. Make a note if there are details that you want to expand or wish to develop further, things that you want to remove or change – you are the one who knows your gaming group and their characters best, and the adventure should be rewarding for all of you.

In the case of an official published adventure, you should always regard it as a collection of ideas and possible challenges. Work it through and make the adventure your own, for the sake of yourself and your players.

UNDERSTAND THE ENEMY

Who will try to stop the characters from reaching their goals? What does the enemy want from the characters, or want to stop them from doing? How far is this enemy prepared to go in order to achieve its goals? What restrains the enemy? What external forces must the enemy take into consideration (other forces or authorities in the area)? What are the enemy's local strengths and weaknesses? Also, remember that even a powerful enemy cannot be everywhere at the same time.

REVIEW THE LAST GAME SESSION

Consider what happened during the last game session and how it may affect future events, especially the upcoming session. Plan for these eventualities.

PREPARE CHALLENGES

Prepare challenges that correspond to the goals of the player characters. Which obstacles stand in their way? What kind of creatures roam the area? What will the characters' enemies do in order to stop them? Who or what can help them when/if they get in serious trouble?

During the Session

ASK THE PLAYERS TO RECAPITULATE

Start your gaming session by awakening your players' (and their characters') memory.

First of all, ask the players what happened the last time you met, but let them also explain what their player characters have done since then and what they plan to do now. Correct your players if they remember incorrectly, and add details they have forgotten that might be important to the current gaming session.

SAY YES

Always try to avoid saying no when the players and their characters show initiative.

Instead, say yes and follow it up with a challenge. Let the players decide if the challenge is too dangerous, or if it is a risk worth taking.

UNPLEASANT SURPRISES

Expose the characters to unexpected and dangerous situations that they have not asked for. The setting of Symbaroum is perilous and often unjust: the characters are not supposed to be able to predict, estimate or avoid every challenge they face.

DESCRIBE THE WORLD

Describe to the players what their characters sense – what they see, how it smells, what they hear. Highlight contrasts and describe differences in the game world, since it is easier to picture "this" when compared or related to "that".

If necessary, you can also describe what a character is thinking; the character probably knows more about the game world than the player does, which makes it appropriate to say things like "you realize that...". Be sure to leave it to the players to do the actual feeling and reacting.

IMPERSONATE THE NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS

Give your non-player characters (NPCs) names and portray them with manners and personalities of their own, so that the players get to experience encounters to remember. Make the NPCs understandable by giving them reasonable motives. NPCs may seem crazy or comical, but to themselves, their actions are always motivated and perfectly sound.

DESCRIBE CONSEQUENCES

Use NPCs to shine a light on the actions of the player characters – whether they hate or love what the characters are doing, they should show it. These reactions can also be described at the end of the session in the form of a narrative, should it not be obvious already. The purpose of this is to make the players understand that their decisions during the game have repercussions, something which helps make the game world feel alive and gives it a touch of "reality".

SAVE THEM FROM TROUBLE

If you as a Gamemaster have placed the player characters in a tight spot, then you should also be prepared to save them from certain doom. Do not let them die; give them a chance to survive in captivity instead. Or let another group appear and save them at the last possible moment – afterwards demanding their help with something difficult and unpleasant, of course.

LEAVE "EVIL" UNEXPLAINED

The darkness lurking at the roots of Davokar is beyond human. Maybe the darkness hates all things living; maybe the darkness feeds off the life force of others; or maybe it simply regards all living beings as playthings.

The allies of evil, its servants, those who transform into blight beasts and hunger for life can be described, and sometimes explained, but the source of the darkness is nigh unexplainable.

After the Session

REWARD THE PLAYERS

Award the characters with Experience for each scene they encounter, and also add other kinds of rewards: social rewards such as contacts, secrets, titles and new equipment or maybe even mystical artifacts.

THE CHARACTERS' PLANS

Ask the players to describe what their characters plan to do next, or, if an adventure has just been concluded, what they intend to do before their next journey starts. Such information is essential for the Gamemaster when planning the next session.

CONCLUDE THE SESSION

Write down details or key words describing what happened during the session, as well as thoughts and ideas that might be useful during future sessions. Keep it short and to the point, with the aim to tie the sessions together.

Gamemaster Techniques

HERE ARE A number of different techniques that the Gamemaster can use, appropriate for giving the game a good start, keeping it going and for varying the story in interesting ways.

ALTERNATIVE CHARACTERS

A very concrete way to let the players see more of the world or to experience other perspectives is to temporarily let them change characters.

These new player characters can, for example, take the players to a different place or a different time, if only for a game session (or just part of a session). Another option is to go back in the characters' history, if it is long and mutual, so they can play their present characters, but a long time ago.

Experience gained through the adventures of these alternative characters is awarded to the primary characters, but no other rewards (thaler, artifacts, loot, etc.) are transferred in that way.

> EXAMPLE 1: *The session starts with everyone playing guards in the ruined castle that the characters are preparing to visit. The guards fight a desperate and predestined battle against the powerful lindworm that destroyed, and later came to live in, the ruin – which the players will face again, but this time with their usual player characters.*
>
> EXAMPLE 2: *Many of the characters grew up in the same orphanage in Yndaros, and as a part of an adventure the Gamemaster throws them back to the orphanage, to when they were young.*

DEUS EX MACHINA

The technique of *Deus Ex Machina* means that the Gamemaster saves the player characters from trouble with the help of narrative tools. It can take many forms, but the Gamemaster may, for example, let an allied group of soldiers show up when a battle is about to go south and save the characters from certain death. Naturally, challenges solved in this way do not yield any Experience to the characters.

EXAMPLE 1: *The characters fight desperately against a blight beast and see death approach, when a band of elves joins the fight and saves the characters. Then, the leader of the elves demands that the characters solve a task in return; a task that the elves cannot solve themselves (inside Thistle Hold, for example). When, and if, the characters solve the task given by the elves, they get extra Experience as compensation for the hopeless battle against the blight beast.*

EXAMPLE 2: *Players can be allowed to invoke the use of Deus Ex Machina during an ongoing problem-solving event. Let us say that they are investigating a murder and are stuck. They then ask for help from the local Ordo Magica chapter to cast a ritual. In return, Ordo Magica demands a favor to be dealt with after the murder has been solved, which the characters accept. The ritual is performed and provides the characters with the clue they need to move on with the adventure. The XP given as a result of the ritual is held hostage by the Gamemaster until the characters have solved Ordo Magica's problem. The characters can choose not to return the favor, with the effect of not getting the Experience points that await them, as well as the loss of trust from the local chapter of Ordo Magica.*

IN MEDIAS RES

In Medias Res means to start in the middle of an event or something that is happening. For example, the adventure might start with an attack, an assassination attempt or an invasion. The players are forced to react to what's happening, and the adventure is then set into motion.

EXAMPLE: *The characters wake up after hearing an arrow hit the inn's window shutter. The inn is under attack!*

INTERLUDE

An interlude can happen between adventures or parts of an ongoing adventure. The characters get a chance to catch their breath, settle their business and possibly level up, while the Gamemaster gets a chance to bring in the player characters' everyday lives, as well as less epic, but equally important relations and situations.

In short, interludes are excellent opportunities for the players to develop their characters in small and everyday situations, and to put those moments into contrast with the life-and-death decisions of their adventures.

EXAMPLE: *The characters return to Thistle Hold after a successful expedition into Davokar. After negotiating a good price for their treasures, they treat themselves to an evening at the Salons of Symbaroum, where they discuss their adventure, boast to their table neighbors and party into the night.*

NARRATIVE

The Narrative is a collective name for a numbers of different ways the Gamemaster can tell the players about the world. A good narrative makes the players see their part in the larger context. If used correctly, narratives can be very striking, but overused they can turn a game session into a story reading, rather than a game night.

Initial Narrative

An effective way to set the mood at the start of a session is to dim the lights, play atmospheric music and describe a scene that is relevant to the session. The initial narrative can be a dream sequence, told from the perspective of the enemy or a historical event related to what is to come.

Dream Sequence

A dream sequence lets the characters share a common dream, the content of which highlights, clarifies or complicates the story that the characters experience. The dream can either be disconnected from real events, or the Gamemaster can tie it to some known mystical artifact that binds the characters to events far, far away.

Historical Event

Adventures based or depending on historical events can benefit from narratives in the form of important events from the past, explaining or clarifying the conflicts of the present. Once more, dreams can be used to imply that the fate of the player characters is tied to these dramatic events of the past.

ARCH ENEMY

Most players love to hate a specific enemy a bit more than others, and the Gamemaster can use this by letting old enemies return during the run of a campaign. Of course, enemies that manage to get away from the characters can show up again; the same goes for undead versions of enemies that the characters have already defeated. It must also be said that descendants, disciples or lovers of a fallen enemy can hunt down and exact vengeance upon those who slew their relative, master or lover.

Online Resources

Downloadable character sheets and additional material are available at freeleaguepublishing.com. Find the sub-page called "Games" and click on *Ruins of Symbaroum*, where you will find a link to downloads.

Employing the Rules

THIS CHAPTER TAKES a closer look at how to use the game rules when planning for and running games in *Ruins of Symbaroum*. As Gamemaster you are expected to read the following as guidance, rather than as instructions; in the end, it is up to you to decide what rules to apply, and how to apply them – preferably as a result of an open discussion with your players.

Difficulty Classes, Ability Checks and Saving Throws

DURING THE GAME, when a character (or the entire group) wants to try something that has an uncertain resolution (i.e. they could succeed or fail, neither is guaranteed), then you'll most likely use an ability check. If the characters are exposed to sudden danger or damage, they are likely to get a chance to make a saving throw – an opportunity to avoid or at least mitigate the damage taken.

The game engine uses the traditional six ability scores. Most abilities also have some skills that are, by default, associated with them. Here is a breakdown of how each is traditionally used:

STRENGTH

Strength measures bodily power, athletic training, and the extent to which you can exert raw physical force.

Strength Checks

A Strength check can model any attempt to lift, push, pull, or break something, to force your body through a space, or to otherwise apply brute force to a situation. The Athletics skill reflects aptitude in certain kinds of Strength checks. Sample Strength checks:

- Break bonds or force open a door
- Climb a sheer or slippery surface, hang onto the same under duress (Athletics)
- Grapple someone or fight off a grapple (Athletics)
- Hang onto a wagon while being dragged
- Jump a long distance or perform a stunt mid-air (Athletics)
- Keep a boulder from rolling
- Lift, push or pull things (Athletics)
- Swim against a current or other dangers (Athletics)

Strength Saving Throws

A saving throw using Strength often checks to see if a character can use their physical prowess to avoid danger or being knocked prone.

Strength Attack Rolls and Damage

You add your Strength modifier to your attack roll and your damage roll when attacking with a melee weapon such as a mace, a battleaxe, or a javelin. You use melee weapons to make melee attacks in hand-to-hand combat, and some of them can be thrown to make a ranged attack.

Lifting and Carrying

Your Strength score determines the amount of weight you can bear. The following terms define what you can lift or carry.

Carrying Capacity: Your carrying capacity is your Strength score multiplied by 15. This is the weight (in pounds) that you can carry, which is high enough that most characters don't usually have to worry about it.

Push, Drag, or Lift: You can push, drag, or lift an amount of weight in pounds up to twice your carrying capacity (or 30 times your Strength score). While pushing or dragging weight in excess of your carrying capacity, your speed drops to 5 feet.

Size and Strength: Larger creatures can bear more weight, whereas Tiny creatures can carry less. For each size category above Medium, double the creature's carrying capacity and the amount it can push, drag, or lift. For a Tiny creature, halve these weights.

Variant: Encumbrance

The rules for lifting and carrying are intentionally simple. Here is a variant if you are looking for more detailed rules for determining how a character is hindered by the weight of equipment. When you use this variant, ignore the Strength column of the Armor tables.

If you carry weight in excess of 5 times your Strength score, you are encumbered, which means your speed drops by 10 feet.

If you carry weight in excess of 10 times your Strength score, up to your maximum carrying capacity, you are instead heavily encumbered, which means your speed drops by 20 feet and you have disadvantage on ability checks, attack rolls, and saving throws that use Strength, Dexterity, or Constitution.

DEXTERITY

Dexterity measures agility, reflexes, and balance.

Dexterity Checks

A character uses Dexterity to adjust or contort their entire body or for delicate work using their hands. Sample Dexterity checks:

- Conceal an object or plant it somewhere (Sleight of Hand)
- Control or steer a vehicle
- Craft detailed objects or play a stringed instrument

- Escape a grapple (Acrobatics)
- Keep your balance or perform stunts (Acrobatics)
- Pick locks or disable traps
- Sneak up on someone, hide yourself, slip past a guard (Stealth)
- Tie someone up or slip free of bonds yourself

Dexterity Saving Throws
When you make a Dexterity saving throw you are often making an effort to avoid an area of effect attack or other damage source.

Hiding

The Gamemaster decides when circumstances are appropriate for hiding. When you try to hide, make a Dexterity (Stealth) check. Until you are discovered or you stop hiding, that check's total is contested by the Wisdom (Perception) check of any creature that actively searches for signs of your presence.

You can't hide from a creature that can see you clearly, and you give away your position if you make noise, such as shouting a warning or knocking over a vase. An invisible creature can always try to hide. Signs of its passage might still be noticed, and it does have to stay quiet.

In combat, most creatures stay alert for signs of danger all around, so if you come out of hiding and approach a creature, it usually sees you. However, under certain circumstances, the Gamemaster might allow you to stay hidden as you approach a creature that is distracted, allowing you to gain advantage on an attack roll before you are seen.

Passive Perception: When you hide, there's a chance someone will notice you even if they aren't searching. To determine whether such a creature notices you, the Gamemaster compares your Dexterity (Stealth) check with that creature's passive Wisdom (Perception) score, which equals 10 + the creature's Wisdom modifier, as well as any other bonuses or penalties. If the creature has advantage, add 5. For disadvantage, subtract 5. For example, if a 1st-level character (with a proficiency bonus of +2) has a Wisdom of 15 (a +2 modifier) and proficiency in Perception, he or she has a passive Wisdom (Perception) of 14.

What Can You See? One of the main factors in determining whether you can find a hidden creature or object is how well you can see in an area, which might be lightly or heavily obscured, as explained in the core rules.

Dexterity Attack Rolls and Damage
You add your Dexterity modifier to your attack roll and your damage roll when attacking with a ranged weapon, such as a sling or a longbow. You can also add your Dexterity modifier to your attack roll and your damage roll when attacking with a melee weapon that has the finesse property, such as a dagger or a fencing sword.

Armor Class
Depending on the armor you wear, you might add some or all of your Dexterity modifier to your Armor Class.

Initiative
At the beginning of every combat, you roll initiative by making a Dexterity check. Initiative determines the order of each creatures' turn in combat.

CONSTITUTION

Constitution measures health, stamina, and vital force.

Constitution Checks
A character uses their Constitution to endure hardship or resist bodily effects. Sample Constitution checks:

- Hold your breath
- March or labor for hours without rest
- Go without sleep
- Survive without food or water
- Quaff an entire stein of ale in one go

Constitution Saving Throws
A Constitution saving throw usually represents avoiding or enduring some sort of bodily effect or a mystic's effort to maintain concentration on a spell that requires such focus.

Hit Points
Your Constitution modifier contributes to your hit points. Typically, you add your Constitution modifier to each Hit Die you roll for your hit points.

If your Constitution modifier changes, your hit point maximum changes as well, as though you had the new modifier from 1st level. For example, if you raise your Constitution score when you reach 4th level and your Constitution modifier increases from +1 to +2, you adjust your hit point maximum as though the modifier had always been +2. So you add 3 hit points to your total (one point each for your first three levels), and then roll your hit points for 4th level using your new modifier. Or if you're 7th level and some effect lowers your Constitution score so as to reduce your Constitution modifier by 1, your hit point maximum is reduced by 7.

INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence measures mental acuity, accuracy of recall, and the ability to reason.

Intelligence Checks

A character uses their intelligence to discover new information and connect disparate facts together. Sample Intelligence checks:

- Communicate non-verbally
- Estimate the value of an object
- Find clues and make deductions (Investigation)
- Knowledge of a craft/trade
- Knowledge of deities, symbols and ceremonies (Religion)
- Lore about nature and the weather (Nature)
- Put together a disguise set or forge a document
- Win a game of skill
- Recall magical lore and recognize arcane symbols and spells (Arcana)
- Recall historical facts and legends (History)

Intelligence Saving Throw

This usually represents an effort by the character to keep their mind focused or notice details of a magical effect that are incongruent with reality.

Spellcasting Ability

Some mystics use Intelligence as their spellcasting ability, which helps determine the saving throw DCs of spells they cast, plus their Corruption Threshold.

WISDOM

Wisdom reflects how attuned you are to the world around you and represents perceptiveness and intuition.

Wisdom Checks

Wisdom allows a character to notice new things and make clear judgments. Sample Wisdom checks:

- Calming or controlling an animal (Animal Handling)
- Determining true intentions (Insight)
- Discern the undead from the dead
- Get a gut feeling about a course of action
- Stabilize a companion or diagnose a disease (Medicine)
- Spot, hear or otherwise notice something (Perception)
- Track, hunt or lead a group in the wilderness (Survival)

Wisdom Saving Throw

A character is often required to make a Wisdom saving throw to avoid enchantment effects or other efforts to control their mind or body.

Spellcasting Ability

Some mystics use Wisdom as their spellcasting ability score, which helps determine the saving throw DCs of spells they cast and their Corruption Threshold.

Finding a Hidden Object

When your character searches for a hidden object such as a secret door or trap, the Gamemaster typically asks you to make a Wisdom (Perception) check. Such a check can be used to find hidden details or other information and clues that you might otherwise overlook.

In most cases, you need to describe where you are looking in order for the Gamemaster to determine your chance of success. For example, a key is hidden beneath a set of folded clothes in the top drawer of a bureau. If you tell the Gamemaster that you pace around the room, looking at the walls and furniture for clues, you have no chance of finding the key, regardless of your Wisdom (Perception) check result. You would have to specify that you were opening the drawers or searching the bureau in order to have any chance of success.

CHARISMA

Charisma measures your ability to interact effectively with others. It includes such factors as confidence and eloquence, and it can represent a charming or commanding personality.

Charisma Checks

Charisma allows characters to convince others and impress groups. Sample Charisma checks:

- Blend into a crowd
- Delight an audience (Performance)
- Hide the truth (Deception)
- Influence people (Persuasion)
- Learn rumors, news or gossip
- Threaten others (Intimidate)

Charisma Saving Throws

Many Charisma saving throws avoid effects of enchantment and suggestion or otherwise require force of personality.

Spellcasting Ability

Some mystics use Charisma as their spellcasting ability, which helps determine the saving throw DCs of spells they cast and their Corruption Threshold.



Clan Chieftain Embersind of Odaiova with this trusted hunting partner, the jakaar Skall. He and his clan may get along fine with Ambrian visitors, but they will never forget who they truly are.

VARIANT: SKILLS WITH DIFFERENT ABILITIES

Normally, your proficiency in a skill applies only to a specific kind of ability check. Proficiency in Athletics, for example, usually applies to Strength checks. In some situations, though, your proficiency might reasonably apply to a different kind of check. In such cases, the Gamemaster might ask for a check using an unusual combination of ability and skill, or you might ask your Gamemaster if you can apply a proficiency to a different check. For example, if you have to swim from an island in the center of a lake to the mainland, your Gamemaster might call for a Constitution check to see if you have the stamina to make it that far. In this case, your Gamemaster might allow you to apply your proficiency in Athletics and ask for a Constitution (Athletics) check. So if you're proficient in Athletics, you apply your proficiency bonus to the Constitution check just as you would normally do for a Strength (Athletics) check. Similarly, when your barbarian warrior uses a display of raw strength to intimidate an enemy, your Gamemaster might ask for a Strength (Intimidation) check, even though Intimidation is normally associated with Charisma.

PASSIVE CHECKS

A passive check is a special kind of ability check that doesn't involve die rolls. Such a check can represent the average result for a task done repeatedly, such as searching for secret doors over and over again, or can be used when the Gamemaster wants to secretly determine whether the characters succeed at something without rolling dice, such as noticing a hidden monster.

Here's how to determine a character's total for a passive check:

10 + all modifiers that normally apply to the check

If the character has advantage on the check, add 5. For disadvantage, subtract 5. The game refers to a passive check total as a score.

> FOR EXAMPLE, *if a 1st-level character has a Wisdom of 15 and proficiency in Perception, he or she has a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 14. The rules for hiding in the "Dexterity" section below rely on passive checks, as do the exploration rules.*

WHEN TO USE ABILITY CHECKS

You should only have characters make ability checks when the outcome is uncertain and interesting (something happens if the characters fail, something different happens if they succeed).

If the activity is something regular and everyday for the adventuring sort of folk that the player characters are then there's no need to roll, they simply succeed. Conversely, if it would take a miracle for them to change their circumstances then it is fine to announce that the task is impossible. If not succeeding at the check has no consequences and they could just try over and over again until they succeed, it's okay to narrate "it takes you a little while but eventually you succeed...".

ASSIGNING DIFFICULTY CLASSES

The chart below shows the different ranges of difficulties for each phase of the game. It also has columns for the chances of success you might assign to different activities. For example, if a character is 8th level and you think that the task should have about a 75% chance of success, then a DC of 10 or so is appropriate. Always compare the situation to the average character – if the player character is well-trained at a particular skill then they should more easily pass the check. This is fine, it rewards the player for having chosen that skill.

WORKING TOGETHER

Sometimes two or more characters team up to attempt a task. The character who's leading the effort – or the one with the highest ability modifier – can make an ability check with advantage, reflecting the help provided by the other characters. In combat, this requires the Help action.

A character can only provide help if the task is one that he or she could attempt alone. For example, trying to open a lock requires proficiency with thieves' tools, so a character who lacks that proficiency can't help another character with that task.

Moreover, a character can help only when two or more individuals working together would actually be productive. Some tasks, such as threading a needle, are no easier with help.

DIFFICULTY CLASS RANGES

Level Range	90% Success	75% Success	50% Success	25% Success	10% Success
1–4	DC 4–8	DC 7–11	DC 11–16	DC 17–21	DC 20–24
5–8	DC 4–9	DC 7–12	DC 11–17	DC 17–22	DC 20–25
9–12	DC 4–10	DC 7–13	DC 11–18	DC 17–23	DC 20–26
13–16	DC 5–11	DC 8–14	DC 12–19	DC 18–24	DC 21–27
17–20	DC 5–12	DC 8–15	DC 12–20	DC 18–25	DC 21–28

GROUP CHECKS

When a number of individuals are trying to accomplish something as a group, the Gamemaster might ask for a group ability check. In such a situation, the characters who are skilled at a particular task help cover those who aren't.

To make a group ability check, everyone in the group makes the ability check. If at least half the group succeeds, the whole group succeeds.

SAVING THROWS

A saving throw – also called a save – represents an attempt to resist a spell, a trap, a poison, a disease, or a similar threat. You don't normally decide to make a saving throw; you are forced to make one because your character or monster is at risk of harm.

To make a saving throw, roll a d20 and add the appropriate ability modifier. For example, you use your Dexterity modifier for a Dexterity saving throw.

A saving throw can be modified by a situational bonus or penalty and can be affected by advantage and disadvantage, as determined by the Gamemaster.

Each class gives proficiency in at least two saving throws. The warrior, for example, is proficient in Strength saves. As with skill proficiencies, proficiency in a saving throw lets a character add their proficiency bonus to saving throws made using a particular ability score. Some monsters have saving throw proficiencies as well.

The Difficulty Class for a saving throw is determined by the effect that causes it. For example, the DC for a saving throw allowed by a spell is determined by the caster's spellcasting ability and proficiency bonus.

The result of a successful or failed saving throw is also detailed in the effect that allows the save. Usually, a successful save means that a creature suffers no harm, or reduced harm, from an effect.

Combat and Challenge Ratings

FOR FAMILIARITY'S SAKE, all of the core rules for combat apply. To determine appropriate enemy forces, use the core rules to build encounters or see the simplified rules on page 18.

In general, players of *Ruins of Symbaroum* should expect to have two to four encounters of high difficulty when in a dangerous situation. Also, it should be noted that characters in the system do not readily recover Hit Dice and thus the longer the dangerous situation persists, the more even higher level characters will find themselves worn down and running out of resources.

Challenges

CHALLENGES COMPRISE ANYTHING that the characters must overcome in order to accomplish their goals. Handling these challenges is one of the Gamemaster's main jobs. One fundamental rule is that none of the characters' goals should be achievable without passing at least one challenge – preferably there should be several challenges stacked against the characters, standing between them and their goals. The group's common goals are suitable as the goal for an adventure or a campaign, since those goals are shared by the whole group. Personal goals, pursued by one individual player character, should have fewer challenges tied to them, since they do not concern the entire group and can feel boring to the other players should they drag on for too long.

Below is a list of possible challenges that the Gamemaster can use to make life interesting for the characters on their way toward their goals.

The characters face an obstacle on their way:

- Escape captivity
- Survive an ambush
- Get out of a surrounded or besieged location
- Overcome a lock or a trap
- Pass through a swamp or field of thorns

They need information from someone, and that person requests help:

- Defend a location against an attack
- Track down a fleeing person or creature
- Steal an item
- Win a duel

They need help from a person, but first they have to get hold of said person:

- Capture a possessed person alive and banish the spirit
- Break into a prison or let themselves be captured
- Track down a fleeing person or creature
- Get inside a surrounded or besieged location

They have to gain access to a specific location for a short or long period of time:

- Defend a location from enemies
- Partake in a play or a gladiatorial fight
- Overcome a lock or a trap
- Sneak past or fight the guards



They must choose between different goals:

- Hand over a murderer to the authorities to face justice – or ask the murderer for help
- Destroy a corrupted artifact that causes suffering – or use it to defeat an enemy

Facing Monsters:

- Add up the characters' levels. This gives you a total level amount. (For example, four characters of 5th level each count as 20 total levels).
- If the number of monsters is less than the number of characters, then the monsters' CR total should be equal to or lower than half the total levels (rounded down). (For example, two CR 5 monsters (total 10) are an appropriate threat for a group with 20 total levels.)
- If the number of monsters is equal to or greater than the number of characters, then their total CR should be greater than half the total levels but less than the actual total levels. (For example, from five to nine CR 2 monsters, four to six CR 3 monsters, exactly 4 CR 4 monsters, etc.)

Note: These values, especially when the creatures outnumber the player characters, can produce very deadly fights, representing the dangers of Davokar and the larger world. The players should always be ready to turn and run for their lives if necessary.

Time Within the Game

THE *RUINS OF Symbaroum Player's Guide* provides plenty of information on the calendar of the setting, naming days and months according to both the old ways and the new Ambrian calendar. As a Gamemaster, you may want to keep the player characters informed of time's passage, in order to help bring the world to life and provide a sense of urgency when appropriate.

The Gamemaster has another responsibility in regard to time in the game – you will often be in control of the party's access to short rests, long rests, and extended rests (for the exact benefits of each rest type, see the *Player's Guide*, page 34).

In order to take a short rest, the group needs to be in a location where they are safe from enemies and excessive interruptions. They need to be able to clean and bind wounds,



wrap sprained joints, repair armor, rest comfortably and generally be able to physically and mentally 'reset' themselves. While a corner room with a sturdy door wedged shut in a ruin can qualify, it doesn't have to – water dripping in from a broken ceiling making the floor slick or muddy, swarms of normally harmless insects that bite or sting any visitors, or the challenges of enemies right outside as they pound on the door that will surely give way are all reasons that a short rest might not be viable. The same can go for wilderness locations. Additionally, you shouldn't allow another short rest after a first one until the group has faced some sort of challenge or exerted themselves somewhat.

Long rests have similar requirements, except that the members of the group must also be able to sleep for at least six hours. Extreme conditions, such as excessive heat, cold, or loud noise might very well prevent this. In any case, each player character can only benefit from one long rest each day.

Extended rests require a complete 24 hours or more without any threats and must take place in a safe location. Finding this amount of time and this level of safety in the wilds of Davokar or other dangerous places is extremely unlikely. Gamemasters should encourage players to think of extended rests as breaks in the action that usually signal the end of an adventure, not a mere pause in the middle.

Shadow and Corruption

ALL BEINGS AND objects in the world are surrounded by mystical shadows, whose appearance varies depending on the creature or object's relationship to the great and vast powers of the world. Most people are unaware of the existence of these shadows, and while many might have been told about them, only a few individuals can actually perceive them.

THE ROLE OF SHADOWS

The ongoing struggle between civilization's desire to tame the wilds, and the corruption born out of over-exploitation, is a fundamental theme in the game of Symbaroum. The primary purpose of Shadows is to introduce the players to these great forces and the dynamic that exists between them.

Shadows have two main functions within the game. First, individuals with the Shadow-sight feat can see through deception and deceit by actively using this ability. Second, the Gamemaster can use this element to infuse the world with both life and soul, and to portray these grand and obvious conflicts in a more personal and spiritual way.

THE POWER OF CORRUPTION

Power corrupts, and in *Ruins of Symbaroum* quite literally so. A fundamental principle in Symbaroum is that when nature is cultivated or violated it grows dark and vengeful – and strikes back! The darkness that comes alive in this way feeds off and can continue to infect its surroundings. Since mystics bend and warp nature according to their will, they are constantly threatened by Corruption. And when looking at the ruleset, this principle is mirrored in the concept of Shadows and in creatures like abominations and the undead.

Corruption starts at zero (0) and grows as the character is tainted. A character is technically transformed into an abomination when its permanent Corruption value exceeds its Corruption Threshold. Yet, long before that, the character starts to show physical signs of its growing taint, in the form of Stigmas. The rules in the *Player's Guide* cover how to determine a character's current Corruption Threshold and what happens when total Corruption (temporary + permanent) crosses this – a possible Mark of Corruption.

CHANGE OF SHADOW

A creature's Shadow reflects its increasing level of Corruption, and the Shadow-sight feat or the *holy smoke* ritual can be used to reveal this. Technically, a corrupted creature has two Shadows, one representing its base color and one representing the taint.

As one accumulates permanent Corruption the tainted Shadow begins to dominate and takes over by the time that the creature has permanent Corruption equal to half their Corruption Threshold or higher.



SECTION 2

The World of Symbaroum

Nine years of toiling in the Marshes and my body was spent. I returned just the other day, as the sun climbed over the Ravens and the mists danced along the surface of River Doudram. I couldn't believe my eyes; I felt like a stranger.

Sure, I recognized the scaffoldings, the crowds and the sounds of voices mingled with treading shoes, boots and hooves. What truly amazed me was all that had sprouted from the racket – the pillars at the harbor basin, the dome of the Cathedral of Martyrs, not to mention the marvelous palace of our Queen. And there was more. The pavement on the streets, the four-story buildings lining them, the statues in the squares, the convent school that I found where my favorite tavern used to be. But let's return to your question...

I am lying here bleeding because I have been, successively, stoned, stabbed, whipped, beaten and finally stabbed again. I was stoned at midnight as I happened to end up in the middle of a stand-off between two groups of fancy but remarkably brutal dwarves. I received a stabbing in response when I asked one of the dwarves for mercy, and was later whipped by a drunken witch-hunter who mistook me for a blight beast. The witch-hunter chased me all the way to Old Kadizar where I stumbled upon a trio of goblins who beat down on me smiling. And the final cut came from someone I misidentified as a little girl. I thought she was going to help me, but then she searched my pockets and stabbed me in disappointment when they turned out to be empty.

That being said, I would truly appreciate it if you could stop smirking, walk away and let me die in p...

SYMBAROUM IS A vast and detailed setting and we do not have enough space to describe it in full detail. Instead, we have chosen four parts of the setting to focus on. The town of Thistle Hold at the border of Davokar Forest is given some extra detail and nuance, since it is a settlement the player characters will visit frequently, before and after their journeys into the woods. Yndaros, the capital city of Queen Korinthia, and the cliff of Karvosti where the High Chieftain and the Huldra of the clanfolks reside are also presented in some detail. Finally, we provide some information about the Underworld, Yonderworld and Spirit World – three fantastical adventure settings that can provide an entertaining and thrilling alternative to the rolling plains of Ambria and the mysterious darkness of Davokar.

Thistle Hold

WHEN IT BECAME known that the Queen's mother had taken ill and the House of Kohinoor announced that a sizable reward would be given to anyone who could provide a cure, Lasifor Nightpitch knew that his time had come.

Together with his companion, the barbarian witch Yagaba, he collected an armful of Twilight-Thistle from a secret location deep inside Davokar and delivered it to the Queen's medicus. He waived part of the reward in exchange for a title as Prince of the Realm over the area previously ruled by the warlord Haloban. What remained of the payment was used to fund the construction of a brand new town, right on the threshold of Davokar.

That is how Thistle Hold came to be, born out of a retired fortune-hunter's dream to secure his own future, and at the same time do something in benefit of his exiled brothers and sisters. The walled town is today neither more, nor less than it was meant to be: a fairly safe place at the brink of Davokar where the people of Queen Korinthia can find shelter, rest, trade and amusements before – as well as after a possible return from – expeditions into the forest. That Mayor Nightpitch lives a comfortable life financed by tolls and taxes no one begrudges him, especially since a part of the income passes on to the Queen's treasury – and because the founding of Thistle Hold has facilitated trade and other connections with the barbarian clans.

The birchwood palisade and most of the buildings within were erected over the course of the summer and fall of Year 13, largely thanks to the goblin tribe that Mayor Nightpitch had befriended during his travels. Today the town has about 6,000 permanent residents, but counting visitors, peasants from surrounding areas and people passing through there are about 10,000 people inside the walls at any given moment. Order is maintained by a well-paid town watch, led by Lasifor's brother and mostly composed of veterans of The Great War. Misbehavers can expect punishments which often are harsher than the ones handed out in Yndaros – after repeated petty crimes the wrongdoer can find himself being relieved of all earthly possessions and tossed out through the town gates, sometimes a couple of fingers or a hand poorer.

The boundaries between the formal, tax-paying citizens and its guest-laborers are sharp as the edge of a barbarian war axe. So long as a citizen refrains from unprovoked murder and torture, they can do almost anything to the guest-laborers without risking a reprimand. Other forms of temporary inhabitants are treated more fairly, but if they do not have a renowned name or cannot flaunt signs of wealth or boast of possessing extraordinary skills, they must accept being greeted with a cold, almost contemptuous attitude. In Thistle Hold might is right, the mightier the person, the greater his rights – that is nothing to be ashamed of, but to take pride in.

Surroundings

NORTH OF THISTLE Hold there is a small strip of open ground before the forest begins. It is commonly known as the Firebreak, but is of course mainly there to prevent the people and beasts of the woods from approaching unseen. Highroads run both towards Yndaros and from east to west between the forts Otra Senja and Otra Dorno, towers that have kept their names from when they were part of Haloban's defenses. Along the road linking the forts, manned watch towers are posted about a thousand paces apart and a moat is under construction – twelve paces wide and fifteen paces deep – protecting the lowland from the beasts of Davokar.

Despite the fact that a pass or cash payment is needed to enter the town, the founding of Thistle Hold has revitalized the whole region. The noble House Argona has its estate nearby and supports a village close to its residence, about one day on horseback south of the Hold. Furthermore, the smaller

House Erebus manages the land directly south and west of the town, and House Derego manages the land to the east. As a consequence, farmlands stretch out all the way between Otra Senja and Otra Dorno – a popular hunting ground for the beasts who manage to cross the highroad undetected.

Closer to the palisade, on the road to Yndaros, rests the permanent tent camp called Blackmoor, or more teasingly Thistle Scold. Many are the residents of Blackmoor who work in the Hold but whose employers are unwilling to pay for them to live in town – builders, servants, washers, housemaids and so forth. But with time, Blackmoor has developed into a refuge for all fortune-hunters, pilgrims and independent explorers who either can not or will not pay for the protection of Mayor Nightpitch. And that has in turn given rise to more permanent inns, taverns and other establishments. So, in spite of total anarchy and a lack of formal blessing from the Queen, Blackmoor is rapidly turning into a permanent settlement. And should it keep going at the same rate, it will not be long before its population exceeds that of Thistle Hold.

Another permanent colony can be found about an hour's ride to the east, directly south of the high-road. There dwells Karabbadokk, the goblin tribe that has built most of Thistle Hold and whose members even today perform most of the heavy and dirty duties for Mayor Nightpitch – they harvest and transport lumber, sweep the streets before daybreak, and serve as dishwashers, bellow-boys, messengers, latrine cleaners and moat-diggers.

To be fair, the goblins are good for more than that. Foremost among the Karabbadokks are the chief of the tribe, Idelfons, and the former guide to the wilds, Garm Wormwriggler. Other notable members are the chimney-crawler Yppa, hoopnet-maker Olf and the ogre brothers Kulds and Klagga who are hired when something heavy must be carried in the Hold or during excavations in Davokar.

Locations

THIS SECTION CONVEYS a description of the most interesting and noteworthy places in Thistle Hold. The list is far from comprehensive, but hopefully offers a clear view of the town's character and atmosphere. What is hidden under the surface will not be dealt with in this book, other than in the form of hints and rumors that can be heard on taverns and plazas.

NIGHTHOME

Aside from his companion Yagaba and a staff of servants, Mayor Lasifor Nightpitch lives alone in a wooden palace called Nighthome. The building, three stories high, stands atop a softly sloping, grass-clad hill encircled by a man-high fence. The only other building on the plot stands by the fence-gate, and is occupied by the Mayor's personal guard.

The rumors swirling about Nighthome and what can be found within are of course many. There is talk of vaults full of gold, walls draped in antique tapestries and facial masks, and not least of the miraculous herbs growing on the roof terrace – for example the moonlight-loving Nightrose and the Silverlily that emanates sweet sugar-sap. But aside from the witch and the servants only a few select people have been allowed to see more of the building than the Mayor's ground floor office. Great caution is taken, since Nighthome must be considered every burglar's most coveted target.

THE QUEEN'S LEGATION

The eldest daughter of House Argona, a meticulous and educated widow named Suria, acts as the official legate of the Queen in Thistle Hold. The newly constructed legation is placed close to the fence of Nighthome and houses a staff of seven, entrusted to speak for Korinthia's administration and to send daily reports on large and small matters back to Yndaros.

Suria's father, the imposing Count Alkantor Argona, has come to spend more and more time on the upper floor of the building, supposedly treating his quarters as if he owned them. Persistent rumors claim that he governs his daughter with an iron fist, and that she for her part is fully occupied by trying to cover up her father's taste for all forms of lowly pleasures. Such gossip aside, there is no doubt that the Count often meets with the Mayor and the reason for that is commonly known: both have a lot to lose by the continued growth of Blackmoor, especially since the situation plays in favor of the unruly House Erebus and its charismatic leader, Baron Grafoldo.

ORDO MAGICA

The tower of Ordo Magica is, besides the Beacon, the tallest building in Thistle Hold. Reaching seven stories high it stands on a plot surrounded by a stone wall, a plot where the novices of Master Cornelio grow and study various herbs salvaged from the forest. A short time ago they discovered the flammable oil that can be extracted from the damdra-seed – something which has resulted in large-scale, troubled excavations on the turf of the lindworm Skaramagos.

Officially it is the Master of the Chapter, Cornelio, who runs local affairs. But there are always other masters at the tower and sometimes the arguments between them echo far across the rooftops. The greatest conflict seems to be the one between the Chapter Master and the two other permanent masters in Thistle Hold, Goncai and Eufrynda. The fact that the latter two have been observed cuddling in a stall at the Salons of Symbaroum is hardly to the advantage of Cornelio. In fact, it may eventually lead to a change from the Chapter's current caution to more bold strategies of exploration.

THE BEACON

The lives of nine goblins and three ogres were lost in the construction of the miraculous light tower that looms about three hundred feet above Toad's Square. The fire which blazes at its top is fed oil from a shelf fifty feet below; a shelf serving as a lookout post for the Queen's Rangers. The soldiers stationed up there are also tasked with stopping the many ruined and hopeless people in town from using the platform as a gate to the peaceful beyond.

The massive tower has become something of a symbol for the Ambrian struggle to tame the wilds, and the wardens of Davokar appear to have declared it their primary target. Only taking the latest year into account, three attempts have been made to burn it to the ground. In all three cases the attacks were carried out by unscrupulous citizens on the brink of ruin who had been bribed into action. Who paid them is not known, but according to the rumor mill the answer is obvious: the gold came from the witches or the elves, alternately from the human-hating alliance they both are believed to be part of.

MOTHER MEHIRA'S AGENCY

When the former treasure-hunter Mehira lost her left arm, her right eye and the major part of her respiratory capacity in an encounter with a swarm of tricklestings she put the adventurer outfit on a shelf and settled down in Thistle Hold. But just like her former colleague, Mayor Nightpitch, she was unable to rest on her laurels. It did not take long before she had a new business up and running, one which proved to be both lucrative and beneficial to the ambitions of the Queen.

Any fortune-hunter may register at the agency, relating his or her personal details along with a description of important skills and the willingness to take risks (low, high, extreme, foolish). The skills are sorted under the categories a) Fighter (warriors and most captains), b) Pathfinder (hunters and scoundrels) and c) Mystic (self-explanatory), and must upon enrollment be verified in some way. Once the agent has received a first assignment, the contractors get to evaluate his performance; evaluations are used to rank the agents. The price you must pay to hire an agent is then based on their rank, the supposed timeframe of the contract and its estimated level of risk. A quarter of the cost and a fixed deposit are awarded to Mother Mehira, the rest is paid to the agent once the job is done.

THE MISSIONARY STATION

In close proximity to the Antique Plaza is a building which has acidified the relations between Mayor Nightpitch and the ruling body of the Sun Church, the Curia – namely the missionary station of the highborn sun priest Father Sarvola. The elderly liturg has long been notorious within the Church for calling its practices crude, heartless and condemning. He says that: "Just like the sun generously shines upon high and low, wretched and pious, so shall our Church treat all children of Prios with the same warmth and love." Since coming into an enormous inheritance a couple of years ago he has used his newly acquired wealth to spread this message of love and compassion – a message that persuades a slowly increasing number of newly ordained priests to help

WILDERNESS GUIDES

Name	Category (Origin Class: Approach, Level)	Risktaking	Features
Elvea	Mystic (Ambrian mystic: Wizard, 5)	Extreme	Wizard, knowledgeable about herbs, unwavering
Galfenio	Mystic (Ambrian mystic: Self-taught 4)	High	Great combat skills (Combat Magic Expert), somewhat labile, changeling
Gruffy	Pathfinder (Ogre hunter: Monster-hunter 5)	High	Knowledgeable about beasts, good tracker, quiet, ogre
Hugalea	Pathfinder (Goblin scoundrel: Explorer 3)	Foolish	Great scout, moves silently, hygienic
Meomaar	Mystic (Barbarian mystic: Witch 6)	Low	Witch of clan Baiaga, speaks with animals and plants, touchy
Serafia	Pathfinder (Barbarian hunter: Ironsworn 5)	High	Great tracker, good aim, skilled climber, Understands elf tongue
Serex Attio	Fighter (Ambrian warrior: Duellist 5)	High	Excellent strategist, experienced in battle, tough, temperamental
Urfons	Fighter (Goblin warrior: Weapon Master 6)	Extreme	Great local knowledge, discreet, selfless
Vanoya Skullsplitter	Fighter (Barbarian warrior: Wrath Guard 4)	High	Strong, fearless, loyal, headstrong

him in the tasks of running the soup-kitchen in Blackmoor and proselytizing both there and among the Karabbadokks.

The fact that Mayor Nightpitch allows Sarvola to run his heretic movement in town is highly disapproved of by literalist theurgs and Black Cloaks, especially by Father Elfeno, the head of the local sun temple. But the Mayor argues that so long as you pay your dues and refrain from inciting riots anyone is welcome to stay. However, there are many indications that the agents of the Church will take matters into their own hands. New malicious rumors about Sarvola surface on a daily basis and his sermons are often disrupted by boos and seemingly spontaneous outbursts in the audience.

THE ANTIQUE PLAZA

What happens in the Antique Plaza at the center of town is determined by the ebb and flood caused by the varied success of treasure-hunters and explorers. The stalls and booths are of course always there, and so are the potential and very eager buyers from Yndaros and the noble houses. But sometimes the latter cannot do much else but sip hot beverages at the plaza's famous tea-houses or examine the ancient bronze well – a remnant of old Symbaroum that in fact is the reason why Thistle Hold is located where it is.

Everything changes when one or two expeditions return from the wilds. Usually it takes a couple of days before the treasures reach the plaza, since a select crowd of potential buyers always get the opportunity to inspect the items first. But when that happens, the whole block is turned upside down: food and drinks are served from every window; the sound of voices arguing about prices combines with the cacophony of bards trying to outperform each other and the cries from victims of muggers. Only inside the Treasury and Faraldo's Novelty Store – the establishments that most often are awarded the privilege of selling the finest antiques – does a relative calm prevails as the auctions proceed.

The Bronze Well of Thistle Hold

The roofed bronze well that today marks the center of Thistle Hold was, up until Year 10, placed in the courtyard of the warlord Haloban's fortress. That it originates from the glory days of Symbaroum has been established by Ordo Magica's scholars, who also have made attempts to decipher the symbols inscribed around its rim. The text tells the story of the birth, life and death of some mighty being; that much seems to be agreed upon. But in terms of detail the interpretations differ, both regarding what actually made the being remarkable and concerning what kind of creature it was – a serpent, a dragon or some other kind of reptile. What is evident for any and all is that the well still produces fresh and crystal clear water that each day quenches the thirst of a large portion of the townsfolk.

THE SALONS OF SYMBAROUM

In Thistle Hold there is a huge selection of dives, dens and finer taverns where the townsfolk can appease their various needs and wants. But among these establishments the Salons of Symbaroum has earned itself a special status. You may get the best tenderized deer steak at Afadir's Triumph Tavern, the sweetest syrup beer at Brew and the best gaming odds at Benego's, but only under the roof of Ordelia Wildjoice do all these pleasures come together.

The Salons of Symbaroum, or "the Salons" for short, offers three stories of pure delight and two of the dirtier kind – the visitors may eat, drink, gamble, enjoy exotic shows or pay for entrance to the top floor where they can appease various carnal desires. However, the latter is only an option during six out of seven days. What happens up there on the seventh is not commonly known, but there are three main rumors: meticulous cleaning, sessions with special guests or occult rites led by Ordelia herself.

THE GARRISON

The town watch of Thistle Hold is both numerous and well-paid. The one hundred fifty guards are divided into three shifts but can in times of trouble be amassed in full strength. When that happens they make a formidable fighting unit, not least because they are led by a trio of very experienced officers. The captains Tallios, Marvello and Dekamedo are, like most of their subordinates, veterans of The Great War, where they all acted as commanders in densely populated areas. To suppress unrest, lecture mischief-makers and predict where trouble will arise are their specialties.

According to persistent rumors the town watch's only real problem is that its commandant lacks much of the commitment shown by its captains. Herado Duskwatcher is the younger brother of Mayor Nightpitch, and it is said that he was awarded his position only because Lasifor wanted a commandant he could trust and control. Much suggests that the temperamental and anxious Herado, a man with a velvet fist in an iron glove, may prove to be a liability if and when the town watch is tested for real.

THE TOAD'S SQUARE

In the shadow of the Beacon lies a large, circular plaza surrounded by taverns and dives, including the Salons of Symbaroum. If one were to name one single place as the most dangerous in town, it would have to be the block neighboring the Toad's Square. More deaths occur there than in the rest of Thistle Hold combined, and it is in close vicinity to



the Beacon's foundation that most of the town's shady affairs take place – affairs that often go overboard since active town guards seldom are seen in the district.

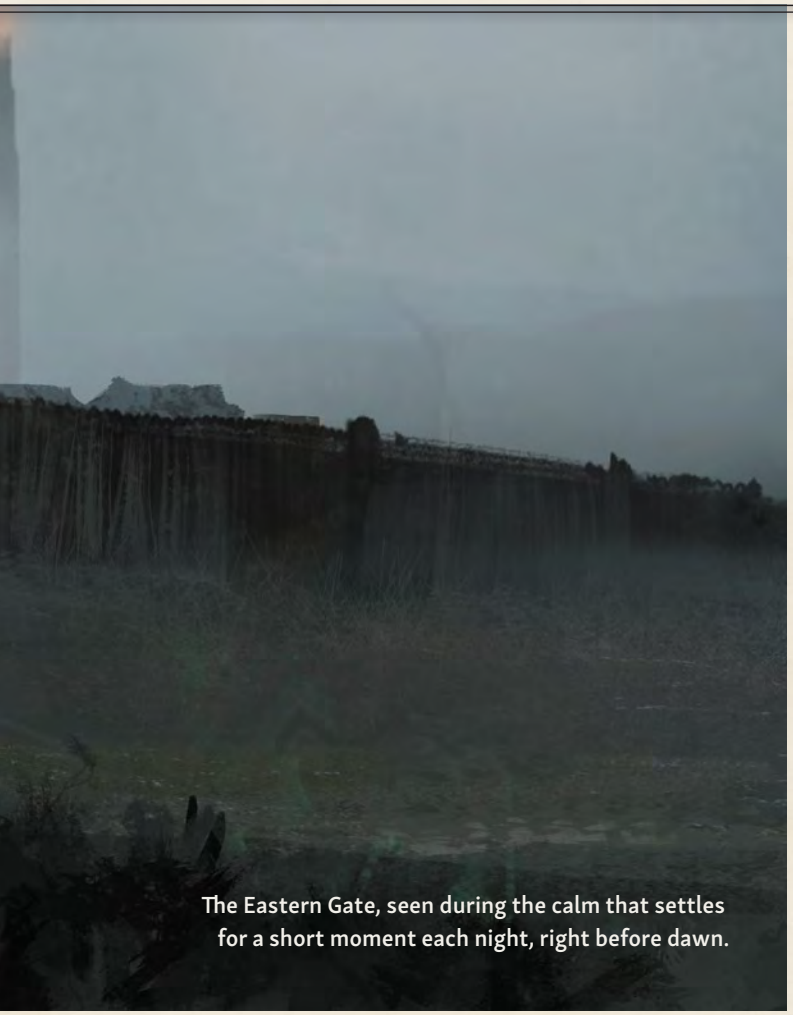
However, what is most renowned about the square is without a doubt the statue which has given it its name. Standing on a base made of black basalt, encircled by a stone-framed pond, stands the reassembled skeleton of a huge, toad-like monster. The carcass was found quite intact under the construction of the palisade and was restored by scholars from Ordo Magica. Even though the beast itself is enough to inspire the wildest fantasies, most speculations tend to be about the modest brass bell hanging in a ribbon around the creature's neck. Does the bell imply that the giant toad was once someone's pet? In that case, whose? Or was the creature itself thinking and astute, wearing the bell as jewelry? And why is its tone so frail? Would it sound differently if its original, not yet recovered clapper was found?

THE RUIN

In Thistle Hold there are many guest houses and inns of varying quality. The representatives of the Queen and the noble houses gladly visit the Court and Harp at the Antique Plaza or the Winged Ladle near the eastern gate; explorers often stay at the Seamstress' Rest close to the tower of Ordo Magica, while less wealthy visitors tend to be drawn to the establishments in the vicinity of the western gate – The Witch and Familiar, Arkerio's Guest House or the cheap but flea-infested Rose Garden. But for treasure-hunters, there is no place like the Ruin.

The guest house is as old as the town itself and has had many distinguished patrons. For example, it is said that Iasogoi Brigo stayed at the Ruin before going on the expedition that raised him to the skies, and the same has been said about Lysindra Goldengrasp. Should one put faith in the claims made by the owner, Master Pergalo, those two names are but the start of a long list of successful fortune-hunters who have blessed their expeditions by spending a night under his roof.

In addition, many are tempted by the inn's afternoon soup, cooked over an open fire in a giant cauldron that was recovered close to where the Toad's Square's skeleton was unearthed. No one has been able to decipher the archaic inscription covering it, but whatever it may say there is no doubt that the cauldron is perfect for cooking soup.



The Eastern Gate, seen during the calm that settles for a short moment each night, right before dawn.

Gaining Entry to Thistle Hold

In order to pass through the palisade, you have to carry a bill of passage and the copper, silver or gold signet ring with which the pass has been stamped. All who travel in and out for work are given rings of copper – something which has graced them with the disdainful nickname Coppers. The residents are awarded rings of silver but may choose to upgrade them to gold rings, with or without ornamentation.

If you are willing to accept the risk, it is possible to acquire forgeries among the tents of Blackmoor or in Karabbadokk. And if that does not seem tempting you can instead rent or buy a ring plus bill of passage from some shift-worker who is willing to part with it. Other than that the only, and possibly less risky, way to enter the Hold is to pay the fee. The base price is 1 shilling per leg or wheel that passes through the gate – in other words 2 shillings for a person on foot, 4 shillings for a person towing a cart with two wheels, 6 shillings for a rider and their horse and 1 shilling for a one-legged war veteran (provided that they are not riding a trolley). Furthermore, anyone who has come to Thistle Hold to do business must be prepared to declare their wares and pay a tenth of their market value in tax.

Persons of Interest

EVEN IF MOST people living in or passing through Thistle Hold have a connection to Davokar and the ruins of Symbaroum, there are also those who lead perfectly ordinary lives – they awake at dawn, go to work and toil (or roll their thumbs) until it is time for supper. The individuals described in this section may not be completely ordinary, but they can hardly be counted among the prominent or influential. Instead, they are meant to represent a varied assortment of inhabitants – people that the player characters can make contact with upon their first visit to Thistle Hold. And, as if by chance, they all have some kind of ambition or dream which they need help to realize.

KADRA, FORTUNE-HUNTER

No more than fourteen years of age, the orphaned Kadra arrived at Yndaros in a caravan filled with refugees. In the luggage she had nothing but traumatic memories: the death of her parents, her uncle's guardianship, the defiance of her big brother Julio which led to his death and to Kadra being thrown out into loneliness and poverty. All alone in the Promised Land she really had to struggle to survive, first as a servant in the capital, later as a maid on the estate of House Argona.

At the estate she met other young boys and girls dreaming of freedom and riches. They visited the inn at Argona Village, listened to stories about the treasures of Davokar and eventually they decided to give it a go. Out of the group who started the journey towards, and later on down into, Jerak's Sinkhole, only a badly bruised Kadra made it back. Luckily she did so with a bag full of precious artifacts salvaged from the ruins in the deep. Since then, two years have passed and Kadra still gets by on what she earned from selling the finds, waiting for the right people to cross her path – capable adventurers who can accompany her back to Jerak and who are willing to let her keep at least half of the loot.

GANDERALD, EXPLORER

Ganderald, an adept of Ordo Magica, is a changeling, born among the elves of Davokar but fostered by the members of clan Karohar near the forest edge. Like the majority of his kinsmen, he left his human family when his adoptive parents passed away. After having roamed the Ambrian countryside for years, he happened to end up in Yndaros as Ordo Magica held its "annual tryouts", when anyone may perform the Order's test of admission. He passed with flying colors and has in two years risen to the rank of adept.

Today Ganderald works for Master Goncai and shares his ambition to study and understand the Elder Folks, particularly the elves. Ganderald's special project involves the mapping of all observations made of elven activities, in the hope of uncovering where they might have their villages, cities or meeting places. At the moment he is focusing on two locations, both situated far beyond the border of Davokar, and he is trying to convince the Chapter Master that they are worth a closer look. When he succeeds he will be in need of capable traveling companions.

ELDA, ANTIQUE DEALER

Elda of clan Godinja has with her bone pale hair and blue-toned skin always felt like an outsider amongst her people, not to mention a disgrace to her parents. More or less by choice she has preferred to roam the woods rather than taking part in the community. And she has never taken note of the elders telling her to stay away from the ruins of old. Consequently she had collected a respectable amount of finds and riches even before she heard about the Ambrians and their hunger for Davokar's treasures.

As Thistle Hold opened its gates, Elda was one of the first to buy a small house inside the palisade. She leads a simple life, develops her network of explorers and fortune-hunters, and keeps her stall at the Antique Plaza relatively well-stocked with interesting items. The commissions she collects to hand out certificates of authenticity and to peddle the merchandise are lower than that of most competitors, which may be a reason for newly hatched fortune-hunters to stay on her good side. Additionally, she keeps full track of all rumors of interesting hunting grounds and may very well give adventurers a nudge in the right direction, in exchange for the right of first refusal on any noteworthy finds.

GALENO, MISSIONARY

Galeno is twenty-six years old and does not remember much about where he grew up, not more than the dust from the sterile soils and the daily hunts for clean water. And the refugee camp at Yndaros was not much more uplifting, especially not after his father died from consumption and his mother abandoned him for a new man with cold eyes and the dreams of a fortune-hunter. He was taken into the care of a charitable sun priest who sent him to the convent school where he was taught to revere Prios, the One.

Galeno studied diligently. He read anything he came across, searching for phrases resounding with the charity of his adoptive father. But he never found anything but rules as cold as the mother-thief's eyes, passages arguing that might is right and all-encompassing demands for an unconditional, self-destructive worship of the One. Then he heard about Father Sarvola...

Two months later he had left Yndaros and resumed his studies at the missionary station in Thistle Hold, determined to spread the love of Prios to illiterate goblins as well as to those hunting for fortunes in bottles of blackbrew. So far he has not received much more than a handful of beatings in return, but he will never give up. His dream is to journey far into the woods, and to find one of the many goblin tribes dwelling there, naturally in the hope of converting them to followers of Prios. As soon as he has found a suitable escort he is off.

VALLOMEI DEREGO, NOBLE

Many young nobles fantasize about Yndaros and the court, but not all of them. One of those who would rather seek adventure than intrigues is Vallomei Derego, the fourth son of baron Valtos. Like other noble youngsters he has more riches than good judgment and a mouth bigger than his courage, which is why he has spent the better part of three years talking about and preparing for the perfect expedition. Equipment has been bought, a cartographer has helped him to draw a map and the archives at Mother Mehira's agency have been scrutinized for the perfect band of companions.

The target of his planned journey is of course Symbar; he wants to become famous for being the one who finds a safe passage to the legendary palace of the last Symbarian emperor. Everything is set for departure, except for one last detail: the choice of an escort. Vallomei has such low regard for "common people" that he has a hard time finding someone he can trust. But as soon as that happens, as soon as he comes across a group of persons that makes him feel at ease, the trip towards the beating heart of Davokar will commence.

URFONS, SELLSWORD

Two years old, while searching for berries in the outskirts of Davokar, the goblin Urfons happened upon a hunter who had been torn asunder by a forest beast. By the cadaver remained the hunter's sword. Urfons hid his find under the moss and returned to it day after day to admire and polish the shiny, sharp-edged weapon.

As he grew strong enough to wield it, he spent several hours each day fighting against imaginary enemies, stones and bushes. And even though he never learned any special technique, he became more and more skilled at trailing and utilizing the weight of the weapon in a kind of raging, twirling sword-dance.

Urfons is big and strong for a goblin, and has matured into one of Mother Mehira's most experienced sellswords. He may not be as skilled as the legendary war veteran Serex Attio or the axe-wielding warmaiden Vanoya Skullsplitter, but on the other hand he is neither an alcoholic nor especially touchy. What's more, Urfons has actually survived a handful of expeditions to mythic locations far past the brighter parts of Davokar. He can easily find his way back if someone would pay him for guidance to the Columns of Haganor or the Cave Town of Keruan.

PELLIO, TOWN WATCHMAN

Tormented by memories of confrontations with the hordes of the Dark Lords, Pellio accompanied the first detachment to abandon the south. He took part in the short siege of the village of Kadizar and was thereafter commanded to patrol its walls. In order to scatter his thoughts he started playing dice and soon he owed a small fortune to persons who would rather make use of his skills than demand reimbursements. Pellio became an expert at handling all sorts of shady deals – from extortion and exactions, to smuggling, to outright acts of violence.

Three years ago the fifty-year-old veteran resigned from the army and moved to Thistle Hold where he applied for a position in the town watch. The controlled environment is more or less made for a man of Pellio's talents. He is careful not to get involved in anything too dangerous or risky, which is why no one has safer smuggler routes in and out of the Hold than he does. Also, no one has him beat when it comes to procuring sensitive objects or illicit substances. If you need anything done in Thistle Hold, turn to Pellio!

Areas of Conflict

COMPARED TO THE teeming and chaotic Yndaros, Thistle Hold may be perceived as an oasis of peace and tranquility. The intention of its Mayor has always been that he who pays to step through the gates has earned himself a pleasurable stay; a logic that he also applies to himself. Troublemakers and potential insurgents are caught early on and banished from the Hold, with the possible exception of a few who can display honest regrets and a generous gift to compensate for the problems they have caused. Sure, it can get wild at nights – drinking and brawling is tolerated by the town watch, at least in the taverns surrounding the Toad's Square. But all threats to the "public order" are harshly dealt with. That is, if they are detected...

Not more than eight years after its founding, cracks have appeared in the wooden wall, literally as well as figuratively. The system of rings and bills of passage meant to control who passes in and out through the gates has its weaknesses, since the articles can be both forged and stolen. Furthermore, a handful of corrupt watchmen have been exposed over the years and a number of more or less successful attempts to tunnel under the palisade revealed.

In the more figurative sense, there are powers within the walls whose gratitude towards Mayor Nightpitch's generous achievements has declined considerably. There are many who stress that the price you have to pay for the relative safety of Thistle Hold is way too high, or that the wages paid for services rendered are way too low. Others do their best to avoid taxes and tolls, either by making trades in secret or by moving their business to Blackmoor. And adding to this is a long list of feuds between families or individuals, some of them dating back to the time of The Great War – feuds causing the allegedly well-oiled clockwork that is Thistle Hold to squeak and rattle.

This section describes a handful of conflicts that may be considered typical for Thistle Hold. They can be used as a basis for creating adventures, but are also meant to serve the purpose of expanding the portrayal of the region and its people. The content is mainly meant for Gamemasters to read, but exceptions can of course be made if the members of the gaming group are in agreement.

GRUMBLING GOBLINS

Ever since the Karabbadokks were invited by Lasifor Nightpitch to leave the woods and establish a settlement east of Thistle Hold, the tribe has been characterized by its self-selected submissiveness. The tribe's chief, Idelfons, regards himself as a very close friend of Mayor Nightpitch, and is deeply humbled by being allowed to serve such a noble man's ambitions – a notion which is strengthened by the numerous and lavish gifts he receives from his friend.

But there is a growing mass of younger goblins that refuse to be content with getting nothing but scraps from Lasifor's table. With the hothead Ugtuls as their frontrunner, they claim that the proud history of Karabbadokk is sullied by its current slave-like status. And when the intoxicants are flowing they are heard yelling about everything from boycotting work to armed takeovers of the Hold. Idelfons ignores Ugtuls, thinking he is nothing but a harmless bully. Only the informal leader of the village, Garm Wormwriggler, senses the gravity of the situation and tries to pour oil on the troubled waters. The question is how long it will take before the oil catches fire...

FRIENDS OF THE FOREST

That the subjects of Queen Korinthia are charmed by the wild might of Davokar is not as uncommon as one might think. One flagrant example was exposed the other year when the authorities caught up with a secret society called the Jakaars – led by a novice of the Order named Hurelia and consisting of about twenty individuals who only had one thing in common: an abhorrence of how their fellow countrymen were treating the forest.

The Jakaars were no cult; they were in no way allied to the dark and corrupt forces of Davokar. But they were far from toothless. Up to the point of their capture they had only carried out a few minor attacks, but they had plans to cause problems for everyone exploiting the woods as well as those who trade in the loot of treasure-hunters and explorers. One might wonder just how they were hoping to accomplish this without attracting suspicions from witch-hunters or becoming directly involved in occult activities.

UNHEALTHY STIMULANTS

The vegetation of Davokar can have the most astonishing properties and to consume even the smallest seed can have devastating effects – just ask the explorer Lupina who literally was torn apart from inside by a Bellycreeper that had rooted itself in her throat. Some herbs have both positive and negative effects and there will always be gamblers willing to pay a high price for accelerated muscle growth, enhanced night vision, a rosy complexion or sensations of ecstasy – even if the cost is murderous rage, blood thirst or lifelong addiction.

There are of course also people exploiting the situation to make money. In most cases not even the vendors know exactly what long-term effects are incurred from consuming their "medicaments"; sometimes they just ignore any side-effects and keep their trade to the shadows – as for instance the masked "Miracle Master" who periodically is seen in both Yndaros and the Hold, marketing his joy-inducing medicures.

THE APOSTATE SARVOLA

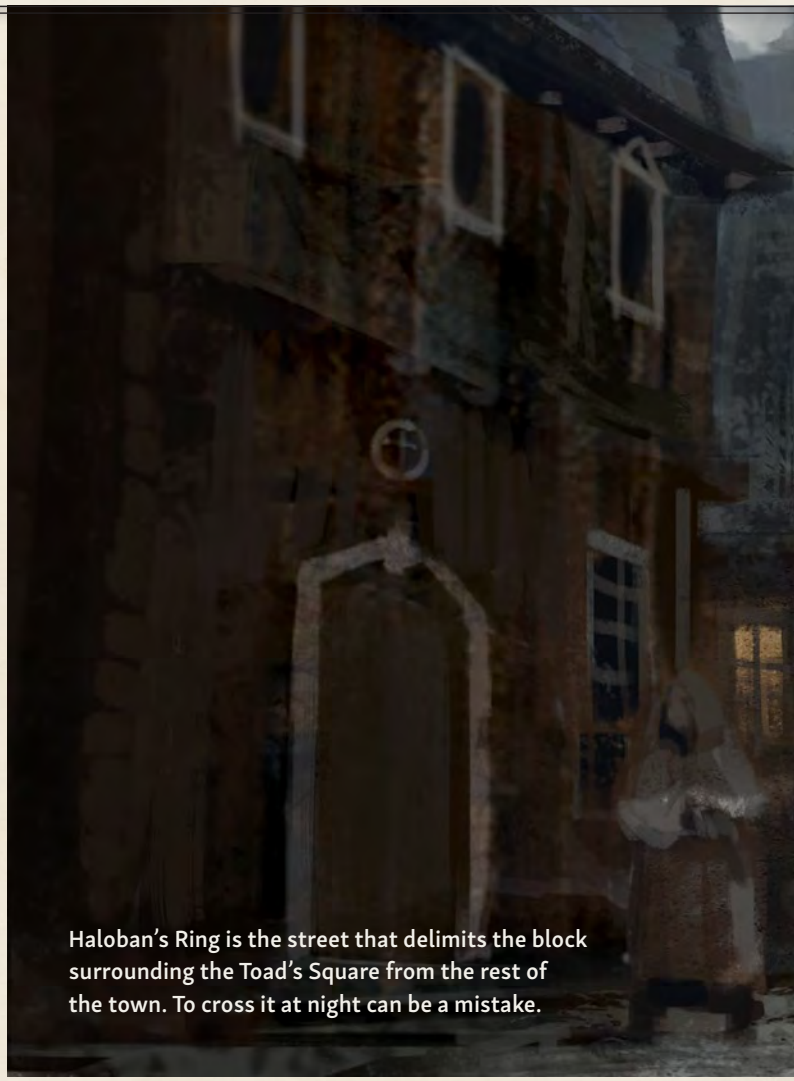
According to the Curia, the governing body of the Sun Church, Father Sarvola is a heretic spreading false doctrines and dragging the sublime name of Prios in the dung of the gutters. The problem is that very few others seem to worry about the doings of the apostate.

On the contrary, many silently approve of his missionary activities among goblin scum and barbarians, as well as his appeals for generosity, love and brotherhood. In short: so long as the Queen, Lasifor Nightpitch, Grand Master Seldonio and other influential individuals accept the activities of Sarvola, there is not much the Curia can do. At least not in the open.

THE GROWTH OF BLACKMOOR

Blackmoor is growing. It was once a small campsite but now the tents are spread far and wide over the dark soil, and can, during the summers, accommodate more people than the Hold itself. The land is owned by House Erebus, headed by baron Grafoldo who welcomes the transformation. His family earns a great deal on rents and taxes from the stores, guest houses, artisans and eateries that make out a small village core by the high-road. The earnings are in fact so good that the baron has hired a guard – the mercenary outfit called the Blood Robes – to keep some kind of order in the camp. He has also sent a petition to the Queen, asking her to allow for permanent homes to be built on the land.

Grafoldo Erebus and the most prominent entrepreneurs in Blackmoor work hard to get the petition approved, but they are struggling against the wind. Among the opponents are Lasifor Nightpitch in alliance with House Argona, but also lots of merchants who have reasons for wanting the trade in loot and artifacts to be conducted in the controlled environment of the Hold. On their side they really only have the Sun Church, partly because the priests regard Blackmoor as a breeding ground for depravity, partly because they want to punish Mayor Nightpitch for housing a barbarian witch and the heretic Sarvola.



Haloban's Ring is the street that delimits the block surrounding the Toad's Square from the rest of the town. To cross it at night can be a mistake.

TROUBLE AT THE ANTIQUE PLAZA

As a collective, the merchants are the most powerful faction in Thistle Hold, and among them the antique dealers comprise the elite. Consequently, intrigues equal to those among the nobles in Yndaros are found in and around the marketplaces in the Hold.

When it is rumored that a successful expedition is on its way back to town, it all breaks loose. Merchants do their best to gain an advantage, resorting to anything from smearing opponents to robbing them blind; at times even kidnappings or murders take place. And for the happy one who manages to secure the vending rights the troubles are far from over, as rivals will do everything in their power to sabotage sales.



The Player Characters in Thistle Hold

AS PREVIOUSLY STATED, Thistle Hold will probably be the place from which the player characters embark on their expeditions and to where they (hopefully) return. But never forget that the Hold makes an interesting setting on its own! Mayor Nightpitch's town is teeming with conspiracies, secrets and interesting individuals, just waiting to be addressed by the player characters.

HOUSING

When you have made it through the gates you should not have a difficult time finding a place to spend the night. Ever since Blackmoor became a viable option for many treasure-hunters, there are often affordable rooms for rent at the Ruin, the Witch and Familiar, and the Rose Garden. It is also both possible and cheap to rent a bed in some private household or in the barracks at the Garrison which is only used in times of trouble, when the town watch expands its numbers by hiring mercenaries.

Acquiring permanent lodging in Thistle Hold is a costly affair, but it is of course possible to buy houses as well as apartments, from private owners or from the Mayor. Concerning the latter, there is no room for any new buildings to be built, so the homes for sale are always ones which have been confiscated from some evicted or dead previous owner.

Another option is to lease a home from some landlord who has moved or is out traveling. But that often amounts to a higher cost than buying, since a fee for "permanent residency" is added, paid directly to the Mayor. However, lately many have chosen that alternative despite it being more expensive. The reason for this is the continuous growth of Blackmoor – the risk is that the prices on houses in the Hold will decline considerably if the tent camp is approved for permanent housing by the Queen.

EQUIPMENT

Everything needed for mounting an expedition into Davokar can be bought in the Hold. The general store Marvalom's specializes in equipment for treasure-hunters and explorers but can keep prices that are about 20 percent above normal because of its legendary status. Within the walls there

LODGING IN THISTLE HOLD					
Quality	**Example**	**1 Night**	**1 Week**	**1 Month**	**Ownership**
Exclusive	The Court and the Harp, The Winged Ladle	1 thaler	—	—	—
Fine	The Seamstress' Rest, The Ruin	2 shillings	1 thaler	4 thaler	—
Ordinary	The Witch and Familiar, Arkerio's	1 shilling	5 shillings	2 thaler	—
Simple	The Rose Garden, The Barracks	5 ortegs	2 shillings	1 thaler	—
Rent nice	Three rooms at the Antique Plaza	—	2 thaler	10 thaler	—
Rent ordinary	Three rooms at the West Gate	—	1 thaler	2 thaler	—
Rent simple	One room east of the Toad's Square	—	5 shillings	2 thaler	—
Own nice	Three rooms at the Antique Plaza	—	—	—	500 thaler
Own ordinary	Three rooms at the West Gate	—	—	—	300 thaler
Own simple	One room east of the Toad's Square	—	—	—	100 thaler

are also Marvalom's competitor the Rope and Axe and the discount market in the Queen's Square, where brand new objects share tables with secondhand items.

If you are looking for a real bargain you should visit Blackmoor, in particular the Marketplace or the store called Kodomar's Huckery. But the noise, crowds and criminal elements of the tent camp are avoided by most, especially when taking the varying quality of the wares into account. In Blackmoor you can pay less than nothing for a masterly crafted item one day, and wind up paying a fortune the next for a pickaxe made from porous bog iron.

MISSIONS TO PERFORM

One who is fairly capable and is seeking to earn money on adventurous tasks does not have to stay unemployed for long in Thistle Hold. The town is full of fortune-hunters and merchants in need of company, who can offer cash payment or shares in future earnings to interested parties. The destination may be a colony, a nest of free settlers or a barbarian camp site but most often the road leads to the alluring ruins of Symbaroum. And the person or group that is unwilling to follow the orders of some taskmaster is always free to map out their own goals. In the taverns by the Toad's Square anyone can listen to stories about promising hunting grounds, ask around for directions or even pay for more or less reliable maps to places like Saroklaw, Black Pitch Mire, Jerak, or Symbar itself.

Once you have proven what you are made of, it might be time to contact Mother Mehira, hoping to get enrolled among her agents. The one who succeeds in that, has a great chance of being hired by more prominent employers, such as Ordo Magica, the Sun Church, wealthy merchants, adventurous nobles or even representatives of the Queen. For instance, Mother Mehira was honored with the task of assembling an escort to accompany Arch Duchess Esmerelda, the Queen's half-sister, on a trip to Karvosti. It is said that Serex Attio completely pulverized the furnishings of the Witch and Familiar when he was excluded because of his unruly temper.

Job opportunities can also be found inside the palisade. A group of adventurers can take jobs on the lawful side, for instance as night guards in some antique dealer's warehouse or as bouncers in one of the taverns by the Toad's Square. They can be paid to find stolen objects, missing persons, elusive criminals, groups of rioters and cultists, or the unhealthy source behind a mysterious disease. But a word to the wise: irrespective of what one does, one must tread with greater care in the Hold than in Yndaros and other Ambrian towns – at least as long as one has not been given the assignment by Mayor Nightpitch or one of the captains of the town watch. Thistle Hold is a small town, where everyone knows everyone, where everything is seen or heard by someone and where the authorities are anxious to preserve law and order. Stealthy maneuvers, assassinations, diplomacy and shrewdness are always preferable to rampaging through the streets!

Of course, the lawful side also has its darker counterpart. It is far from unusual that those who are up to no good put their trust in newcomers and non-residents. A skilled and unscrupulous group of adventurers can get lots of assignments which involve stealing things (antiquities, treasure maps, journals and so on); sabotaging buildings or objects; or acting as middlemen in shady deals. And it probably goes without saying that he who paws about on the wrong side of the law must be doubly careful in Thistle Hold.

Yndaros

YNDAROS IS BUILT on the well-preserved ruins of the city-state Lindaros. Regarding the latter not much more is known than what has been told by the clanfolks – the contact between Alberetor and Lindaros was never developed because of the great barrier called the Titan Mountains. The general belief is that the city-state was ruined about two centuries ago when a terrible epidemic wiped out its population. It is also said that the fate of the Lindarians was self-inflicted; that the scourge was sent from Higher Powers, as punishment for their arrogant and slothful ways.

The ruins of Lindaros were for a long time shunned and feared by the people still living in the area. But as the Ambrians arrived at the shores of the Doudram they were greeted by a walled, barbarian village situated inside the ruined city. After a short siege and an even shorter parley, the chieftain of Kadizar agreed to surrender and to dissolve his clan. In return he was awarded the title Baron Manvar Grendel, and was given a piece of land to govern. The oldest daughter of the newly appointed baron refused to submit herself to the rule of the intruders and eloped to the mountains along with two hundred Kadizans. The rest of the clan stayed and were soon put to work by the new lords of the land.

Thanks to thousands of prisoners of war, Lindaros was rapidly transformed into the new residence city of Queen Korinthia. When she arrived with her court, seven years after the forerunners, a respectable palace was already waiting for her, and the basic structure of streets and city blocks was also in place. With her arrival the development gained momentum. The palace was remodeled and expanded; lots of buildings were demolished to leave room for bigger and more beautiful ones; parks and squares were established, most of them crowned with pompous monuments; grandiose constructions like the Cathedral of Martyrs, the Dome and the harbor basin were based on foundations of old Lindaros and could be finished in a matter of years.

Fourteen years have now passed since the arrival of the Queen and the city keeps growing in a way which many deem to be unsustainable. According to estimates about 100,000 people call the capital their home, but many of them live under harsh conditions within the walls of old Kadizar or in the refugee camp southeast of there. And the immigrants keep coming; lots of people arrive from the dying south on a daily basis. Some have been invited because of their special skills or thanks to siblings already there, other are hopefuls lured by the inflated rumors of Yndaros' splendor. And even if many are referred to colonies in the west or to work at the edge of Davokar, one may wonder if, and for how long, the authorities will be able to maintain some kind of order.

Symbaroum and Lindaros

The Ambrians have limited knowledge about the civilizations that previously ruled the region. But if one is to believe the barbarians, Symbaroum and Lindaros are somehow related or at least connected. According to their legends, the latter was established when some of the clans opted to settle down, at about the same time as the other clans united under a High Chieftain to combat the horrors of Davokar. But as is the case with myths and legends, the truth is far from established. The connection between the two is often the topic of lively debates in taverns visited by Ordo Magica's novices and adepts.

Surroundings

YNDAROS AND THE lands surrounding it belong to the Grand Duchy of Korinthia, called Yndarien. Count Demetro Vearra governs the land west of the capital, Count Edogai Brigo the land to the east, while the Queen herself has direct control over a vast area to the south. About a dozen towns and villages lay within a day's ride from the city, the biggest ones being New Vearra and Brigo's Bridge close to the estates of the counts.

Most notable among the villages are Prios Pass and Dekadena. The former is located where the mountain road from Alberetor reaches the lowlands and traverses River Veloma. Aside from its inhabitants working closely with the nearby monastery of the Twilight Friars, Prios Pass has developed into a border crossing, where refugees from Alberetor have to register before traveling further into the Promised Land. While waiting for the certificate declaring them to be healthy and suitable for work and lodging in the Queen's realm the immigrants all live in a huge camp south of the river. Others try to avoid passing through the village or make attempts to bribe their way to swift passage and a signed certificate, adding to the workload of the Ranger border patrols. The rangers stay fully occupied rooting out corruption and chasing after those who are denied entry to Ambria but still try to find a way into the Promised Land.

Dekadena, high seat of the Barony of New Dekanor located in the southeast, is another story. Late in the spring of Year 20, Baron Mergai declared himself independent and

appointed himself King – something which happened after Korinthia had publicly ordered him to build a sun temple in Dekadena. The baron refused, accusing the Queen and the First Father of wrongfully exalting Prios at the expense of all other gods. The Sun Church immediately threatened to brand him a heretic and a servant of the Dark Lords, but an overwhelming majority of Baron Mergai's subjects appeared to welcome and revere their new "king". Adding to that, a slight increase in people migrating to the barony has been noticed – obviously Ambrians who share Mergai's spiritual beliefs. The situation is tense, to say the least, and in most of Yndaros' taverns the main question is debated daily: will the Queen allow the transgression to pass unpunished or will she accept the offer from commander Iakobo Vearra and let the Templars deal with the heretics?

Aside from the above-mentioned examples, life in the smaller towns and villages is often more pleasant than life in the city. But there is a price to pay, in the form of constant threats from local bands of robbers. A handful of bandit chiefs are held up in the mountains, the most infamous ones being Baron Manvar Grendel's obstinate daughter, called the Ice Witch, and the ogre Mound and his gang of goblins and tamed rage trolls. The robbers attack villages, ambush travelers on the highroads and in mountain passes or strike at ships moving along the rivers. Fortunately, in most cases the bands are composed of five to ten desperate and not very organized ruffians without any other means to survive. But if you encounter one of the bigger bands you will need more than a handful of caravan guards to protect cargo and lives.

Besides the threats from robbers, life in Yndaros and its surroundings is relatively safe compared to other regions. Yes, refugees come carrying horrible diseases from the motherland, Davokar's predatory beasts and abominations reach the lowlands at times, and poverty and misery sometimes spark revolts in the area. But such challenges can almost always be dealt with before they turn disastrous. The Queen's capital contains both the strongest muscles and the sharpest brains, and when they team up there is no threat that is too great to handle, or rather, no such threat has so far been revealed.

The Districts

THIS SECTION PROVIDES some details on the various districts and other areas of the capital city.

THE PALACE DISTRICT

The palace with its pavilions, parks and barracks is located in the southern part of the capital, and is completely based on foundations from old Lindaros. It is placed on a wide hilltop surrounded by a polished, and nowadays somewhat eroded, stone wall; a hill that likely harbored the lords of the dead city-state two centuries ago.

Aside from the sequentially remodeled palace with its sky-high central tower there are many other buildings inside the wall. The dukes and duchesses share two pavilions, one of which also is the permanent residence of the sickly mother of the Queen. The Queen's Guard, the Pansars, has its barracks close to the Palace Park with its sculptures and encaged beasts. Close by is also the highly appreciated Triumph Theater, housing an ensemble of actors, a male choir and two dance companies.

Finally, the residence of the Key Master must be mentioned. Since four years ago, it is the beloved Herakleo Attio who runs the city administration. Many would say that his fierceness, made evident in the expansion and harsher methods of the city's reformatory, would never have been tolerated if he were not such a celebrated and adored war hero.

The Dance Academy

When the Dark Lords were vanquished, a group of dancers were liberated from their stronghold. The dancers asked to follow Korinthia's troops back to Alberetor, and today the big craze among Ambria's nobles is to be seduced by eastern dance magic. The easterners share a building in the Palace District with the court dancers of the Queen – a company of arrogant ballerinas that have a hard time accepting the success of the newcomers. They claim that the performance of the former prisoners lacks artistic depth, that the "dancers" exhibit a total lack of physical discipline and that they basically are engaged in fraudulent nonsense.

THE HARBOR DISTRICT

Initially it was a place for unloading incoming construction materials, but nowadays the Harbor District has turned into Yndaros' center for amusements, pleasure and relaxation. Taverns like the Victory Vault, Ynedar's Legacy and the Town Hall's Loft provide food and beverages, often accompanied by bards playing and singing. And if you would rather skip eating there are places like the wine house Tuvinel's, the cider mill Bego's Basement or The Savage that exclusively serves variations of the barbarian blackbrew. For thrill-seekers there are also dives like The Fortune Smithy and The Lucky Charm down by the waterfront, or why not The Steel Glove located in the bohemian quarter where the prize fights keep going all night long – at least until its grand master, the ogre Bigpaw, has stepped into the ring and clubbed down anyone drunk enough to take the challenge.

But not everything is drunkenness and debauchery. The fuming Steam Bath down by the dock can accommodate highborn as well as lowborn in separate rooms; from the circular balconies of the Vivisectory visitors can observe the masters of Ordo Magica cut open anything from strange seed-pods to huge spiders, corrupted beasts and even goblins; in the five-story building housing the Legacy Gallery it is free for anyone to behold artworks and listen to bards praising the glorious past of the Ambrian people and the lost splendor of Alberetor. And one should not disregard the pillories and the executioner's podium at the Triumph Plaza, the latter featuring both gallows and a stand where nobler criminals are beheaded.

Aside from all things mentioned above, it is of course possible to board ships in the harbor basin. Queen Korinthia has a galley with twelve oar pairs at a well-guarded berth, next to the smaller rowboats which carry prominent residents to the extravagant pleasure palace on the Islet – for a night of good food, exclusive company and first-class spectacles. Furthermore, a ferry journeys between the harbor and the village of Beren's Berth on the northern shores of the Doudram, leaving from Yndaros at each even stroke of the clock and back at the odd ones.

THE ARTISANS' DISTRICT

The capital's many craftsmen mainly keep to four city blocks – two directly below the Palace District, and two west of the harbor basin. The competition is deadly due to the fact that most of the artisans who previously were scattered over Alberetor now have assembled in Yndaros. And the situation is hardly improved when the craftsmen get additional competitors in the form of migrating barbarians and, in some areas, goblins.

In Year 19, hoping to address the many conflicts and feuds caused by the surplus, the Queen dictated that a guild system should be installed, much like the one that already existed within Ordo Magica. The idea was that bricklayers, blacksmiths, brewers, tailors, potters and so on should get organized in systems of novices, adepts and masters, based on the skill of each individual. Since then the struggle for the master and grandmaster seals has been bloody, actually so bloody that many of the survivors have chosen to move elsewhere – two factors that have finally led to a relative calm settling in.

Then again, there is another storm cloud hovering over the neighborhood. During year 13 the first of a dozen dwarven families arrived, asking permission to settle in the city. As they could pay their way and possibly develop into a valuable contact between Ambria and the secluded kingdom of Küam Zamok, they were warmly welcomed and made their homes in the Artisans District.

However, it has become more and more apparent that the families are feuding and that they are not capable of, or interested in, performing any crafts. Instead they have by various methods acquired a long list of businesses – taverns, warehouses, dives and so on – that they now manage. The rumors about what they are up to, why they oppose one another and gather in large groups that clash in brutal fights are numerous; as many as the connections made between the dwarves and various criminal deeds in the western districts of Yndaros. But even if their activities have started to spread to adjacent parts of the city, the authorities do nothing – another strange fact which gives rise to wild speculations.

THE TEMPLE DISTRICT

The blocks west of the palace are commonly called the Temple District, even though they contain much more than the Sun Church's majestic shrine. The Cathedral of Martyrs is without a doubt the area's most prominent landmark. But one who closes in on Yndaros from the south or by ship along the Doudram also sees the three spires of Ordo Magica's tower and the Kohinoor's guesthouse roof rise higher than the surrounding buildings. Here the buildings generally stand further apart than in the rest of the city, most of them being surrounded by an open space, stone paved or covered with trimmed grass. For instance, the Convent School of the Last Light is situated on a walled plot, big enough to include housing facilities and a temple with room for about one hundred visitors, aside from the school itself.

Nearest to the palace wall is a fenced-in neighborhood, inhabited by the most prominent people in the realm. A huge force of armed guards, led by the retired hero-general Seraon Patio, makes sure that no trespassers make their way to the private residences. Here prosper the city's wealthiest individuals – the merchant Master Hurian, the Islet's proprietor Elindra Aroma, the patron Laguboi Galeia and many more. Other estates are owned by the noble houses and are only in use when their representatives have errands in the capital. Finally, there are some other noteworthy houses: the fabulous tavern Brother Humlu's, the copy of Nighthome built by the Mayor of Thistle Hold and the fortress-like residence recently constructed by Artek Valotzar, the head of what appears to be the most successful dwarven family.

OLD KADIZAR

The barbarian village of Kadizar was established about a century ago, by the clan Kadiz which had made an enemy of the Jezites – the region's most powerful force back then. Searching for a safe haven, they dared to challenge the taboos and entered the abandoned city-state, where they soon settled down and built a claystone wall for further protection. The location they selected lay close to the waters of River Doudram and included an ancient tower-ruin to function as a lookout for keeping an eye on the enemy up north.

The twenty-foot-high bailey is still standing, and within it is a mixture of Kadizian claystone houses, Lindarian



Yndaros is still a work in progress, which is true for buildings and social structures alike. Those who argue that the authorities should focus less on mortar and stone, more on law and order, may have a point.

buildings and a few ruins from the time of Symbaroum. Before the arrival of the Ambrians the old tower ruin was the residence of the chieftain, but since then its sections have been divided between different occupants – the local headquarters of the city watch composes one section, while the informal leader of Old Kadizar, the thief king Nobleman Dastan, resides in the remodeled tower itself. Beneath the complex a widely debated excavation is taking place, organized by Ordo Magica. If they have found anything noteworthy, the excavation leader, Master Marbela, has managed to keep it a secret.

Today the overcrowded Old Kadizar has about four thousand inhabitants, a majority of which only survive thanks to alms, day-laboring and begging in the streets. The jobs available are often burdensome, dangerous and smelly: the city's tannery lies within the wall, as well as the headquarters of the sewer workers and the guild of the blacksmiths. Of course, the leaders among the tanners, the "sewer rats" and the blacksmiths have a lot of power and influence in Old Kadizar, just like the proprietor of the claystone plant, Lord Manselm.

Many of the inhabitants choose to lead a criminal life, too proud or too greedy to settle for the meager outcome of honest labor. Because of that, an informal power structure has emerged, with Nobleman Dastan on top. It is said that he has made a fortune from organized begging, pickpocketing, renting out manpower and so on. And he is of course as determined to oppose any rebellious tendencies as the city watch has ever been.

THE CARGO DOCKS

East of Old Kadizar's bailey are the docks that nowadays are used for shipping cargo to and from Ravenia in the north, Agrella in the west and Mergile in the east. South of the dockyard's warehouses lies the most shabby laborer's quarter in Yndaros, not much more than an unstructured gathering of sheds and hovels. All buildings from the time of Lindaros are gone – officially razed to be salvaged for materials needed when reconstructing the Palace District; according to rumors demolished because the authorities did not want refugees and peasants living in easily defended stone buildings. If you trail the bailey around to the south, you will find finer living quarters for laborers and simple folk. These quarters have been allowed to keep their stone structures and they grow increasingly pleasant the closer you get to the city center.

Pleasant or not, it is in these blocks that you find the discontented and rebellious. In Old Kadizar all rebellious tendencies are kept in check by Nobleman Dastan and the city watch, but outside the wall it is harder to maintain control. The dock workers, domestics, builders, coachmen and so on are right to claim that they are awarded far too little in exchange for their hard work. At the same time they have to suffer the effects of a continuously expanding refugee camp – destitute, hungering men and women that are prepared to do anything and for an even smaller salary.

If the population were not so divided into various subgroups fighting each other, the situation would most likely be drastically different. But as it is, you will find the stevedore Krepano arguing for the rights of all Ambrians, the leather seamstress Yahela arguing for the barbarians, the day laborer Ulofin for the goblins and unemployed Feora for the rights of the newly immigrated. The one voice that seems to be shouting for the sake of all impoverished is the one rising from the criers of an organization called The Torch. Nobody knows who is financing the operation or who writes the biased news announced by the Torch's boys and girls – apparently not even the children themselves.

THE REFUGEE CAMP

The Refugee Camp stretches out south of the Cargo Docks and east of the patch of forest surrounding the gladiator stadium called the Dome. Just as in the Cargo Dock District all remnants of old Lindaros have been razed to the ground, which leaves the dwellers no other shelter than tents, wagons and the occasional shed. It is hardly an overstatement to claim that the 20,000 people living in the camp were expecting something quite different when they came through the Titans. Before leaving, most of them even led a tolerable life in the parts of Alberetor that still had some life in them.

Fortunately, the Queen and other prominent residents seem to realize that the situation would get out of hand if the refugees were not only homeless and impoverished but also starving. Soup kitchens can be found here and there among the tents, bread is distributed and some days the children are even treated to so-called Sugar Showers.

On the other hand, the food and the sweets are not much more effective than a poultice on a cracked skull. Those who have the stamina and a glimmer of hope take whatever kind of job they can get, no matter how heavy or dangerous, not

The Brew Vandals

Even if a majority of Queen Korinthia's subjects regard barbarians and their traditions as uncivilized and despicable, there are some customs which have taken root. A huge group of youngsters in the Labor Districts have started to make use of barbarian intoxicants, in particular the beverage called blackbrew and various mushrooms. These Brew Vandals sometimes get so stewed that they move through the streets like a laughing wave of destruction and random violence, causing dismay and fear among more respectable residents.

least in order to afford themselves a cheap jug of brutebrew for comfort. Their highest wish is to be selected to climb into one of the wagons that several times a week arrive from country estates and border colonies, searching for capable workers.

The city watch is of course always present in the camp, and its patrols are often accompanied by a Black Cloak and one or more young Pansars. It has indeed been known to happen that barbarian rebels and organized criminals have used the refugee camp as a base of operations in Yndaros. The patrols have a deterring effect when it comes to petty crimes like theft and abuse but the refugees still live in constant fear, not least due to all rumors circling the camp – rumors of murderous rebel leaders, occult sacrificial rites, bloodthirsty abominations in human form and the kidnapping sprees of slave traders; rumors which seem all the more real when the inhabitants of the camp have a tendency to vanish without a trace, sometimes several people per night.

FORTRESS DOUDRAM

Yndaros is not surrounded by a bailey and the relatively low walls of the Palace District would hardly stop a hostile army from reaching the heart of the realm. At the moment there seems to be no serious threat against the Queen but such things can change, for instance if the High Chieftain rallied the clans and also joined ranks with the elves. And for that reason a great fortress went into construction four years ago, placed on a cliff in the mighty Doudram west of the city – meant to be a safe haven for the court and the city's most prominent residents.

Fortress Doudram will be fully finished within a year and is already in use as the headquarters of the Pansars, guards to the Queen and also the army's heavy infantry unit. The fortress is under the supervision of Seneschal Bartho who, in turn, obeys the commander of the Pansars, General Jomilo. About two hundred fifty soldiers are stationed at the fortress while fifty stay in the Palace district, patrolling the palace, acting as bodyguards for dignitaries or keeping order in the refugee camp.

People and Places of Interest

THE FOLLOWING IS a selected list of people and places to visit in Yndaros. We also include a list of inns to lodge at, and the prices of buying rooms in the city.

MASTER ALINARD

Ever since Queen Korinthia's decree to establish a guild system was enacted in year 19, all craftsmen in Yndaros have worked within a strict hierarchy. However, things are being complicated by a phenomenon best exemplified within the Blacksmiths' Guild: additional masters arriving from other regions.

For the last four years Ambrian smiths have had to compete with Master Alinard, who came to Yndaros from the city state of Koral. Additionally, many nobles order their fencing swords from the barbarian blacksmith Master Ranomar of clan Vajvod. The Blacksmiths' Guild's Grand Master, Petrona Steelwife, has not yet found a lawful way of prohibiting either Alinard or Ranomar from using the title of Master; nor has the guild members been able to prove that these "outsiders" are spying on behalf of their respective motherlands.

Despite the ongoing smear campaigns (both literal and figurative), it appears that common folk have little interest in Master Alinard's place of birth or Ranomar's barbarian ancestry – they craft first-rate products at relatively low prices, and the week of extra waiting caused by overbooking is something most people can accept. The question is how long Petrona and the Ambrian blacksmiths will put up with the unwanted competition.

LODGING IN YNDAROS

Name	Quality	1 Night	1 Week	1 Month	Ownership
The Tower	Hostel (Communal)	5 ortegs	2 shillings	—	—
	Simple Room	1 shilling	4 shillings	2 thaler	
	Suite	1 thaler	4 thaler	—	—
Depth of the Titans	Room: 2 or 4 beds	1 shilling	3 shillings	15 shillings	—
Zoltar's Inn	Double room	2 shillings	9 shillings	3 thaler	—
Kohinoor's	Room	3 thaler	12 thaler	—	—
	Suite	5 thaler	20 thaler	—	—
Homestay	Local host	3–30 ortegs	2–15 shillings	1–4 thaler	—
Three rooms by the Cathedral	Own nice	—	—	—	2,000 thaler
Three rooms in New Town	Own ordinary	—	—	—	600 thaler
One room by Monger's Square	Own simple	—	—	—	150 thaler

Alinard's Products

All kinds of weapons and armor (including alchemical ones) can be ordered at Master Alinard's smithy. Prices are 10% lower than those listed in the *Player's Guide*, and the waiting period is roughly a month plus one week for each quality added.

THE CROFT

If the Town Hall's Loft and the Davokar Feastery are described as upscale taverns, the Croft must be placed at the other end of the scale. Located in Old Kadizar, near the gate to the Monger's Square, it is the favorite hangout of Nobleman Dastan. The thief king even has his own table in the dining hall, on a platform one meter above the floor, from which he holds court and addresses "his subjects," spurring them into offering various forms of entertainment (his favorites being Naval Battle and Drunken Peons).

Some say the City Watch always has a number of undercover agents stationed at the tavern, hoping to obtain information regarding impending criminal activity. Other rumors claim that the Royal Sekretorium also has infiltrators hiding among the customers. The supposed reason for this is that Nobleman Dastan is suspected of colluding with agents from the City States and/or the Realm of the Order, or harboring wanted criminals (thieves, murderers, rebels and even surviving Dark Lords) at the tavern – for a price, of course. Regardless of whether these claims are true or not, guests at the Croft would probably be wise to keep their voices down when discussing matters best kept hidden from the authorities.

- Porridge of the day, 2 ortegs
- Today's stew with turnips, 5 ortegs
- Tankard of brutebrew, 1 orteg
- Tankard of blackbrew, 2 ortegs

NOBLEMAN DASTAN

The underworld of Yndaros has its kings and queens, just like the ordinary world. And the soon to be sixty-year-old Nobleman Dastan is without doubt the top dog in the unwashed and violent pack. They say that he started his career as an orphan pickpocket in Berendoria, and that, before crossing the mountains, he had dethroned his adoptive father and taken over his growing organization of thieves, charlatans and extortionists. Having arrived in Yndaros, he kept a low profile, while his competitors acted too soon and were weeded out. Once the city had grown large enough to tolerate a certain amount of organized crime (and even appreciate the help in keeping some form of order in the underworld), Dastan emerged from the shadows to conquer Old Kadizar and now looks to eliminate all competitors from Yndaros!

THE DOME

No one knows exactly why the huge arena currently known as the Dome was built – whether the Lindarians used it for spectacles, mass meetings or idolatrous worship is a hot topic among local history enthusiasts. The two colossal statues on each side of the main entrance are assumed to represent different aspects of the Guardian – one looking much like an abomination in its many-armed splendor, the other sweet and childlike. It is of course possible that the people of Lindaros gathered there for the same, varied reasons as the Ambrians now do.

As with many other entertainment facilities, tickets are offered at different prices, in the Dome's case ranging from a few shillings to tens of thaler. Gladiatorial prize-fights are arranged every night; the seats are rarely sold out unless one of Ambria's most celebrated fighters happens to need some extra money. Normally, Feast Day is when the biggest events are held, along with reenactments of famous battles or duels. And sometimes the gladiators must give room to other forms of entertainment. The arena is never more popular than when one of the royal art companies appears outside the palace walls – the Ambrian Court Dancers, the Korinthia Choir or the Palace Dramatists.

- Cone of roasted almonds, 2 ortegs
- Salty-sweet needles, 4 ortegs
- Cup of Stut (unspecified), 2 ortegs
- Cup of the Duke's Relief, 3 ortegs

Death Matches

The fights at the Dome usually end at first blood or when one of the gladiators admits defeat, but exceptions are sometimes made. Wild animals such as jakaars, fey beasts, or kotkas rarely leave the arena alive; the same goes for captive barbarians, goblins and ogres who through hostile actions have forfeited their right to live.

Another example is prisoners awaiting the death penalty, who under certain circumstances may try to win their freedom by defeating Ripe, the city's legendary executioner, in single combat (none have yet succeeded). And finally, the gladiators may challenge each other to the death – something that is always arranged and announced far in advance so that prices can be adjusted according to the popularity of the event.

THE ETERNAL EXECUTIONER

About ten years ago a giant, mask-wearing man presented himself at the palace gates and asked to be allowed before the Queen. After many ifs and buts (and a whole lot of bloodshed) his wish was granted, and he offered Korinthia his service as executioner in Yndaros. Nobody knows where he came from or who he is, but he calls himself Ripe and his enormous two-handed blade has become the informal symbol for law and justice in the new realm.

He is seldom seen except when performing his services – executing wrongdoers at the Triumph Plaza. But when he is, everything around comes to a halt – people stop to stare, conversations fall silent and those standing in his way hurry sideways. Ripe instills fear with his mere presence, and the capital's bards and storytellers happily add to the mystery, sometimes describing him as an unusually clever arch troll, sometimes portraying him as an equal to creatures like Aloéna on Karvosti. But no matter what people believe, they are all asking themselves what will happen when the Eternal Executioner has quenched the yearnings of his bloodthirsty blade.

GRONDEL'S MASKS

The enormous Grondel of clan Godinja is a proficient manufacturer of masks. Moreover, he has a vast network of contacts within Davokar – people who are making masks themselves as well as those peddling the works of others. Sometimes he also purchases objects from adventurers and explorers, only to sell them on at a higher price. His primary interests are authentic witches' masks or facial ornaments infused with mystical powers, but ordinary masks can also be of value, provided that they come with an interesting story. Among other things, he prides himself on having sold the mask of stained glass – a relic from the glory days of Lindaros – which Arch-Duchess Esmerelda wore at the New Year's Ball in year 21.

Less flattering is that one of the city's thug gangs, the Brew Vandals, has started wearing masks during their raids. Rumor has it that these were all sold by Grondel and, more disturbingly, "infused with darkness" which contributes to the gang's increasingly violent behavior.

THE ISLET

Every evening, a small armada of boats are rowed, lanterns glowing, toward the Islet and Madam Elindra Aroma's immensely popular establishment. Except in cases of sudden illness or injury, the house is full night after night, and those who make reservations may have to wait a month, if not more, to enjoy the excellent food and high-quality entertainment.

A table on the salon floor, in front of the stage, costs three thaler per person. For twice that amount you get a place on the raised platform surrounding the floor, complete with your own personal waitress and free access to Ambrian wines. Should that not be enough, a seat in one of the twelve balconies protruding from the walls can be yours for fifteen thaler, but in that case the wait might be even longer as five of them are always reserved for (and prepaid by) special customers – House Kohinoor, Ordo Magica and the dwarves of the Valotzar family, among others.

It is said that many of the decisions affecting everyday life in Ambria are made on the balconies of the Islet's entertainment palace. Furthermore, the Royal Sekretorium is allegedly helping Madam Aroma recruit new staff – to ward off spies, perhaps, or simply because of her distinguished clientele. Whatever the reason may be, one can be quite sure that events on the Islet are crawling with agents of various factions and interests – most sent to gather information, the rest in pursuit of good food and a bit of recreation.

- Today's three course menu, 1–2 thaler
- Pâté tray, 5 shillings
- Bottle of Southern Slopes (newly made), 4 thaler
- Tankard of Kurun's Honor, 1 thaler
- Tankard of Zarekian Blackbrew, 3 shillings

KOHINOOR'S

While visiting nobles will sometimes choose one of the Tower's upscale rooms, most prefer the inn known as Kohinoor's. As its name suggests, the inn was established on the Queen's initiative, after she came to Yndaros and discovered there was no appropriate housing for guests of lesser nobility (the kind which did not own property in the city and could not be accommodated at the palace). Very few can afford to stay at Kohinoor's, and it is unlikely that anyone but a noble would feel at home there. Apparently, Manager Ribaio wants his customers to feel as though they were the personal guests of Queen Korinthia – with all that entails in terms of etiquette, formalities and customs.

Everything that involves the rich and the powerful is subject to gossip and speculation, and Kohinoor's is no exception. It has been called the headquarters of the Apostles of Supremacy, portrayed as a den of fornication and unbridled gluttony, and some say the staff consists almost entirely of spies, paid by various factions or powers. But more than anything, witness accounts from inside the establishment have furthered the rumors of division within, and between, Ambria's noble houses. For even though Kohinoor's can sometimes be a place for more or less secret, romantic fraternization between the realm's most powerful, angry arguments and bloody confrontations seem to be more common.

ODBOLG

Allegedly even the Queen fears getting on the wrong side of Odbolg. The aged goblin was the right-hand man of Nobleman Dastan, until a couple of years ago when he, for no apparent reason, parted ways with the thief king, and has

since become one of the most feared people in Yndaros. They say his network of homeless children and infiltrators have dirt on every person (literally!) in the city, and that he now makes good money selling delicate information to the highest bidder. The expression "Odbolg sees you!" is used at all levels of society, as a warning whenever someone is planning to do something dubious or illegal.

Odbolg lives in a loft in Old Kadizar, and has clearly remained on good terms with Nobleman Dastan – due to some kind of leverage, according to some; out of long and faithful friendship, according to others. His home is guarded by a group of well-paid war veterans, and the few occasions when the goblin has been in danger clearly demonstrated that he may also call upon Dastan's people for help. The question is how long this will be enough to protect the old rumormonger. If nothing else, many people would probably be willing to risk their lives to obtain his legendary register of personal information...

TOWN HALL'S LOFT

On the top floor of the building which is said to have been the town hall of Lindaros lies the tavern known as the Town Hall's Loft. Below the sloping ceiling, the atmosphere is as cozy as it is elegant. The staff serves exclusive food at exclusive prices, allegedly based on recipes by the legendary Royal Chef Eberto. The clientele consists mainly of wealthy merchants and successful artists or artisans; the salon is nice and quiet, as is the balcony, where customers often end up having a drink, to wash down the last of four to twelve courses.

The fact that the owner, Jalio, has trouble attracting nobles to his tavern may seem strange. But there is an explanation – among the highest of the highborn, the Town Hall's Loft has a reputation for encouraging the view that the rightful privileges of the noble blood should be restricted in favor of the populace; that credentials and effort should be valued as highly as lineage. When confronted with such claims, Jalio usually responds with a dismissive snort, followed by silence. Of course, many of his regulars may have controversial opinions on the matter, but that does not necessarily mean that he agrees.

- Pork & bean pie, 3 shillings
- Crayfish pâté, 6 shillings
- Glass of table ale, 5 ortegs
- Cup of Argona, 2 shillings

THUS SPOKE AROALETA

" ... and tormented the Howler roars in agony; he who instead of an eternal life was awarded an eternally reoccurring death; he is Inja, the one whose pain echoes through Davokar each time the juices of life turn to vapors."

ZOLTAR'S INN

Several of the city's inns are run by barbarians, and specialize in making the people of Davokar feel at home. Down by the harbor is the Bear Trap, by the Monger's Square stands the Axe & Cauldron, and those who would rather experience a more Ambrian conception of barbarian living may check into the Howling Wolf in the district called New Town – a place packed with furs, antlers, hunting trophies, low-priced brutebrew, and crude wooden furniture.

The place generally considered most genuine is Zoltar's Inn. Housed in a Lindarian ruin, the establishment has no ties to the chieftain of clan Vajvod, other than its decor, which was supposedly made to resemble his windowless residence – the stone fortress of Vojvodar. It is simple and robust, expertly crafted from wood, stone and linen. Cook Aztri's skill is widely recognized, especially when she gets her hands on some delicious aboar or kanaran.

The Founding of Yndaros

Few ever speak of the seven years that passed before Queen Korinthia arrived at her new promised land. Everyone knows it was a dark time – a time of poverty, danger and endless exhaustion; a time of slavers; a time of death. The suffering was of course necessary, inevitable even, and the blame for the misery lies entirely on the moldering shoulders of the Dark Lords. But the Queen's people prefer to remember the victories and triumphs, rather than the necessary evil that occurred in between.

It was a beautiful late summer day when Korinthia and her entourage passed the posting at Prios' Pass. After a three-day journey across the rolling gold of the plains, they finally halted their horses just south of today's Temple District. Before riding on to receive the people's ovations, the Queen raised her voice and proclaimed: "You, fair new home and fortress, shall carry the name of the true hero; your name shall be Yndaros!"

Today, Queen Korinthia rarely leaves the Palace and is careful about whom she meets with in private conferences.



Karvosti

THE CLIFF OF Karvosti, the age-old meeting place and thingstead of the barbarian folks, rises like an island out of a sea of leaves about five days' ride northwest of Thistle Hold. Not much is known regarding its early days, but legends suggest that it first housed a number of temples and that it later became a refuge when the civilization of Symbaroum began to crumble. An indication to back that assumption is that the temple ruin rebuilt by the Sun Church is evidently older than the magnificent stronghold of the High Chieftain.

Whatever the truth may be, the barbarians have used the plateau for hundreds of years. Legends say it was the threatening hordes of the Spider King that five centuries ago caused the clans to appoint a common paramount leader and follow him into battle. The leader still exists but lost his authority as soon as the threat was taken care of. Like his predecessors the current High Chieftain, Tharaban, has no more power than what the clan leaders grant him, if and when they need him to mediate or adjudicate in particular disputes – sometimes in peaceful negotiations, sometimes acting as judge when blood feuds must be settled through brutal duels.

To aid him, Tharaban has Karvosti's witch node, spearheaded by the Huldra Yeleta. Formally the witches are advisors in all affairs dealt with on the cliff, providing guidance based on their profound understanding of the clans and the people. However, persistent gossip maintains that they are more than that; that it is in fact the Huldra who leads the barbarians with Tharaban as her mouthpiece – a notion which has become especially popular in Yndaros where skalds and minstrels fondly make use of Yeleta as the star of their more terrifying pieces.

Five years ago, the High Chieftain and the Huldra were faced with their greatest challenge in centuries. It was Ambrian explorers who first discovered the sun-like symbols on the plateau's ancient temple ruin. They were followed, first by missionaries, later by heavily armored Sun Knights intent on cleansing the cliff of savages. The Templars attacked but were after a bloody day of combat driven back by the High Chieftain's Wrathguards. Long and trying negotiations ensued, that finally ended in an agreement by which the Church of Prios was given the right to both remain on Karvosti and to restore the temple ruin. At about the same time, Queen Korinthia sent the eldest son of House Grendel to the cliff as her envoy.

The exact reasons behind the outcome of the negotiations remain unclear, but apparently Karvosti's symbolic importance is not great enough for the clans to rally in its defense. In addition, there are many who claim that the High Chieftain and the Huldra to some extent can appreciate having the Ambrians around, as allies in the fight against the Dark of Davokar.

In spite of the fact that Karvosti rests in the more open and brighter parts of the forest, it is not spared from encounters with corrupt monstrosities. Any barbarian can testify that the attacks from both beasts and abominations have grown more numerous over the past decade. Some whisper that the witches have foreseen such a development and that they are preparing for something called the Resurrection of Davokar. And even if the clanfolks tend to accuse the Ambrian people of having upset the woods, this may explain why the High Chieftain and the Huldra seek peaceful agreements instead of war. If Davokar truly awakens it may prove to be a bad thing to have hostile Templars, Pansars and Ambrian mystics at your back.

Surroundings

KARVOSTI LIES DEEP within the woods and when standing on the plateau you see nothing but forest whichever way you turn. Looking east you can detect distinct patterns in the foliage, darker and denser the further your gaze wanders. In all other directions the panorama is characterized by leafy forests, sometimes intersected by rivers and lakes or darker patches of evergreens, but mainly of a nature which allows the rays of the sun to penetrate the treetops.

According to legend the area surrounding Karvosti was densely populated in Symbarian times, and remnants of the old civilization can be found here and there. Much of it has already been mapped and explored for treasures, as for instance the mighty Pyramid of Serand and the deep-reaching Earth Towers by the Black Leech Rift. But the further you travel from the cliff, the more likely you are to find untouched ruins. The barbarians regard all remnants of Symbaroum as taboo and are not happy to welcome treasure-hunters to the plateau carrying their finds with them. But most obey Tharaban's dictate to let the Ambrians be, or rather to "suit themselves". A few can even take it a step further, and trade in information about virgin ruins, provided that the price is right.

There are not many settlements close to Karvosti. The Sun Church and a horde of goblins are about to explore and restore another temple ruin three days to the east. Aside from that, the Baiaga clan has one of its camp sites about one day's march to the north and the Odaiova clan's main settlement is about as far to the south. Rumors also speak about two groups of free settlers living in the area – one at the northern shores of Lake Volgoma, another by the forest edge west of Karvosti. But if that is true, their inhabitants are very elusive and never make an effort to visit the cliff of the barbarians.

The Parts of the Cliff

THIS SECTION PROVIDES some details on the various areas of the plateau.

THE THINGSTEAD

Two times a year, at the equinoxes of spring and autumn, High Chieftain Tharaban holds market days on Karvosti. During such events, the northern part of the plateau is full of tents and wagons, inhabited by thousands of barbarians. By day you can hear children frolic and shout, women exchange news and men negotiate trade treaties or debate the right to newly discovered resources in the border regions. At night the festivities take over. The intoxicants flow, family-ties are knitted, and age-old conflicts resurface to spark more or less violent disputes.

Perhaps most disconcerting for a visitor to witness is the settling of serious conflicts which have not found a solution through mediation attempts by the High Chieftain. Such disputes are resolved at dawn when the champions of the brawling parties meet on the Pole – the one who manages to strike their opponent down from a log that has been hoisted ten feet up in the air is deemed to be righteous.

Usually, however, it is much more peaceful at the Thingstead. On an average day there are about ten to twenty tents or wagons stationed on the dusty field, whose owners have come to seek the counsel of the Huldra or to trade with Ambrian merchants. Adding to that are groups of travelers visiting to get a few days' rest and to replenish their supplies.

THE STRONGHOLD

The first version of the High Chieftain's residence was built about four to five hundred years ago and was not much more than a simple tower of wood and stone. That tower still stands, but has with time become incorporated into the continuously expanding stone stronghold that balances on the eastern rim of the plateau. Today the old three-story tower can be found right behind the throne in the enormous audience hall of the fortress, a hall that once was the outer walls of the castle constructed for Karvosti's fifth High Chieftain – the legendary Maiesticar, slayer of the Spider King.

Aside from the High Chieftain with family and servants, the stronghold houses the ninety-nine clan warriors of the honorary guard. The members of the Guard of the Slumbering Wrath – selected to represent the most disciplined and skilled fighters of the eleven clans – live in the west wing of the fortress, and they stand under Tharaban's direct control. The Wrathguard is divided into nine troops, composed of one warrior from each clan, that take turns guarding the stronghold, manning the station where the road comes up and patrolling along the rim of the plateau.

Finally, Lothar Grendel and his staff of three must be mentioned. Lothar's father, Baron Manvar, was the Chieftain in Kadizar when the Ambrians arrived and he was later made a noble as a reward for his swift and complete surrender. Baron Manvar's son is now tasked with being Queen Korinthia's legate on Karvosti – a task he is rumored to loath but manages flawlessly thanks to his barbarian heritage.

The Guard of the Slumbering Wrath

The stronghold of the High Chieftain has for centuries been protected by the Guard of the Slumbering Wrath, composed of the barbarians' best warriors. The clans take great pride in their Wrathguards and the chieftain whose warriors are biggest, strongest, quickest or most skilled is always treated with great respect during gatherings at the Thingstead.

Normally the period of service is ten years, after which the guard returns to their clan. They do so without the blood-and-rust colored wrath armor and without much of the vigor they once brought along to Karvosti. Former Wrathguards never talk about their time of service, and most do not survive long after returning home – a reality that no barbarian wants to discuss, but about which Ambrians enjoy speculating. Maybe there is some truth to what is said, that the Guard of the Slumbering Wrath is fed a special elixir that makes them extra powerful but which they have a hard time doing without once the duty is done.

THE WITCHES

Mystics among the barbarians are usually called witches. They exist in all clans and are also loosely organized in a Circle. Four times a year each clan sends one of their witches to Karvosti, for a meeting where they account for the situation in their respective flocks – conflicts, clan members eligible for marriage, sicknesses and so on – and the state of the clan territory. Whispers on Karvosti imply that these congregations lately have become more and more burdened by talk of ominous omens and a growing threat from Davokar.

The Huldra Yeleta and the other two members of the Karvosti node, Gadramon and Eferneya, live in the ancient caves carved out of the fault line's wall. Anyone can enter the Antechamber, the great hall directly beyond the cave opening, hoping for an audience with the Arch Witch. But what lies beyond the five, draped openings to the inner caves is unknown to most. One can of course assume that the witches have their lodgings there and everybody knows that there are pathways going both to the upper level of the fault and down into the cliff, but the rest are rumors – rumors about ritual chambers full of bloody remains; about winding tunnels to Davokar's dark groundwater springs; about subterranean plantations of toxic as well as healing mushrooms; about caverns occupied by imprisoned abominations.

THE PILGRIM CAMP

All non-barbarians who undertake the walk up to the plateau are greeted by a troop of eleven wrathguards who politely but firmly direct them to follow the trail running south along the western rim of the cliff. The obedient ones will soon come to see the temple up on the south side of the fault line and the small tent camp by the foot of the steep wall. When arriving at the camp they will most likely be warmly welcomed by a group of weary but happy pilgrims who direct them to an empty spot where they can set up their tents.

Soon they will come to see that the pilgrims are in company with other types of travelers – merchants there to trade with the barbarians and explorers studying barbarian culture or the ruin that has been renovated by the Sun Church. In addition, there are most often one or more groups of fortune-hunters who have climbed Karvosti in search of recuperation and healing. The informal leader of the camp is the former treasure-hunter Edrafin, who came searching for shelter after having lost his entire expedition in a nearby ruin complex. The terrible occurrence took place four years ago and Edrafin still does not dare to venture down into the woods – something he gladly admits but without ever touching upon exactly what he is afraid of and how he lost his friends. The curious one is left to speculate, based on the eye Edrafin has lost, the corrosive burns covering the left side of his body and the howls heard from his tent at night.

THE SHRINE OF THE SETTING SUN

It was Ambrian explorers who first detected the sun-like symbols on Karvosti's old temple ruin. The rumor traveled with them back to Yndaros and before long the Curia sent an expedition to the plateau, composed of theurgs and missionaries tasked with studying the symbols more closely. After thorough examinations and numerous debates the verdict came: the ruin on Karvosti was indeed the oldest known temple erected in honor of Prios. It was decided that the heretical barbarians must be driven from the cliff, and a host of one hundred Templars embarked on a Sun March to accomplish the task.

It did not turn out as planned: the Guard of the Slumbering Wrath put up a good fight and Commander Iakobo Vearra found it best to seek a peaceful solution, with the aid of Queen Korinthia. It is whispered that the First Father and the other members of the Curia would have preferred to deal with the situation more forcefully, but whatever the truth may be the commander's initiative led to the Church being granted free passage to the holy ground surrounding the ruin.

Two years ago the relatively small but beautiful temple was finished, with the entrance pointing towards the setting sun in the west. A dozen friars and twice as many Templars live on site, and the shrine is visited by pilgrims and explorers on a daily basis. Aside from the head of the temple, Piromei, and his subordinate, the liturg Aranitra, the individuals come and go. The temple on Karvosti acts as a base for persons involved in the demanding and hazardous restoration of the even older ruin that has been discovered three days' march east of the plateau.

THE GROVE OF ALOÉNA

For as long as anybody knows a being called Aloéna has lived in a towering grove at the southern edge of the plateau. The ten-foot-tall, horned and humanoid female is assumed to be related to Davokar's elves. Among the barbarians it is said that she resides on Karvosti in order to protect something, and many were worried that she would be called into action when the Sun Church started to poke around in the ancient ruin. But that concern proved to be unfounded – her purpose for being on the cliff remains a mystery.

With only a few exceptions per year Aloéna never leaves her grove, and none but the witches dare to pay her a visit. No one, save the witches of Karvosti's witch node, can claim to have heard her speak; she appears to view humans with the same distance and indifference as a human would view a passing flock of birds. It is said that on rare occasions she has halted her slow walk over the plateau, made eye contact with a child or an elderly clan-member and given them a smile. Aside from that she seems to lack all interest in humans, who in their turn spend many and long discussions guessing who she really is, what she is waiting for and what would happen if someone happened to make her angry.

People and Places of Interest

THE FOLLOWING IS a selected list of people and places to visit near Karvosti. We also include a list of places to stay at, on or close to the plateau.

ALISABETA VEARRA

The sun knights on Karvosti are commanded by Alisabeta Vearra, daughter of Knight Commander Iakobo. She has a reputation for being nothing but kind to loyal followers of the Lawgiver, but ruthless when fighting the hordes of darkness. On Karvosti, she is often seen wandering the plateau, stopping to chat with anyone who dares to approach her.

She sometimes spends entire evenings and nights at the pilgrim camp, sitting by some guest's camp fire – simply to enjoy the company and have a good laugh, she says. Others claim that she only does it in order to learn as much as possible about the forests of Davokar and the darkness spreading through them.

LODGING AT KARVOSTI				
Name	**Description**	**1 Night**	**1 Week**	**1 Month**
Pilgrim Camp	Spot on Campground	3 ortegs	1 shilling	4 shillings
Marketplace	Spot for tent/caravan	5 ortegs	2 shillings	8 shillings
The Victorious Hawk	Dormitory or room for two	1 thaler	5 thaler	15 thaler
The Stronghold	Room for two or four	2–9 shillings	1–6 thaler	4–15 thaler
The Cave	Pelt on the ground	1 shilling	—	—
Braddokkugru	Place in hut	2–5 ortegs	—	—

BRADDOKKUGRU

Another alternative for those who do not mind paying for a bit of extra security is the goblin tribe Braddokkugru. The settlement lies just west of Karvosti, and is happy to welcome smaller groups to stay. However, some may be deterred by the fact that guests are expected to participate in the tribe's games before bedtime, including one they've invented: Peep Through the Curtain. This has been the end of many expeditions, as important members ended up behind the curtain and the goblins found it more amusing to be wrong than right.

Rules: Peep Through the Curtain

All participants blurp (i.e. simultaneously cover their eyes and ears). The chieftain (or equivalent) taps the shoulder of someone who must then rise and slip behind the curtain. The blurping stops.

The participants must now try to guess who is missing. This is done by hurling blunt objects at the curtain, hoping to identify the person behind it by the groans they make. The more guesses (hits) the hidden one endures, the more praise they will receive. The current record is 411, but as Ruut sadly died just after having revealed herself she never got to enjoy her great accomplishment.

EFERNEYA

The Keeper Eferneya and her apprentice, Sefa, are both proficient drug makers, equal even to the master alchemists of Ordo Magica. Those in need of healing drugs, waybread and such are more than welcome to visit the witches' dwelling and seek an audience with one of them. But one should think twice before doing so...

If Eferneya suspects her buyer of planning to violate the barbarians' taboos (or admits to such intentions), he or she will be turned away. On several occasions, rude fortune hunters have contracted a terrible flu just before (or after) leaving Karvosti, strangely enough.

FIRST GUARD FARVAN

The current leader of the Wrathguard is a Karit named Farvan. The stories of Farvan's exploits are many, most of them emphasizing the courage, skill, and unforgiving disposition of the First Guard. But there are other, less flattering tales suggesting feelings of resentment between Farvan and Tharaban, and others even questioning his loyalty to Karvosti. Clan Karohar has suffered badly as a result of the Ambrian's arrival in the region, so perhaps it is quite understandable if the First Guard harbors a deep hatred for the Queen's people and reproaches the High Chieftain for having done so little to support the Karits in their struggle.

IARLO'S CAULDRON

Of the two people selling food and drink at the pilgrim camp, Iarlo is both the cheapest and most pleasant. Outside his modest tent, from early morning to late at night, he keeps a sooty iron cauldron suspended over a burning fire. He claims to have lived among the northern clan Enoai for over a decade, where he learned the basics of their barbarian cuisine. Whether or not this is true, there is no denying the amazing smell and exquisite flavor of his root vegetable stews.

- Today's stew, 3 ortegs
- Spring water, free
- Cup of brutebrew, 2 ortegs
- Cup of blackbrew, 5 ortegs

THE LONGHOUSE

In one of the few permanent buildings at the marketplace, spouses Ov and Teresma serve simple dishes and cold beverages. Barbarians may have their meals for free, courtesy of the High Chieftain, while other visitors must pay a small sum to partake in what is offered. The water is free for all customers, but even barbarians must pay to have something stronger – and there are always several barrels of fine Zarekian Blackbrew stored in the cellar.

- Soup with bark bread, 2 shillings
- Grilled meat with turnip mash, 4 shillings
- Jug of brutebrew, 5 ortegs
- Jug of Zarekian Blackbrew, 5 shillings
- Pint of the Duke's Relief, 3 shillings
- Bottle of Vearra's red, 5 thaler

The Prophesy of Sarkomal

According to rumors circling both Yndaros and Thistle Hold, the Sun Church has recovered a prophecy from an old temple ruin a couple of days' walk east of Karvosti. First Father Jeseebegai firmly denies all knowledge of such a find but that has hardly stopped the rumor mill from grinding. Quite the opposite. In a short time numerous versions of the prophecy have appeared, all reflecting the same basic theme – Ambria is supposed to gain lordship over all land once ruled by ancient Symbaroum and Queen Korinthia will ascend to the throne of the empire's last emperors.

That basic theme aside, the versions differ greatly from each other. When it is supposed to happen, how it will happen and whether or not it will be to the advantage of the Ambrian people depends on which version you choose to trust. There is really only one strophe which recurs in all versions, claimed to be translated by the Curia: *"...where night and day are without meaning, where darkness shimmers and light gathers in shadows, there stands the throne that again shall carry a mistress, a regent, a peer of the divine..."*. But, as previously mentioned, no one has confirmed the authenticity of that passage, nor of any other. And even if someone had, there is likely room for any number of translations and interpretations, as always when prophesies are concerned.

LOTHAR GRENDEL

The Queen's Legation on Karvosti is reluctantly, but so far commendably, run by Lothar Grendel. He is assisted by three colleagues: his barbarian aide Undi, Notary Karlas, and Emon Garlaka – a retired military strategist who lost his left eye in a battle against the Dark Lords.

Their primary responsibility is representing the Queen and speaking on her behalf, but also to deal with Ambrians who find themselves in trouble on the cliff, for example by offering food to people heading back to Thistle Hold. Furthermore, the legate decides the fate of those who end up in the stronghold's dungeons – as long as they have only committed a minor offense, such as theft or assault. More serious offenders are taken to the Thistle Hold penitentiary to undergo investigation and await final judgment.

MASS AT THE SUN TEMPLE

Every evening at sundown, the faithful attend mass at the sun temple. It is usually the liturg Aranitra who delivers the sermon, preaching harshly about Man's duty to the Church's dying god.

Sometimes, Piromei will instead take the podium. To the anguish of the Wrathguards and other barbarians he lets his hateful rhetoric echo over the plateau, ending with *"Grant us strength, O Prios, Father of our Laws; cleanse us so that we may reflect your light in all its glory; flog the soot off our souls, carve the rot from our skins; for our torment is just and can never be too great, if only it may save the One!"*

It could be argued that Father Piromei Lethona, theurg and inquisitor, is unfit to be head of Karvosti's sun temple. His fanaticism and immense love for Prios is certainly an asset in many respects, but the very same traits often have a way of exacerbating tensions between the Church and other authorities on Karvosti. His views have grown more extreme, and he does not refrain from weaving provocative insinuations into his fiery sermons – insinuations about the witches being in league with the evils of Davokar and the barbarians carrying a latent darkness inside.

STORY NIGHT

From time to time, the High Chieftain arranges a story night at the Marketplace, often as a way of calming residents and guests after some upsetting incident. Karvosti's chroniclers have always been spectacularly talented storytellers, but the current one, Monagona, is truly extraordinary. When she walks up to the podium and begins to weave her magical tales to the tunes of strings and flutes, it is as if time suddenly stops and nature itself settles down, not to spoil the moment.

VEARRA'S OUTPOST

By setting up an outpost near Karvosti, the House of Vearra hopes to entice Ambrian explorers and fortune hunters to spend thaler and treasures at their establishment, rather than on the High Chieftain's cliff. The former innkeeper Orola manages the stock and is also in charge of sales, along with Madar, an Adept of the Order who is tasked with assessing the value of items and artifacts offered in trade.

One can purchase both gear and provisions at the outpost, albeit at a higher price than normal (+50%). As for the value of the items one wishes to trade, it depends completely on Madar's assessments, which are likely to be on the low side. These circumstances are the reason why many people are reluctant to do business with Orola and her adept. Nevertheless, there is a rumor that tempts customers to accept these prices – a rumor of the duo paying good money for corrupted objects.

THE WHISPERER IN THE WATER

About halfway between Karvosti and the Earth Towers of Black Leech Rift, one finds The Whisperer's Rapids – a three hundred pace long stretch of river where the Malgomor surges and splashes and froths. According to the barbarians, the rapids are in fact a living entity called The Whisperer. After much research, the scholars of Ordo Magica have concluded that there is some truth to this, but reject all ideas of the river itself being animate. Instead they have declared it haunted, and recommend that all sensible Ambrians stay clear of it.

It is said that those who cut open their palms and let their blood mix with its water, will soon hear a hissing voice rise from the foam. People claiming to have heard the Whisperer are rarely willing to share his words, but most describe him as an oracle – one they say has the power to foresee the bleeder's death.

Under, Above & Beyond

IS THE REALM of Ambria and Davokar not enough? If that is the case, it may be a good idea to have one or more gaming sessions take place in what in Symbaroum are called the Underworld, the Yonderworld and the Spirit World – planes of existence that lead to new experiences and perspectives, as well as other kinds of challenges.

This chapter should not be seen as an exhaustive account of these game environments, but rather as a set of guidelines for creating different adventures, or rather campaign episodes. We recommend that Gamemasters make visits to these worlds short, but eventful – partly to maintain their mystique and distinctive character, partly because we intend to delve more deeply into at least the Under- and Yonderworld in future supplements. There is no need to worry about your portrayals of these places clashing with our visions, at least if you follow the guidelines below. All these worlds are vast enough to allow for great variation and considerable contrast, which is why it should not be a problem for your own ideas to co-exist with ours.

To further flesh out the three worlds, you will find event tables at the end of their respective sections. These can be used to generate random encounters and incidents characteristic of these settings, but can also serve as inspiration for the Gamemaster's own ideas.

The Underworld

THE UNDERWORLD IS a vast system of caves, chambers, tunnels and crevasses that extends beneath the roots, fields and cobblestones of the game world. It is a dark world in a double sense, a world that is at most illuminated by fluorescent vegetation or rays of sunshine beaming through cracks from the surface, a world dominated by monstrous predators, where the corruption of the surface world trickles down to infect its inhabitants or form stagnant pools of sickly blackness.

But there are also good reasons for heading down into the dark. Some expeditions search for the sunken remains of ancient civilizations waiting to be explored and plundered, while others hope to find the troll realms supposedly located there, or even the legendary dwelling of the Iron Pact – the Halls of a Thousand Tears. Moreover, brave groups of people occasionally set off for the Underworld in search of unique monster trophies, missing people or expeditions, or in the hope of gathering rare medicinal herbs.

HISTORY

The Underworld is as old as the surface world, and its history is just as eventful. The difference is that it is more regional and clearly linked to events on the surface – mighty realms, clans or tribes will rarely allow the world beneath to develop unchecked, particularly if they feel threatened by something down there.

The Gamemaster can therefore assume that no person, creature or culture has ever claimed to rule or dominate more than limited parts of the Underworld, mainly in areas where the world above has been wild, without strong social formations. Another assumption should be that dominance, with few exceptions, is a temporary state; Crypt Lords, goblin tribes or packs of predators who consider themselves rulers of a certain area can quickly and unpleasantly be driven away (or destroyed) by something bigger, stronger and more brutal than themselves – a group of World Serpents, a drifting blight mist, a rival conqueror, or maybe even a larger expedition from the surface world, composed of competent warriors and mystics.

NATURE

The Underworld is so huge and diverse that it has room for all kinds of cave structures – from labyrinthine tunnels and smaller systems of caves, to vast underground halls the size of Ambrian baronies. You should be equally bold when it comes to vegetation and water courses: forests of overgrown, luminous lichens and fields of (edible, poisonous, or corruption oozing) fungi can extend around underground lakes whose tributaries consist of immense waterfalls or fast-flowing streams.

Remains from past cultures or from the civilizations of the surface world can be found anywhere, in the form of anything from statues to great palaces, or even entire temple cities. One might also find caverns chiseled out by the tools of cultural beings – dwelling sites that show signs of past goblin settlements, or even places where exiled trolls have

stayed hidden. Many of these are still inhabited, as are the ruins – by new rulers or predators who have claimed the place as their territory.

Virulent corruption is everywhere, in water, in rocks, and in treacherous vegetation – sometimes hidden, sometimes terrifyingly obvious in the form of mist, sparkling black flakes dancing in the air, or rust-colored rain from a cave roof far above. In contrast to the darkness, the fortunate can also find power nodes, often centered around crystalline structures of different colors, located in surprisingly healthy areas free of corruption – places much appreciated by predators and prey animals, but shunned by abominations and undead.

In short, you are free to design the Underworld as you see fit, with the restriction that the place described and visited by the player characters is fairly limited, possibly to the area surrounding a sinkhole or the winding path down from a ruin on the surface.

CULTURES

There are humanoids living in the Underworld, but they are scattered and usually have more contact with settlements on the surface than with each other. Most of them are trolls, in realms ranging from ten or so individuals cowering under a single liege troll, to thousands of members – often gathered around an aged ruler close to entering its third hibernation. Like humans, the trolls are a heterogeneous group, but with a clear tendency to despise weakness in all its forms. The information presented on the trolls' Origins (page 86 in the *Ruins of Symbaroum Player's Guide*) should be inspiration enough to design different underground troll realms.

Goblins prefer to live under the sky, but a few tribes live out their short lives in the Underworld, by tradition or out of necessity. In the former case they may be vassals of a larger troll realm or have managed to defend their right to a clean and life-giving "oasis" in the subterranean dark. As for necessity, it is not uncommon for a tribe to fall out of favor with some force of the forest – another tribe, an arch troll, or a domineering Drakworm. Escape might then be the only alternative, which leads to the tribe members becoming fearful and unusually aggressive compared to other woodland goblins.

Ambrian expeditions never stay very long underground, but if the Gamemaster so desires, it is possible that Ordo Magica, the Queen's Rangers or some foolish noble might have financed a real outpost on the shore of some night black lake. It is also possible that undead and severely blight-marked humans have come together and found a home beneath the feet of their former brothers and sisters, where they can live without constantly being met with fear and hate, and without having to watch out for witch-hunters and hateful lynch mobs.

CREATURES

The *Ruins of Symbaroum Bestiary* provides a number of creatures described as residents of the Underworld: Gwann, Spite, World Serpent, Chasm Stag and The Wily, to name a few. But of course there are also abominations and ghouls, as well as occasional packs of predators, reclusive King Toads and crestfallen arch trolls. Not to mention various forms of Corrupted Nature and Vengeful Terrain. As long as the Gamemaster can explain why a certain beast or monster horde has decided to abandon the surface, the player characters can encounter just about any monster in the depths of the Underworld.

There is also potential for fiddling with already existing creatures so that they offer different kinds of challenges. For starters, they could of course look differently – pale, emaciated, staring and eerily quiet. But they can also be given additional features and traits: they might carry the dark diseases of the Underworld (Infectious), exude corruption (Harmful Aura), develop the ability to act unhindered in the dark (Night Perception) or accumulate corruption and use it in combat (Corruption Hoarder). In short, the dark recesses of the Underworld and its unsound living conditions can spawn the most heinous creatures.

ADVENTURE SET-UP

An expedition sent by Ordo Magica, the Sun Church, or some similar faction has gone missing during an excursion to a ruin on the border between Bright and Wild Davokar. One of the porters, the goblin Iloul, is found roaming near the edge of the forest, exhausted and emaciated, rambling about "the gap to the Great Blackness," about "blind eyes watching all, deaf ears hearing all, voiceless throats groaning with hunger, toothless jaws grinding and grinding." The satchel he carries is heavy with black rocks flecked with sparkling diamonds.

Perhaps it is the player characters who run into Iloul at the edge of the forest, or maybe they are contacted at a later stage by the expedition's initiator, who in turn has gotten hold of the goblin. Either way, they eventually reach the ruin and find it darkened – the vegetation covering it has shriveled and blackened, and the blight appears to be spreading through the surrounding forest, in all directions. Something must be done, quickly!

It turns out that the expedition, deliberately or otherwise, opened a crack in the ruin's catacombs and tracks suggest that the entire group has followed that crack into the Underworld. Exactly what awaits down there is for the Gamemaster to decide, but it should probably be possible to find the source of the blight. Perhaps it is a world wound or a simmering pool of pure corruption, something the player characters must close/ cleanse with a sanctifying ritual, while being attacked by blight born expedition members and the creatures that have made a home near the blight source.

EVENTS IN THE UNDERWORLD		
1d20	**Event**	**Variants/Details (1d6)**
1–3	Carvings in the rock wall	**1–2:** The Loremaster feature or Elf: directions to a troll forge, either active or long burnt out and abandoned. **3–4:** The Loremaster feature or Goblin: warning of some nearby danger, still present or long gone. Use a threat from this list or create your own. **5–6:** The Loremaster feature or Troll: directions to a "song cliff," which could either be a name for an ancient assembly site for trolls, a magic node, or both. Whether it is still being used or has any power left is up to the Gamemaster.
4–6	A hidden door (DC 15), leading to an abandoned hideout	**1–2:** Ambrian expedition: a week's worth of food for five people, 1d6 blankets, 1d4 lanterns and lamp oil, and 1d6 herbal cures. **3–4:** Monster hunter: various trophies on drying racks, together worth 1d6 × 100 thaler. **5:** Iron Pact: waybread for 1d10 × 10 days, 1d6 quivers with 20 arrows each, 1d4 fur bedrolls, 1d4 lanterns with lamp oil, and 1d4 doses of moderate antidote. **6:** Goblins: food for 1d10 + 10 people in the form of dried insects, mushrooms and pieces of obscure meat. Leaves to sleep on for 1d10 goblins, 1d4 daggers, and a large jar of foul-tasting, but strong, liquor.
7–8	Mushroom patch (bracketed feature can be used to understand what the specific mushroom is and what it does).	**1:** Healing mushrooms, equivalent to 1d6 herbal cures (Medicus). **2:** Poison mushrooms, 1d4 doses of moderate poison (Medicus, Poisoner). **3:** Antidote mushrooms, 1d4 doses of moderate antidote (Medicus, Poisoner). **4:** Hallucinogenic mushrooms, 1d4 doses, causes wild daydreams which paralyze for an hour unless the consumer passes a DC 10 Constitution saving throw (Poisoner, Witchcraft). **5:** Corrupting mushrooms, 1d4 doses, inflicts 1d4 temporary corruption (Poisoner, Theurgy). **6:** Corruption cleansing mushrooms, 1d4 doses, removes 1d4 temporary corruption (Medicus, Theurgy).
9–10	Collapsed ruin. A sinkhole has lived up to its name and pulled a building down into the Underworld. The sky can be seen high above, and mighty trees lean alarmingly far over the hole.	**1–2:** Rune-carved monolith. The Loremaster feature: pre-Symbarian remains. A group who studies the runes carefully for 1d4 hours gains (1d4 × Level × 100) XP from their insights into the world prior to the rise of Symbaroum. **3–4:** Monster temple. The Loremaster feature: Symbarian cult site. Those who study the temple carefully for 1d4 days gain (1d12 × Level × 100) XP and 1 permanent Corruption for their insight into Symbaroum's dark history. They also find cult items worth 1d10 × 100 thaler. At some point during the search, one of the old "gods" slumbering underneath the temple wakes up; choose any strong monster – it does not have to belong in the Underworld. **5:** Barbarian tower. The Loremaster feature or barbarian: the tower is a barbarian creation carved with protective witch symbols. Those who spend a day studying the tower and its protective symbols gain (1d4 × Level × 100) XP, and find arm rings and other barbarian ornaments worth 1d6 × 10 thaler. However, they also attract (PC + 1) predators (challenge rating equal to or lower than the group). **6:** Village of Ambrian freethinkers. Obvious to everyone: a number of log houses and a palisade have collapsed and been completely demolished. Those who spend 1d4 hours searching the rubble find 1d6 Ambrian settlers of different ages, all dead and carrying 1d10 ortegs each. A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check also reveals a hidden cache containing 1d10 thaler and a journal detailing the settlers' exploits in the depths of Davokar. Studying the book grants the gaming group (1d4 × Level × 100) XP through their understanding of the hard life in the woodland gloom. The journal is also worth 1d10 thaler to scholars in Ambria.

EVENTS IN THE UNDERWORLD

1d20	Event	Variants/Details (1d6)
11–12	Outpost. An established and reasonably thriving colony down in the dark.	**1:** Base camp for an Ambrian expedition. 1d6 Ambrians and 1d10 helpers in a crude log house. Roll 1d4 to see who leads the expedition; 1 – Ordo Magica, 2 – Sun Church, 3 – Ambrian noble family, 4 – Treasure hunters **2:** Initiation site for witches. 1d4 witches have gathered in this cave to initiate 1d6 future witches into the mysteries of witchcraft. **3:** Goblin settlement. 1d10 × 5 goblins of various ages occupy this stalactite, which hangs like an inverted tower from the cave ceiling. A rope ladder is lowered whenever the goblins want to go up or down. **4:** Troll dwelling. A sturdy door, guarded by a Gwann, leads to half a dozen cave chambers where 1d10 + 10 trolls live under the leadership of a liege troll. They are reserved, but not hostile, and willing to trade thaler for quality metalworks. **5:** Refuge for the blight marked. A village made up of simple huts huddled in a cave chamber. It is inhabited by 1d6 + 10 blight marked humans and goblins, led by a severely stigmatized woman named Akulina. They are afraid of everyone, and terrified of being blight born. Villagers who come alarmingly close to that fate are burned in a nearby cave. **6:** Undead. A small settlement with 1d4 + 2 undead humans (both Ambrians and barbarians). They are led by the undead theurg Tamas, who stubbornly clings to Prios' forgiveness, despite the fact that sunlight burns his puss-filled eyes so badly that he never goes outside during daytime. At night he brings his flock to the surface to pray and lament their bitter fate.
13–14	Monster Encounter	**1:** Chasm stag (*Ruins of Symbaroum Bestiary*, page 124) **2:** Pale crawler (*Ruins of Symbaroum Bestiary*, page 209) **3:** The Wily (*Ruins of Symbaroum Bestiary*, page 126) **4:** Spite (*Ruins of Symbaroum Bestiary*, page 105) **5:** Gwann, slaughterer (*Ruins of Symbaroum Bestiary*, page 53) **6:** World serpent (tunneler) (*Ruins of Symbaroum Bestiary*, page 116)
15–16	Source of Corruption	**1–2:** Pool of bubbling blackness sometimes shooting up like a pitch black geyser (roll 1d6 per round, 1 = eruption). Whoever touches the blackness suffers 1d6 temporary Corruption, as does anyone present in the cave when the geyser erupts unless they pass a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw. On success the individual only suffers 1 point of temporary Corruption. **3–4:** Black flakes whirling in the dark, often chaotically, sometimes almost like a coordinated dance. Anyone walking through the cave suffers 1d4 temporary Corruption. **5–6:** Throbbing boils in the rock wall that crack open whenever something living passes by, splashing them with sticky Corruption. Those walking through the cave must pass three DC 10 Dexterity (Stealth) checks or trigger one boil per failure. For each boil that cracks, the affected must pass a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw or suffer 1d4 temporary corruption.
17	Rune-covered gate. To open it requires solving a riddle, a DC 15 Intelligence check	The gate leads to a Cryptlord's court, active or abandoned. If the Cryptlord is still around, so are 1d10 Dragouls resting in their alcoves. In that case there is also an artifact in here, as well as minor treasure worth 1d10 × 10 thaler. If the place is abandoned one can only find the treasure.
18	The tunnel of a World Serpent. It is 30 feet (10 meters) in diameter and seems likely to collapse	Roll 1d20 every hour; if the result is less than or equal to the number of hours spent in the tunnel then it collapses. Each creature must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 2d12 bludgeoning damage and becoming trapped in the rubble on a failure. A character that succeeds takes half damage and is not trapped. It requires 1d4 hours of work to free the creatures who become stuck.

EVENTS IN THE UNDERWORLD		
1d20	**Event**	**Variants/Details (1d6)**
19	The scattered remains of an Ambrian expedition	A search of the bodies provides 1d10 × 10 thaler plus a handwritten letter describing the expedition and its progress so far. A DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation or Nature) check can determine what type of monster wiped out the expedition – use the encounter table above or whatever else seems appropriate.
20	Crystal column, ice blue with streaks of purple light (Mystics know this is a small magic node not yet destroyed by Corruption)	This node devours all temporary Corruption generated in its vicinity, and grows increasingly dark as a result. Once it becomes utterly black (Loremaster feature or detect magic: the node can take another 100 + 1d20 Corruption), the crystal cracks and everyone in the cave chamber gains 1d10 temporary Corruption. As long as the node exists, beasts (both predators and prey) will be attracted to the area and abominations and undead are prevented from entering. Thoroughly corrupted creatures can enter, but take 1d4 radiant damage per turn.

The Yonderworld

THE SO-CALLED YONDERWORLD has already been hinted at, in spell descriptions provided in the *Ruins of Symbaroum Player's Guide*. Still, we have to admit that we are as uncertain about it as Ambria's intellectual elite, especially when it comes to the most contentious issue: whether it consists of a single world or multiple ones. And perhaps it is mostly an academic matter, as no one will likely stay in this (or these) world(s) long enough to map it all.

Venturing into the Yonderworld is to expose oneself to immense danger – anyone who knows anything about the subject agrees on that much. Going there blind, without some form of anchor or reference point on the other side, is even more reckless, or even suicidal. But in some cases the circumstances might leave the player characters without a choice, that the risk of the journey is outweighed by the potential reward, or that they expose themselves and/or others to even greater danger by not going.

HISTORY

Scholars of the most ancient days believe that the Yonderworld is the cradle of humankind, from which they escaped in giant ships of stone powered by mystical ceremonies. The reason for this escape should quickly become clear to anyone visiting the world in question: it is dead, ravaged by the monsters which the witches call blight beasts and the Ambrians abominations or daemons.

This world was not destroyed overnight, nor because of any one event. It was worn down over time; the humans violated nature to fight the Corruption they had already awoken, which only fed nature's wrathful reactions to the point where the Corruption became overwhelming – you could say that the Yonderworld exceeded its Corruption Threshold. And at that point, the development became irreversible; the world was doomed and lost.

The history of the original human homeworld will be described further in future modules, not least in the final episodes of The Throne of Thorns. But this should not stop anyone from using the Yonderworld as an adventure location, if that seems desirable – it is an absolutely massive world (or possibly several worlds!), so even if your ideas should deviate from ours, it will almost certainly be possible to bridge such differences.

NATURE

Miles-long plains of sand and dust, in rolling dunes or accumulated into towering mountains, sometimes storm-swept, sometimes turned into mud by thunderous rain – as far as anyone can see, this is all that remains. The corruption is ever present, in the dust stirred up by your footsteps and constantly radiating in the background. The Gamemaster can use the table Corruption in the Yonderworld to get an idea of just how much corruption is present.

However, for those with enough time to further explore the wasteland, or who know what to look for, there are interesting discoveries to be made. Hidden beneath the surface are the ruins of several great civilizations that rose and fell over the millennia. Some of these might even have been exposed by rain and wind, made visible to the naked eye and available

CORRUPTION IN THE YONDERWORLD	
1d20	**Corruption***
1–5	No Corruption
6–10	1d4 temporary Corruption per hour
11–14	1d6 temporary Corruption per hour
15–16	1d8 temporary Corruption per hour
17–18	1 permanent Corruption per hour
19	1d4 permanent Corruption per hour
20	1d4 + 1 permanent Corruption per hour

* Characters cannot recover temporary Corruption until they reach an area without a corrupting nature.



for further investigation. But one must then have the courage and strength to defy the famished inhabitants of the Yonderworld, and possess some kind of antidote for the corruption, or it will quickly turn the find of a lifetime into a nightmare.

CULTURES

It would be misleading to say that any cultures exist in the Yonderworld. And as for the ruins which the player characters might be able to explore, you are free to design them in any style that seems appropriate.

Some may be tempted by the thought of making the Yonderworld very similar to our own Earth – that there are buildings of glass, metal and concrete (much like the ones in our cities) hidden underneath the sand and dust. That will not be the case in our version of the Yonderworld, so in this instance you should be prepared to later use the idea that there is more than one world beyond the Davokar region. The level of civilization we have in mind is more similar to Ambria, or rather the ancient Symbarian Empire.

CREATURES

There is nothing living in the Yonderworld, including its inhabitants. Sure, the daemon princes ruling the devastation are often powerful enough to rise above the pure, instinctual hunger of other abominations. Sometimes they even display something similar to rationality and cunning, but only those who were once human. Most creatures in the Yonderworld are just as furiously unreasonable as the primal blight beasts brought to life in humanity's new homeworld.

Speaking about the new world, the daemon princes, the "exalted" humans, would like nothing more than to go there. They try to trick cultists and sorcerers into letting them do just that, but are often themselves tricked or prevented from breaking free from the rituals' control. Humans who make it to the Yonderworld and somehow find a way back out will often do so with daemonic company (intentionally or otherwise). It is therefore not surprising that dimensional travelers quickly attract the interest of the deserts' rulers...

ADVENTURE SET-UP

A demonologist performs a teleportation, and on the way through the Yonderworld she glimpses a rectangular structure poking out of the otherwise rolling dunes of the desert. Shortly thereafter, she uses plane shift to go back there. As she enters the ruin's antechamber she is overwhelmed by fear and anxiety causing her to turn back, but not before grabbing a strangely shaped metal object – one that she proudly displays to her colleagues upon her return.

A little later the demonologist contacts the player characters, directly or through an intermediary. The metal object has been stolen, probably by some envious rival. The problem is that the thief will be able to use the item to get to the ruin, and thereby become the first person to explore it – that must not happen!

The player characters are offered the job of escorting the quest giver to the ruin in the Yonderworld. The rival and her ruthless expedition is already on site, and will likely serve as a complication as the player characters explore the location. Perhaps the rival has already been kidnapped by a daemon prince; maybe one of her companions witnessed the abduction and reveals that the prince intends to force the poor human to bring him along on the journey back to Ambria.

EVENTS IN THE YONDERWORLD

1d20	Event	Variants/Details (1d6)
1–2	Dead node of cracked black crystal, with Corruption oozing from the gaps	The corrupted node no longer absorbs any temporary Corruption, but mystics can choose to gain Corruption from the node's smoking cadaver and gain one of the following advantages as a bonus action on their turn, gaining (1 temporary Corruption) each time: **1–2:** Advantage on an ability check **3–4:** Maximum result on one damage die **5–6:** Recover 1d4 hit points
3–4	Human corpses	**1–2:** Circle of worshipers, all but one with their throats cut. In front of the last person lies a dagger and an empty bowl of poison. The bodies are completely petrified, and mineralized tears shine like pearls on their cheeks. 1d10 of these tear pearls can be picked loose. They are worth 1d10 × 10 thaler each, and absorb one point of temporary Corruption each, being destroyed in the process. **3–4:** A line of humans who were first walking, then crawling, toward some distant refuge. This is as far as they got. Their bodies are mummified, resembling ancient wood. **5:** A family huddled together in a shallow hole in the ground, incinerated in the middle of a final, everlasting embrace. Their bodies are ash, and the slightest touch will send them crumbling into dust. **6:** Scattered bodies, trapped by death in various unnatural positions, covered by gently falling dust. Actually they are a number of Dragouls (twice as many as the number of player characters).
5–6	A character with 15 or higher passive Perception discovers:	**1–2:** A memory cube containing an ancient man's memories from a happy or sad occasion, a baptism, a wedding or a funeral. Those who share the experience gain (1d4 × Level × 100) XP. **3–4:** A blackened cranium still whispering prayers to long dead gods. Whoever listens to its prayers for 1d4 hours either gains (1d6 × Level × 100) XP or loses one point of permanent Corruption. **5–6:** A minor artifact (see *Player's Guide*, page 184)
7–8	The great throne of a daemon prince, alone in the desert	**1–2:** The throne stands alone in the desolate wasteland, its prince long gone. It is made from parts of a capsized stone ship. Those who study the throne for 1d4 hours gain that amount (× Level × 100) XP from their new understanding of ancient human ingenuity. **3–4:** The throne is empty, but surrounded by daemonic supplicants awaiting the prince's return. The throne is made of living bodies – pact-making humans who displeased their master. Those who talk to the supplicants and study the throne gain dark insights worth (1d6 × Level × 100) XP, and 1 point of permanent Corruption. **5–6:** A daemon prince holds court, surrounded by dancing daemons. Humans nailed on black monoliths provide the music. All who hear the lamentations of the tormented humans must pass a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or gain 1d6 temporary corruption. Player characters without permanent corruption are not affected. The daemon prince demands a pact with at least one of the player characters, or else he will unleash the daemons on them – see Pact-making on page 170. The throne is roughly made from the linked remains of human buildings; beams of rusty steel, a huge and highly patinated brass bell, a rose window of multi-colored glass. A gaming group who studies the throne gains deep insights into humanity's origin and early history, which grants (1d6 × Level × 100) XP.
9–10	Monster encounter	**1:** Black plague termite swarm (*Ruins of Symbaroum Bestiary*, 123) **2:** Vengeful terrain (*Ruins of Symbaroum Bestiary*, pages 112–113) **3:** Blight-born human (*Ruins of Symbaroum Bestiary*, page 122) **4:** Blight worm (*Ruins of Symbaroum Bestiary*, page 123) **5:** Glimmer (*Ruins of Symbaroum Bestiary*, page 44) **6:** Primal blight beast (*Ruins of Symbaroum Bestiary*, page 125)
11	Teleporting demonologist	A demonologist is engaged in combat in the normal world when she plane shifts to the Yonderworld to run a bit before finally jumping back into the fight on "the other side." The demonologist has stats as a Necromage (*Bestiary*, 158), if the player characters join the fray.

EVENTS IN THE YONDERWORLD		
1d20	**Event**	**Variants/Details (1d6)**
12	Blackened temple	A once white and shiny temple dedicated to long since forgotten gods is now blackened and haunted by daemons. A gaming group who searches the temple for 1d4 hours gains (1d6 × Level × 100) XP from dark insights, as well as 1d4 temporary Corruption. They also find a minor artifact. Furthermore, their search awakens a daemon or abomination (challenge rating equals highest character level) that attacks the player characters.
13	Shipwreck of stone	A stone ship has run aground and capsized in the sea of dust. Everyone on board is either dead or blight born. A group who searches the giant vessel gains insights worth (1d6 × Level × 100) XP and finds strange and valuable items worth 1d10 × 100 thaler. They are also attacked by two waves of thoroughly corrupted sailors, stats as Dragoul (a total of three times the number of characters, divided evenly between each wave).
14	A sandstorm approaches	Finding a cavity that offers enough shelter takes a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check; the characters then take 1d4 temporary Corruption as the storm blows by. Those trapped in the storm gain 1d8 temporary corruption and take 2d12 bludgeoning damage from the suffocating sand.
15	The ground turns into treacherous mud	Each character must make a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check to notice the danger. Those that fail become stuck in the mud. Rescuing a creature from the mud requires a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check. Stuck creatures have three rounds to be rescued, afterwards they sink into and drown in the mud. Stuck creatures and rescuers gain 1d4 Corruption from the blighted mud.
16	Pointy rooftops of copper protrude from the ground	The player characters find themselves on the roof of a huge building, buried in deep and thick mud. Those who spend 1d4 hours digging, finally reach the top floor and find a minor artifact. Frescoes provide clues about human history worth (1d6 × Level × 100) XP. Anyone digging this way inside the building gains 1d6 temporary Corruption.
17	Doomsday clock of rusty iron	The mechanical clock has stopped at two minutes to midnight. A player character with the feature Artifact Crafting or Blacksmith can salvage the clockwork from the clock itself and make it tick again. It then works as a mechanical version of the artifact Xtala's hourglass (see page 143).
18	Interrupted aqueduct that no longer carries water, but thick, blighted mud.	With a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check, the player character finds a raft of glass up on the aqueduct, covered with dust. The character can use it to ride the river of mud at double walking speed, but the course is set by the aqueduct.
19	A beach of skulls and bones by a vast sea of fuming acid.	As the player characters approach the beach, something moves underneath the surface, creating ripples on the acid's otherwise mirror-like surface. The Alchemy feature: a melee weapon or projectile for a ranged weapon dipped in the lake will forever deal half damage (rounded down), but now counts as Poison damage instead of its original damage type. A person who disturbs the calm surface of the lake (e.g. dipping a weapon into it) is attacked by an abomination with stats as Hammer Eel (see the *Bestiary*, page 128), but thoroughly corrupted.
20	A glass pyramid protrudes from the ground, its interior teeming with movement.	Further investigation reveals that the pyramid is full of blight born humans, fighting to break free from their glass prison. Seeing the player characters increases their frenzy, and a famished roar is heard ever so faintly through the thick glass.

The Spirit World

WHETHER OR NOT *Ruins of Symbaroum*'s Spirit World can be visited is for the Gamemaster to decide – it will not be used as a setting in any of the adventure products currently on our drawing board. However, there is no doubt that the world in question really exists – evidence of this is seen in the mystical powers and rituals that allow people to communicate with the dead and call upon their help.

Those wishing to use the Spirit World as an adventure location would probably be well-advised to accept the sorcerer Katrandama's theories as reality (see the *Player's Guide*, page 71). In that case, it is a barren land of windswept ashes that borders on Eternity, where the dead find the eternal rest of oblivion. It isn't necessary for you to decide if it is a world in the ordinary sense of the word, set on a celestial body which in turn is located somewhere in the universe. What matters is the border – it is a materially existing place which is possible to visit, but where those who more or less consciously cross over to the other side are lost forever.

Journeying to the Spirit World

Visits to the Spirit World should be extremely rare, with only a very limited number of individuals aware of how to perform such a ritual. Easy access to the ash-blown realm of the dead would demystify the afterlife; it would also raise troubling questions about why mysterious deaths and murders are not routinely solved, since all it would take is traveling to the Spirit World and interviewing the victim! We therefore recommend that it takes very special circumstances to enable such an attempt – unique items, ceremonies that will only work under specific conditions, or creatures with certain properties. It should also take some form of anchor, in the form of a recently deceased individual whom one of the travelers can relate to. But as always, it is the Gamemaster's decision; all we can offer are tips and advice.

HISTORY

The fact that cultural beings die does not mean that they are gone completely, except for their previous physical needs. The conflicts plaguing the world of the living can therefore be found in the Spirit World as well – in the wake of a great battle, the spirits of the fallen keep fighting in the afterlife, until they have made peace with the situation and passed on to Eternity; a murder victim whose killer perishes shortly after the bloody deed may well seek out the assailant's spirit in search of revenge.

Thus, the history of the Spirit World follows that of the living, but in the form of snapshots that take place during short periods of time while the dead still linger in the ashen expanse. It is a world where nothing lasts, where no realms or traditions survive more than a few Ambrian days. It might therefore be misleading to even speak of the world of the dead as having a history in its own right.

NATURE

Visitors to the Spirit World are met by gray-white plains of windswept ash under a constantly hazy sky. Perhaps the few dead who are still strong enough to materialize will be sweeping the ashes into piles, in a confused and vain attempt to build a home for themselves. But they never grow very big before they are leveled by the constant winds.

It should be said that the existence on the border of Eternity is completely free of corruption, since its power is linked to the world of the living and its nature. The spirits who arrive here are untainted as well, even if their living bodies were not.

CREATURES

Considering what has already been said about the Spirit World, it seems reasonable to skip the Culture subheading and go straight to its individual inhabitants.

The Spirit World is populated by disembodied entities, and its population turnover is quite rapid. The question is who they really are – what creatures in the world of the living have a soul? One might also ask whether they only come from the world where Ambria and Davokar are situated, or from other places as well.

This can only be decided by the Gamemaster, but given the overarching theme of Symbaroum, we would recommend a generous approach. That all deceased humanoids pass through there goes without saying (possibly except for the dwarves; see the Earth Bound trait). But we would propose that beasts and undead also pass through the Spirit World on their way to Eternity, in the latter case when they are finally destroyed or banished from the world of the living. Perhaps insects, fish and even plants can be seen as tiny, flickering flares as they drift over the border to Eternity without pause? Abominations, however, have no place in the Spirit World – whatever soul they may or may not have consists of pure corruption, and is destroyed along with their physical forms.

A few words should be said about the selected spirits who for various reasons remain in the material world east of Eternity. It may simply be that they do not wish to lose themselves, but more often they stay because of unfinished business from the time before their death. The former can turn into strange loners, hyper social types seeking contact with remarkable newcomers, or into aggressive ghosts regularly lashing out in wild attacks against the Spirit World's inhabitants and visitors (such as the player characters).

Spirits with unfinished business spend the afterlife trying to contact their homeworld. Most of them never succeed, some might at most move or nudge objects telepathically, but some do actually develop powers that allow them to communicate through dreams, visions or what a living person would perceive as an inner voice. Should living creatures come to visit, these can expect to be contacted, in the hope that they will carry out the spirit's final request and bring it peace – it could be everything from murdering someone to eliciting a declaration of love from a loved one who is still alive.

ADVENTURE SET-UP

A small town or large village is shaken by a long series of strange and seemingly unconnected incidents – a brutal murder, a theft, a fire, mixed with positive things such as a childless widow finding an abandoned, swaddled baby on her doorstep, and the insufferable son of an ailing widow suddenly disappearing. What has happened is that a group

of young initiates at the local temple have learned to walk over to the Spirit World and decided that it is Prios' will that they bring peace to the community's dead.

The player characters could themselves have relatives or acquaintances in this place, or be summoned there as freethinking problem solvers. As they start digging into these cases, they soon discover that they are all linked to deaths that occurred in the last six months; perhaps there are other clues that they are connected, indications that also point to the Sun Temple. By the time the player characters figure out who is behind these incidents, the initiates have already fled to the Spirit World, hoping to find a new place where they can resume their "sacred" quest. The player characters must pursue them, find them, and catch them before they complete the ritual that will take them to a new home in the world of the living – something that may prove difficult as they are likely defended by a bunch of grateful spirits.

EVENTS IN THE SPIRIT WORLD

1d10	Event
1	A lonesome soul walks sadly, but resolutely, toward the edge of Eternity. Whoever interrupts the wanderer must pass a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or start walking with him. Another creature must pass a DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check for the player character to come to their senses and stop seeking eternal oblivion.
2	A group of souls, large and small, are walking together. The large ones wait for the little ones to catch up and take their hands before stepping into Eternity together. Whoever witnesses the harmonious event loses 1 point of permanent Corruption.
3	A solitary soul is waiting for someone that never comes. It turns listlessly around and goes alone into the void. Whoever disturbs the wanderer must defend themselves against a Wraith (*Ruins of Symbaroum Bestiary*, 159).
4	A swarm of tiny flares drift toward the edge of Eternity. Perhaps they are the spirits of a flock of beasts or a cloud of insects? Those who take a moment to reflect on the event gain (1d4 × Level × 100) XP.
5	A spirit is searching around the border to the world of the living, looking for someone who did it harm. A person who knows speak with dead can now communicate with the spirit without using the ritual. The spirit tells the character who it is looking for, and asks for her help in seeking revenge. A person who helps the spirit – slaying the offender in the living world – either gains (1d4 × Level × 100) XP or loses 1 point of permanent Corruption once the deed is done.
6	A dreamer in the world of the living has lost her way and stands, surprised and amazed, in the borderland between life and death. Then the vision flutters and dissipates as the dreamer wakes up.
7	A spirit is shouting silently across the boundary between life and death; a hand reaches in from the side of the living, and for a brief moment the two lovers touch each other's fingers. Then the deceased is pulled back into the Spirit World, and the cycle begins anew. Anyone witnessing this may try to help the two lovers hold hands a little longer; it requires a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check. On success the deceased relaxes, kissing their lover's hand. Before wandering off into Eternity, the spirit kisses the cheeks of everyone who helped. Those who helped either gain (1d4 × Level × 100) XP, or lose 1 point of permanent Corruption.
8	A spirit is obsessively building a structure of ashes, only to see it collapse again and again. A person who helps the spirit finish the structure must pass a DC 15 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check. In that case, the spirit gives its creation a satisfied nod, bows to the player characters, and begins its walk to Eternity. The characters gain (1d4 × Level × 100) XP.
9	A spirit is digging in the ashes for some lost item. Player characters who decide to help out must pass a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check, in which case they find an artifact in the ashes. The deceased throws itself at the item, and anyone trying to stop the spirit must fight a Necromage (*Bestiary*, 158). If the undead is defeated, the characters may keep the artifact.
10	Monster Encounter: (use monster's challenge rating to construct a Hard or Deadly fight, or use the rules on page 72.) **1:** Frostlight (*Ruins of Symbaroum Bestiary*, page 157) **2:** Lostlings (*Ruins of Symbaroum Bestiary*, page 157) **3:** Wraith (*Ruins of Symbaroum Bestiary*, page 159) **4:** Necromage (*Ruins of Symbaroum Bestiary*, page 158) **5:** Nightmare (*Ruins of Symbaroum Bestiary*, page 81) **6:** Cryptwalker (*Ruins of Symbaroum Bestiary*, page 155)



SECTION 3

Expeditions in Davokar

I have never been so scared, not before, nor ever since.

Frozen to the bone, soaked by melting snow and by blood seeping from open wounds, I crawled towards the safety of the plateau. My head ached from memories of the night before – the roar of mighty wings, the fire in his eyes, Saran's cries in torment, the escape, the breathless escape.

As I reached the plateau I stumbled and fell. I rolled over on my back and pressed the one remaining artifact to my chest. People and torches wavered around me; humans in blood-red armor were soon joined by a towering wildling with serious eyes. And I was hoisted from the ground; I was carried trembling with fear, until I landed in the hot glow of a fire. There she waited for me. And for my treasure.

The Huldra was a voice, a bone-white mask and two embers that flared hotter than both the fire and the eyes of the Cryptwalker. "How dare you?" The question was an accusation, as if I was guilty of unspeakable crimes. "It is not a lone bear that sleeps, whose fur you unwittingly tug at; it is all bears and all other beings to add; a slumbering horde fed on anger and shame. And you come here carrying a crowing rooster and a decoy…"

She pulled the figurine from my grip, eyed it at arm's length, before giving it to her serious friend, asking him to throw it into the deepest trench of Lake Volgoma. Then her gaze turned back at me:

"For a thousand years she has slept. Her nightmares have been violent but manageable. You are not to blame but you are guilty just the same, and blame aside, your suffering will neither be milder, nor greater than any others. When Davokar awakens."

IT HAS BEEN said before, but bears repeating time and time again: Davokar is a forest like no other. Traveling through an ordinary forest can be dangerous, arduous, and fraught with unpleasant surprises, but in Davokar the threats are greater, the challenges tougher, and the surprises far more deadly. And the further into the forest you go, the more dangerous it becomes – while travelers near the edge of Davokar may encounter a flock of mare cats, those venturing deeper into the woods will more likely face a horde of skullbiters or a famished arch troll.

This section covers aspects of any journey into the legendary Davokar, to various depths and for different purposes. The aim is to answer three key issues: why travelers expose themselves to the dangers of the forest, how good preparations can improve their chance of survival, and what they may encounter on their journeys. Adding to this are chapters that go into detail regarding the design of ruins to explore and what types of challenges may arise depending on what goal the player characters have with their expedition.

Should you and your gaming group want to explore other regions besides Davokar, you will have to make some changes and probably adjust certain details. But in principle, these guidelines can be used to handle all types of wilderness expeditions.

Missions

TO THOSE WHO live in a world where everything seems to have been explored and mapped, it may seem like madness to willingly expose oneself to the dangers of Davokar. But the people of Ambria see the forest in a very different light. For some the expeditions into the forest are a last desperate alternative to starvation and misery, for others a deliberate gamble with potential gains matching the extreme risk. Still others are driven by ambition, curiosity or the pursuit of power and glory – urges that can partly be satisfied in other ways, but not as quickly and effectively.

Davokar is arguably one of the Symbaroum game's main characters, meant to be the setting for many of the adventures taking place around the gaming table. Hence, it must offer a certain degree of variation, aside from the character progression that comes from accumulating experience and being able to press deeper and deeper into the darkness. Looking for ancient Symbarian ruins is certainly exciting, but after a dozen treasure hunts even the most adventurous player would probably be yearning for something else.

Treasure Hunt

THE FIRST AND most obvious reason to head out into the murky woods is to look for ruins from the time of Symbaroum, in the hope that they will be brimming with riches. Information about promising treasure grounds can be obtained in many ways – in settlements near the edge of the forest, goblin villages, barbarian camp sites, or by studying legends and other remnants of ancient times.

Treasure hunts usually begin in civilized areas, where the player characters come across information about a ruin or are offered the chance to join someone else's expedition. The journey can be more or less challenging depending on how far into the forest the characters are going, and whether any intrigues/conflicts arise between the expedition members – treacherous companions are a problem that should never be underestimated! As for the ruin and its treasures, they can either be generated randomly or designed beforehand; either way, in the long run, it will probably be more interesting to vary the amount of treasure, so that the player characters will sometimes hit the jackpot and sometimes return with nothing after wasting a great deal of resources.

The challenges facing the player characters should reflect that they are not alone in the game world. Sure, confrontations with monsters and dragouls can make for thrilling encounters, but do not forget to include other types of encounters as well: another treasure hunting expedition may already be on the scene; the ruin may be home to a peaceful goblin tribe or be watched by the Iron Pact; or perhaps it turns out to be inhabited by a handful of stray ogres trying to build a decent life for themselves.

Exploration

EVERY SO OFTEN, organizations like the Royal Sekretorium and Ordo Magica will arrange expeditions into Davokar. The purpose for this can be to learn more about some historical event, identify or gather medicinal herbs, find manuscripts describing forgotten rituals, or seek out "proof" that House Kohinoor or some other noble house has a historical claim to a certain territory.



The Black Pitch Mire, known for its mysteriously lifelike standing stones, but also for being the turf of the lindworm Skaramagos...

Player characters who are members of a faction or organization can of course go exploring on their own initiative, perhaps after finding clues in an archive or talking to some of Davokar's inhabitants. But since nobles and scholars tend to abhor physical labor, the player characters are just as likely to be hired to do someone else's grunt work. Again, the player characters should sometimes return empty-handed (to an aggravated employer) and sometimes with whatever they were supposed to retrieve. Maybe they will find some other even more important piece of information, which raises the question of how much they should withhold from the person financing the expedition (which could lead to complications if he or she has a mole among the player characters' companions)?

A group of explorers will probably face the same kind of challenging encounters as treasure hunters. But in this case a ruin's inhabitants can also be used as sources of information. A cryptwalker might provide deeper knowledge about the significance of a mural painting, while a goblin tribe can tell the characters about a previous expedition that recently discovered a cache of rune-marked copper tablets.

Missionary Work

FOLLOWERS OF BOTH the Lawgiver and the Lifegiver see it as their duty to spread the knowledge of, and the love for, Prios among pagans and heretics. The target could be a goblin tribe, a barbarian campsite, or why not a free settlement that has come up with a unique version of Prios worship (see page 86 for further ideas).

A player character may feel compelled to serve the Sun God due to personal convictions or pressure from his/her superiors, but it is more likely that a certain congregation or an individual priest is in need of an armed escort who knows the forest. Whatever the case, the group in question could be receptive to the message, or outright hostile to "outsiders." Perhaps they feign interest in order to disarm and enslave the missionaries, or worse. Or they may demand that the player characters prove "Prios' greatness" by passing some brutal test or defeating some fearsome creature that has long plagued the group.

Most challenges during missionary tours will probably be social in nature – conflicts between missionaries and locals, between various groups on site, and between the locals and their wider community (such as a clan or tribe).

Manhunt

ANOTHER COMMON TYPE of mission in Davokar is to find and bring back missing individuals or groups. The previous headings can be used as a starting point to determine who has gone missing, and why – a group of plunderers, explorers or missionaries. These could also be humans wishing to join the Iron Pact or some who willingly have moved away from Ambria, attracted to the idea of becoming a free settler, hermit or member of some barbarian clan.

In this case, suitable quest givers include family members, employers and friends. But one must be careful; the missing person does not always want to be found, and might avoid or hide from the player characters. In more complicated cases, the person/people in question might no longer be where they should be; they might have been abducted or willingly followed new information to somewhere completely different. This is another type of mission where the player characters should sometimes return empty-handed, due to the person being dead or simply impossible to find.

In addition to the challenges that characterize treasure hunting, exploring and missionary missions, manhunts can require a high degree of problem solving. The characters could have to track the individual across great distances, sneak into hostile settlements, and use their features and traits in clever ways.

Movement in Davokar

DIVIDING A FOREST like Davokar into a few homogeneous zones is of course impossible, but for descriptive purposes we are forced to resort to certain simplifications. In order to make the account a little more varied compared to the description in the *Ruins of Symbaroum Player's Guide*, the description below distinguishes between three types of areas: Bright, Wild and Dark Davokar (see map on page 63).

When moving through the forest, the table Modes of Travel and Time on page 34 in the *Player's Guide* is still used, with the addition that Wild Davokar has the same stats as Bright Davokar. We also suggest that traveling up or down a river counts as one tier lower, so that a trip along the river Eanor in Bright or Wild Davokar is equivalent to a journey across the plains of Ambria.

Other things affecting the characters' travels are their access to a competent guide and the acquisition and storage of supplies. Below we present a set of guidelines for just that, including a list of Misfortunes that travelers might face if they or their guide are having a bad day. You can use this as a base, and add on the Event rules on page 70 to make the forest more active and with a greater variety of ruins and dangers. Or use these as a base, and consider that, after an appropriate amount of time, the Guide has led the group to their destination.

Supplies

THESE GUIDELINES ASSUME that the player characters can find fresh/untainted water every day. Food, however, must be brought along, preferably enough so that they will not have to spend time and energy hunting or picking berries and mushrooms. This raises the question of how much in the way of gear and supplies the characters can carry, on their own or with the help of carriers and pack animals.

PROVISIONS

Regarding provisions, the gaming group has an important choice to make: do you want the food situation to be a challenge, or ignore all that and settle for the dangers that await in the forest and at your destination? In the latter case, the player characters can simply purchase enough food to get them there and back again, in the form of waybread and/or edibles that have been smoked, dried, salted or preserved in some other way – then they just have to keep track of how many days go by and adjust their food supply accordingly.

But for the players and their characters to get a feel for what traveling in Davokar is really like, we recommend the Gamemaster employs starvation as a very real threat, in which case purchasing, storing and transporting provisions becomes much more important. The characters should also find themselves a capable guide that can help them prevent Misfortunes, such as bolting pack animals, reluctant carriers and spoiled provisions.

If the characters are running out of food, the guide can help replenish their stock, and if that is not enough there are of course other options as well. The player characters could seek out and negotiate with local barbarian villages, goblin tribes or free settlements, and maybe even venture a nerve-racking meeting with elves or trolls. Yet another option is to raid the stores of another expedition, if they are fortunate enough to come across one.

But even so, they can find themselves on the brink of starvation. In that case there are rules for Starvation in the text box below.

ENCUMBRANCE

Another factor that can make traveling through the forest a more vivid experience is the guidelines for Encumbrance in the core rules:

The rules for lifting and carrying are intentionally simple. Here is a variant if you are looking for more detailed rules for determining how a character is hindered by the weight of their equipment. When you use this variant, ignore any requirements from the Weighty property.

- If you carry weight in excess of 5 times your Strength score, you are encumbered, which means your speed drops by 10 feet.
- If you carry weight in excess of 10 times your Strength score, up to your maximum carrying capacity, you are instead heavily encumbered, which means your speed drops by 20 feet and you have disadvantage on ability checks, attack rolls, and saving throws that use Strength, Dexterity, or Constitution.

Starvation and Dehydration

For people traveling through Davokar, running out of food or water is as serious a threat as predators and corrupted nature. After five days without any food whatsoever, two days without water, or ten days on rations, the following effects kick in:

- For each additional day, the character gains a level of exhaustion.
- The character cannot begin to recover exhaustion until they take a long rest and also eat and drink something.


MAP COVERING THE KNOWN PARTS OF
Ambria & Davokar
DRAWN BY CARTOGRAPHER
TABEO CRANEPLUME
0 100 km
0 60 miles
SCALE 1:4,000,000
N
NW
NE
W
E
SW
SE
S
GAOIA
ENOAR
SAAR-KAHN
GODINIA
DAVOKAR
VEDESA
VARAKKO
Jerak's Sinkhole
BAIAGA
BLACK PITCH MIRE
The Ruined City of Odaban
ZAREK
Serand's Pyramid
Sun Temple
The Columns of Haganor
VAJVOD
THE RAVENS
Sevona
VOLGOMA
Karvosti
MALGOMOR
Earth Towers of the Black Leech Rift
KAROHAR
ODAIOVA
Jakaar
Melima
Karo's Fen
THE MARSHES
NEW BERETOR
EANOR
Thistle Hold
NEW BERENDORIA
EBLIS
Kurun
NARUGOR
Templewall
Kastor
Ravenia
PRIOS DOMAIN
SERAGON
KASANDRIEN
Agrella
DOUDRAM
YNDAROS
MERVIDUN
EBEL
VELOMA
NOORA
Mergile
Redina
YNDARIEN
Küam Zamok
THE TITANS
Dark Davokar
Wild Davokar
Bright Davokar

- A creature with the pack mule feat is encumbered only when they carry weight in excess of 10 times their Strength score, and heavily encumbered when carrying 15 times their Strength score, up to their maximum (which is 20 times their Strength score).

Special notes on gear:

- One waybread is enough to feed one person for seven days, and counts as two pounds against the encumbrance limit.
- Other provisions are enough for one day per ration, and are 2 pounds each.
- Capable carriers (goblin or human) cost 1 shilling per day and can carry up to 60 pounds without being encumbered. Note that these will need their own share of the food supply.
- Four-legged pack animals (horse, donkey, mule) can carry twice as much, i.e. 120 pounds without being encumbered. They can carry up to 180 pounds before becoming heavily encumbered and can carry a maximum of 240 pounds each. The cost of such animals is specified in the *Player's Guide* (page 173), and they have the advantage of being able to survive exclusively by grazing.

The expedition's encumbrance limit will also be important on the journey home, when the player characters will want to bring their finds back to civilization.

Wilderness Guide

VENTURING INTO UNCHARTED wilderness is always risky business. Book learning and a high Perception value together are not enough to secure provisions and avoid danger; no, it takes special knowledge about the specific environment. This is why many treasure hunting parties and expeditions always have a skilled guide or two with them.

The guide has two main functions: replenishing the food/water supply according to the rules for Bushcraft (or Wilderness Explorer), and helping the expedition avoid the worst hazards of the journey.

The cost of the guide is determined by its proficiency bonus and its Wisdom modifier. For example, a guide with a Wisdom modifier of +2 and proficiency bonus of +2 requires 4 thaler every week.

Orientation and Misfortunes

EACH DAY OF travel through a wilderness area, the guide must roll a DC 10 Wisdom (Survival) check. (DC 13 for wild Davokar, DC 16 for dark Davokar). This is the orientation check and success on it may provide benefits on some of the entries for the Events tables (see page 70).

If the check fails, the party gains no advantages and suffers a more or less terrible Misfortune. Below is a list of incidents with the potential to cause trouble for the travelers, or at least treat them to unwanted surprises. The Gamemaster can ask one of the players to roll 1d20, modified by +5 if the expedition is in Wild Davokar or +10 if they have reached the Dark, and then look up the Misfortune with the number corresponding to the dice outcome. The incidents are described in short, but often with questions which the Gamemaster can build on, possibly together with the players.

1. The Campsite
The characters find an abandoned campsite. Is it truly abandoned? Is there any valuable equipment left behind, or something dangerous?

2. The Corpse
The characters come across the remains of a dead fortune-hunter who was not prepared for the challenges of Davokar. What killed this person? Do the characters recognize the deceased?

3. A Distant Howl
An inhuman howl is heard way out in the woods; soon thereafter it is heard again, closer this time. How do the members of the expedition react?

4. A Bad Omen
The characters encounter signs indicating a clear and present danger. What kind of signs – footprints, cadavers, mucus, blood? And how fresh are they?

5. Sudden Silence
Suddenly the forest holds its breath and a tense silence falls over the expedition. Why?

6. Stuck
One of the expedition's carts or part of their equipment gets stuck, in mud, in a crack or under a falling giant tree. It takes two people, each of them succeeding at a DC 13 Strength (Athletics) check, to remedy the situation. If one of the checks fails, the company will travel 5 miles (ten kilometers)

A Player Character as a Guide

- It is, of course, possible for a player character to serve as guide, especially if they have either Bushcraft or Wilderness Explorer and have a high Perception. The term guide refers to the person leading the party on their journey, whether they are an independent contractor or a full member of the party.

shorter this day; if both checks fail, it takes a whole day before they can continue forth.

7. Shadowed
The expedition is being followed, which can be noticed by a character with a passive Perception of 15 or higher. Who is spying on them, and with what intent?

8. Thorns
The expedition stops at the edge of a vast field of dense thorn bushes. They can go around, thereby cutting the day's traveling distance in half. If they try to force their way through, all members must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 1d8 piercing damage on a failure.

9. The Patrol
A unit from the Queen's Rangers orders the expedition to halt. They rummage through packs and other bags and demand to see the group's Explorer's License. Are they really rangers of the Queen? If yes, are they corrupt?

10. Mosquito swarm
During the day's walk, the characters are harassed by a swarm of mosquitos. What they don't know is that the insects are exposing them to a disease. See rules on diseases in the core rules and roll 1d6: 1–3 Cackle Fever; 4–5 Sewer Plague; 6 Sight Rot.

11. Downpour
A strange, icy rain hammers down on the forest and the expedition is soaked. The characters must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, the person catches a chill and has disadvantage on ability checks until they spend a short or longer rest getting warm by sitting close to a fire.

12. Lost
The characters have to admit that they have lost their bearings. As usual, the guide rolls one Orientation check per day, but with disadvantage. If failed, the group wanders in circles and makes no progress at all; if successful, they progress at normal speed. It takes three successful checks with disadvantage before they escape the bewildering area and hence are free from the disadvantage. What makes the terrain so difficult to navigate?

13. Sick Animals
The animals of the expedition seem exhausted and throw up all they eat. A character can make a DC 13 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check – one check per day and animal to relieve their symptoms. If the company travels with one or more sick animals, they only move a quarter of the normal distance. Maybe they have to leave some animals behind?

14. Marshland
Suddenly, the characters reach a vast marshland which will take half a day to circumvent. If they choose to proceed, the guide must make a DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check. If failed, a random expedition member starts to sink and the others must make two DC 13 Strength (Athletics) checks to save them. If three checks fail before two successes are rolled, the unlucky one disappears into the muck.

15. Ambush
Hostiles in the area are planning to ambush the characters, which may be noted with either passive Perception of 20 or higher or by making a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check with disadvantage. Who is the enemy and what is its goal?

16. Spoiling Food
The characters discover that something has consumed some of their supplies while they were sleeping or traveling, or the provisions are attacked by aggressive microbes which cause part of the stock to rot. The expedition loses 2d10 rations.

17. Wildfire
Without warning, a wildfire spreads toward the expedition at an alarming rate. Each person must pass two DC 10 Dexterity saving throws to reach a safe location. Anyone who fails one or more throws takes 1d4 fire damage for 1d4 turns before getting to safety; note that they cannot stop and try to extinguish the flames before then. What happens to the pack animals and/or the contracted carriers?

18. From Bad to Worse
Roll two times on this table and use both outcomes.

19. Discord in the Ranks
The strenuous journey is starting to get on peoples' nerves. Two non-player characters in the expedition start fighting violently. What has happened? Is one of them infected by something?

20. Sacred Ground
The ground that the characters are traversing is considered taboo for strangers by the local population – the trespassers must die! Who lives in the area? Why the taboo?

21. Corrupted Soil
The environment suddenly feels twisted and sick; soon it can be seen, on the dark veins and black leaves of the vegetation. The area is blight-stricken; the characters can turn back and choose another way (loses one day), or they can proceed, in which case each character must succeed at a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or suffer 1d6 points of temporary Corruption that do not leave the body until they have left the corrupted area behind.

22. Hangman's Hill
Without warning you see them hanging there, in nooses from the lower branches, gutted and mutilated: the members of a large expedition. A DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) check is required to convince the characters' companions not to turn around and leave. Who has done this, and why?

23. Sabotage
During the night, a lone saboteur tries to access the expedition's members, provisions and/or animals. Who is the saboteur? What is the target? Can the player characters thwart the attempt?

24. The Ironsworn's Ultimatum
They appear as if from out of the very air, along the path where the characters are walking – an Iron Pact warband, arrows pointing at the travelers. The leader of the elves gives an ultimatum: turn around and take a long detour (two days) or face the Ironsworn's wrath. Why? Can an agreement be reached, such as being blindfolded and escorted through the area?

25. Lair of Evil
Something in this region attracts aggressive monsters and adversaries – roll on the Enemies in Davokar table (page 71). What is attracting these creatures to the area?

26. Delirium
The characters start hearing and seeing what isn't there; horrifying figures connected to their own history. If a character openly questions what they see and hear, they can make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw; success means that the hallucinations subside. The Gamemaster decides how much time passes before the group can resume the journey. Is the delirium caused by something they have eaten, or by something in the air or water?

27. The Eternal Contagion
Everything in the area is dead or twisted beyond recognition. This place is horribly corrupt; even if the characters decide to turn back and go around (losing one day), they must make a DC 13 Charisma saving throw or suffer one point of permanent Corruption. If they choose to proceed and fail the Charisma saving throw, they suffer 2 points of permanent Corruption; should the saving throw succeed, they are instead plagued by 1d6 temporary Corruption. In both cases, all provisions are automatically infected – each ration consumed deals one point of temporary corruption that does not go away until the afflicted has eaten pure food for a week.

28. Disappearance
An expedition member (character, companion or animal with supplies) suddenly disappears, as if evaporated into nothing. Were they transferred to another place, time or world? Who or what caused the disappearance, and why?

29. Heart of Darkness
A member of the expedition encounters something that makes him or her crazy (bug bite, spores, foul air or similar). Select a non-player or player character at random, who then must roll a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw. The character suffers 2 permanent Corruption if the save is successful, or 1d4 + 1 if it fails. Irrespective of which, the victim will attack the closest person with the intent of killing him or her – a state that remains for the duration of the scene.

30. The Eye of the Forest
All who travel the area feel as if they are being watched by the forest itself, as if it is assessing them, searching for weaknesses. Suddenly the feeling grows many times stronger, becomes threatening, like the whole world is out to get them. Each character must make a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw with disadvantage. On a failure, they are struck by panic and start fleeing in different directions. The panic persists for 1d4 hours, and during that time the expedition members become scattered, alone in the depths of Davokar...

Unreliable Guides

Not all guides can be trusted. If the Gamemaster so desires, one of the player characters must pass a DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) check after each random enemy encounter on the journey, in order for the guide to stay with the expedition. Furthermore, if the outcome is a natural 1, it turns out that the guide belongs to a group of robbers who come to take the player characters' money and treasure.

They outnumber the player characters by double and have the stats of your choice of Robber/Robber Chief/Fortune Hunter/Plunderer or a mix of all or some of them.

Planning the Expedition

ENDURING A JOURNEY to the depths of Davokar requires both luck and skill; to actually make it back home poses even higher demands, especially regarding planning and preparations. This section deals with how you as a Gamemaster can turn the expedition's prelude into one or more exciting game sessions.

An important component in this is to convey the understanding that the player characters' lives literally may depend on how well they prepare for the journey. At taverns and inns along the forest's southern border, they can find several (more or less physically and mentally scarred) fortune hunters who have journeyed into the darkness and can stress the importance of mapping one's route, securing a skilled guide (preferably two, in case one of them should die), purchasing high-quality provisions, and so on.

Described under the headings below are not only the sources of information and available companions, but also how the characters' choices will technically affect their journey through Davokar. A high-quality resource can add bonuses to certain checks, or grant advantage when so desired.

Expensive Licenses

Acquiring an Explorer's License for journeys in Davokar is simply a must, and an expensive one at that. On page 23 in the *Player's Guide* there is a table which can help you calculate the price, and remember that the licensors are rarely restrictive when it comes to increasing the base rate with extra add-on costs.

Characters who have difficulties raising that kind of money have a few painful options to choose from: selling properties, artifacts or other assets; borrowing the missing sum at high interest rates; or offering to sell future shares in their expedition. Given the level of risk, the interest rate should be 25% per month (20% with a DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) check), and persons who are offered future shares should demand 10% for every hundred thaler they invest, i.e. 50% for a loan of 500 thaler (more than that will be next to impossible to lend against future shares).

Map

WHEN THE PLAYER characters have decided on a route to the targeted site, they can try to learn more about it – specific areas to avoid, dangers to look out for, and places that are relatively safe or can offer various forms of resources.

Such information can be obtained from people as well as from written sources. As far as the former is concerned, it is for instance possible to seek help from experienced fortune-hunters, Ordo Magica's explorers or persons who have actually lived in the areas the characters will pass on their journey. Archives to scour for additional intelligence can be found in several places in towns like Thistle Hold and Ravenia.

INFORMATION FROM PEOPLE

How much help they gain from conversations with individuals claiming to have information about their route simply depends on how much they are willing to pay. Trusting the misleading information offered by ordinary treasure hunters (cost: 1–9 thaler) will even have negative effects during their travels through Davokar. Technically, their leader/guide gets a –1 penalty to orientation checks and +1 to rolls on the Enemies and Terrain tables.

Should they instead make the effort to search for experienced forest travelers, they can actually get some help, in which case they get a +1 modifier to the orientation check and a –1 modifier to rolls on said tables. But the question is how deep into the forest the person has ventured. An experienced treasure hunter will demand 25 thaler (20 with a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Persuasion) check), but the information will only be useful while traveling through Bright Davokar (see the map on page 63). Sources like Ordo Magica can also provide information on Wild Davokar, at a price of 50 thaler (40 with a successful DC 16 Wisdom (Persuasion) check).

Finally, there are a few people whose information can give the characters a bonus to said checks also in Dark Davokar, as for instance Lasifor Nightpitch and Lysindra Goldengrasp in Thistle Hold. These will charge 100 thaler for such detailed information, or 5% in future shares – can be haggled down to 80 thaler/4% with a successful DC 19 Wisdom (Persuasion) check.

WRITTEN SOURCES

Finding reliable information in the messy archives of Ambria takes time, even with the paid assistance of the notaries. Normally it costs 1 thaler a day and grants access to the archives, and another ten thaler a day for personal assistance (which adds advantage to checks made while researching, see page 41 in the *Player's Guide*).



Each participating player character makes one ability check for every full day of research, up to a maximum of three successes.

- The first success provides a +1 to Orientation checks made in Bright Davokar and a –1 to rolls on the Enemies and Terrain tables in Bright Davokar. If you succeed by 5 or more, the modifier for the tables is –2 instead.
- The second success provides a +1 to Orientation checks and –1 to rolls on the Enemies and Terrain tables in Wild Davokar. If you succeed by 5 or more, the modifier for the tables is –2 instead.
- The third success provides +1 to Orientation checks and –1 to rolls on the tables in Dark Davokar. You cannot earn a –2 for the tables of Dark Davokar, it is too dangerous.

Guide

General rules and guidelines for wilderness guides are found on page 64, but to actually acquire a competent guide is often a challenge, most often of a social nature. It can be that almost all suitable candidates are already out on expeditions, or recently returned and hence reluctant to go out again so soon. Or they may be bound by some form of contract, prepared to head out together with a group funded and led by some organization or individual.

In the latter case, and in part when it comes to convincing a recently returned wildlife expert, the player character needs to pressure the candidate to change his or her plans, preferably without their current employer realizing what is going on. Here are some suggested means of exerting pressure:

- Sabotaging the guide's current plans, for example by eliminating expedition members or destroying supplies.
- Negotiating better terms, promising the guide more money or even future shares.
- Digging up some secret that gives them leverage over the guide, for example that the person in question has stolen from or actively worked against former employers.
- Convincing the person that the player characters' expedition has a greater chance of success or even survival.
- Asking for written evidence that some dignitary will act as the expedition's protector; in Thistle Hold, for example, it can be Mayor Nightpitch, Chapter Master Cornelio, Father Elfeno or Lysindra Goldengrasp.

Note that a group which has already contracted any guide stolen by the player characters will not exactly be overjoyed with this. If the gaming group is using the rules for scheming (see page 172), all characters should get a –2 modifier to their Relationship with that faction. Otherwise

WILDERNESS GUIDES

Name	Wisdom	Perception	Features
Fonsiul	16 (+3)	+5	Famous goblin with a temper; already contracted by Ordo Magica
Arval	15 (+2)	+4	Timid youngster from Clan Baiaga; already contracted as a reserve by the Sun Church
Crooky	17 (+3)	+7	Stoop-shouldered ogre with a sense of humor; is planning her own expedition to another destination
Vindel	17 (+3)	+6	Elderly Ambrian, retired from the Queen's Rangers; newly returned, lightly wounded and in a terrible mood
Hygla	18 (+4)	+7	Scarred, love-struck goblin; also pregnant and therefore reluctant to embark on longer journeys

the Gamemaster can simply try to keep it in mind and let it come back to bite them when the groups meet in the forest.

The Wilderness Guides table lists a handful of guides to choose from or use as inspiration when creating your own wilderness experts. It provides the guide's base Wisdom score and total Perception (including proficiency bonus or expertise). Should additional stats and characteristics be needed, the Gamemaster can use those described on pages 215–223 in the *Ruins of Symbaroum Bestiary*.

Other Companions

MAYBE THE PLAYER characters should consider hiring additional experts for their expedition, to fill in their own knowledge gaps or strengthen the group in other ways. Described below are a handful of professionals whose skills might be useful on the journey; the Gamemaster is free to give them names, appearances and personalities based on what kind of people the characters are looking for.

We propose that the player characters be allowed to decide exactly what their companions are capable of and how experienced they are, by creating them as independent characters with their own character sheets. These non-player characters should then be distributed between the players and become additional player characters over the course of the journey, in situations where their expertise can be of use.

These experts can be of lower level than the characters, from about 1/2 their current level to 3/4 of the lowest character level and designed to be much more focused than a standard player character. Should this procedure be too burdensome for the gaming group's liking, there is a vast array of characters described on pages 168–211 in the *Bestiary*. Certain adjustments will likely have to be made, but at least there are stats to build on for most of the types below.

Costs per week are generally a number of thalers equal to their proficiency bonus plus primary ability modifier. (Somewhere around 5–10 thaler per capable individual.)

MONSTER HUNTER

The Monster Hunter approach is described on page 15 in the *Player's Guide*, where appropriate origins and features are also specified. Aside from participating in regular combat, the monster hunter's knowledge about trapping beasts or abominations can give the entire gaming group a much-needed damage bonus in times of peril.

PRIEST/THEURG

Priests can have different areas of expertise, but for a journey through Davokar, their healing or holy powers may be of particular interest. Furthermore, a combat-oriented priest can be an effective abomination slayer, with spells such as sacred flame, spiritual weapon, and shield of faith.

INTERPRETER

There are highly educated individuals who specialize in interpreting between the peoples of the region, and who have the ability to express themselves in the otherwise extinct Symbarian language. In the company of an experienced interpreter with Loremaster (3rd level), the player characters can communicate in foreign human languages (for example the barbarian tongue) without making any Intelligence checks; at 6th level the same applies to the languages of elves and trolls, and a master (9th level) has the same effect on conversations in Symbarian.

The strong linguistic ability also gives the player characters advantage on Persuasion checks when negotiating to avoid combat, if the Gamemaster deems it at all possible.

Finally, the gaming group can benefit from having someone with whom their own loremaster can discuss and analyze finds, artifacts, ancient texts, and the like. Technically, this means that the player characters have advantage to pass all ability checks related to Loremaster, as long as the level required does not exceed that of the freelance interpreter.

SELLSWORD

In Ambria there are plenty of battle-hardened veterans and well-trained youngsters seeking work as freelance warriors. In this case, the players are free to create their companions any way they like in order to bolster their own weaknesses. Perhaps they need a warrior on the front line, capable of soaking up lots of damage? Or maybe they are in need of a ranger who is a skilled marksman as well as a competent tracker?

MYSTICS

Spells and rituals are among the most powerful means of problem solving this game has to offer, and unless the characters are very broad in their mystical training, there will likely be a knowledge gap or two that needs filling. There are spells for tracking and finding, protecting and concealing, but also for communicating with animals and spirits – all of them very useful for expeditions trying to reach deep into Davokar.

WITCH

Witches are partly covered by the category above, but deserve their own mention. Their ability to lull Davokar's darkness and abominations to sleep can help the player characters escape many life-threatening situations, and their ability to shapeshift or use their familiar can be useful for reconnaissance purposes.

Companions and Death Saving Throws

While companions can be used as additional player characters, we recommend that they are treated fundamentally as NPCs. This means they don't make death saving throws but instead die at 0 hit points.

Events

TRAVELING THROUGH A wild and unexplored environment offers opportunities as well as risks. This section contains rules for randomly determining what the player characters encounter or experience on their expeditions. The Gamemaster may of course pick and choose among the lists and tables below, without rolling dice, others may choose to only roll on a successful Orientation check, or only once for each week's travel.

Each day the characters spend in Davokar, four things can happen: they can come across a ruin, an encounter, a group of enemies, and/or special terrain. Since the forest of Davokar is so vast and diverse in its environment, a separate roll is made for each of these four, with the following general modifications:

- When in Wild Davokar, add +2 to rolls on all four 'In Davokar' tables.
- When in Dark Davokar, add +5 to rolls on all four 'In Davokar' tables.
- When traveling along waterways, add +2 to any roll on the Enemies in Davokar table.

We suggest that these four rolls are made before the gaming session begins, so the Gamemaster will have time to consider what the outcomes entail and turn them into an interesting scene with suitable challenges. If you must roll during the game session, it might be a good idea to call a short break for the players. That way, while the action does stop for a little while, they aren't watching you roll with bated breath and you have a few moments to assess the meaning of the results.

If the outcome of the rolls means that the player characters encounter a medium-sized, badly damaged ruin and a number of Weak enemies with an Ordinary leader, the ruin in question would likely be a den of robbers or the home of an aggressive goblin tribe.

Passive Perception vs Active Searching

As an optional rule, the Gamemaster can decide that the characters' chance of encountering a ruin is affected by whether or not they are actively searching for one – if so, active search requires that they do not move faster than normal speed. Groups that opt not to actively search gain no bonus from passed Orientation checks and also suffer a -5 modification when rolling on the Ruins in Davokar table.

Should it also turn out that there is a local settlement in the area (see Encounters in Davokar table), it may be inhabited by other goblins or human settlers who are either in conflict with the occupants of the ruin or working together with them in some way.

The Inhabitants Relationship table on page 79 can be used or consulted when the outcome indicates that the characters face both an encounter and a group of enemies, to determine the relations between the two parties. Otherwise, feel free to let your imagination run wild!

Ruins

FOR EACH DAY of travel, the expedition leader makes a roll on the Ruins in Davokar table. A successful Orientation check grants a bonus of +2, in addition to any other modifications.

The table determines whether the party finds a ruin and, if so, what type of ruin it is – in turn determining the maximum number of finds at that location. It is up to the Gamemaster to decide on the physical characteristics of the ruin, with larger structures having different areas to explore and more danger as well (see Ruin Details on page 78). Simply discovering a ruin rich with treasure is no guarantee of wealth and fame – the items in question must first be found or dug up! Everyone contributing to the excavation makes an Intelligence (Investigation) check every day, with the DC set by the type and condition of the ruin.

RUINS IN DAVOKAR

1d20 + Mods	Ruin	Investigation DC	Maximum Finds
1–7	None	—	—
8–10	Completely crumbled or already ransacked	—	—
11–12	Small, badly damaged	13	1d4 + 2
13–14	Small, dilapidated	11	1d6 + 2
15–16	Small, well preserved	10	1d8 + 2
17–18	Medium, badly damaged	17	2d6 + 2
19	Medium, dilapidated	15	2d8 + 2
20	Medium, well-preserved	14	2d10 + 2
21	Grand, badly damaged	21	3d8 + 2
22	Grand, dilapidated	19	3d10 + 2
23+	Grand, well-preserved	18	3d12 + 2

Successful diggers may roll on the Treasure Type table on page 73 to see what kind of treasure they have found, after which they are referred to another table to determine exactly what it is. The excavation may continue until the ruin's maximum number of finds have been salvaged – a roll that can be made in secret by the Gamemaster or left to the players. But staying in the same place for several days is not without risks, as shown under the Enemies heading below.

Encounters

ALTHOUGH UNUSUAL, IT is not impossible to come across groups of potentially peaceful travelers in Davokar. Obviously, the likelihood of that happening decreases the further into the forest you get, particularly when it comes to encounters with humans from Ambria or the barbarian clans.

Once a day a roll is made on the Encounters in Davokar table, modified by what part of the forest the characters are in. If the outcome indicates that an encounter will take place, and the guide of the expedition passed the Orientation check, the player character (or guide) with the highest Perception score can make an ability check against the DC indicated on the table. If successful, the player characters notice the other group before being detected themselves, and may choose whether to hide, lay an ambush, or do something else; if the check fails (or if the Orientation check failed) the Gamemaster gets to decide the strategy of the other group.

The details regarding the encounter are decided by the Gamemaster, on the basis that the player characters and the group they face are equally keen to avoid bloodshed. Perhaps they can exchange information, help each other with healing and/or supplies, or join forces to defeat a mutual enemy in the area?

ENCOUNTERS IN DAVOKAR

1d20 + Mods	Encounter	Perception DC	Number
1	Hunting party	15	1d6 + 2
2	Missionaries	10	1d6 + 4
3	Treasure hunters	14	1d4 + 6
4	Local settlement	10	2d10 + 20
5	Rangers	15	1d4 + 4
6	Large expedition	12	2d10 + 4
7	Nomadic goblins	16	4d10 + 4
8	Diplomatic elves, Civilized trolls, Peaceful bestials	20	1d10 + 4
9+	None	—	—

Enemies

IN THIS CASE, the term "enemies" refers to creatures whose default position is aggression, whom the player characters cannot easily get past without combat. These may be predators, belligerent humanoids, ravenous abominations or life-hating undead. The Enemies in Davokar table only specifies the enemy's challenge rating, which leaves it to the Gamemaster to decide exactly what is attacking the player characters or standing in their way. When two challenge ratings are given, the suggestion is for a number of 'troops' for the first rating, led by a single commander of the second rating.

Each day a roll is made on the table, modified by what part of the forest they are in. A successful Orientation check adds a –1 modifier to the roll, or –2 if the check succeeds with a difference of 5 or more.

If the player characters choose to stay in the same place for more than one day, for example to gather supplies or excavate a ruin, they risk attracting unwanted attention. In that case the member of the party with the highest Stealth can try to make sure that everyone is as quiet as possible, by rolling a daily Dexterity (Stealth) check from their second day forward. The DC starts at 10 and increases by 1 for each day you remain stationary. A failure means a roll is made on the Enemies in Davokar table to determine what type of unexpected guests show up, without help from a successful Orientation check – staying in the same place for too long can be very dangerous indeed...

ENEMIES IN DAVOKAR

1d20 + Mods	Examples	Challenge Rating	Number
1–8	None	—	—
9–10	Village Guards, Kotkas, Blight-born Human	1/2 or less	1d4 + 2
11–12	Fortune Hunters, Jakaars, Frost Lights	1 or less	1d6 + 3
13–14	Colossi, Hunger Wolves, Stone Boars	2 or less	2d4 + 2
15–16	Ferber Swarm, Rage Trolls, Killer Shrubs	4 or less	1d4 + 1
17–18	Liege Trolls, Primal Blight Beasts, Ravenous Willows	10 or less	1d4
19–20	Robbers + Robber Chief	1/2 + 2	1d4 + 3
21–22	Dragouls + Necromage	1 + 15	2d4 + 2
23	Skullbiter Crushers + Skullbiter Queen	5 + 15	1d4
24	Aboars + Lindworm	5 + 15	1d6
25	World Serpent Tunnelers + World Serpent Wallower	17 + 26	1d2

Setting a Challenge

If you want the players to encounter a 'fair' fight, you can use the following challenge rules. However, it may be more appropriate to simply allow the dice to fall where they may and have the group deal with the enemies according to their best judgment (including fleeing or hiding).

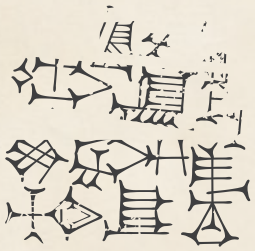
- Add up the characters' levels. This gives you a total level amount. (For example, four characters of 5th level each count as 20 total levels).
- If the number of monsters is less than the number of characters then divide the total levels by 2 and make sure the monsters' CR total is equal to this or less. (For example, one CR 10 monster is equal to the 20 total levels divided by half, or two CR 5 creatures.)
- If the number of monsters is equal to or greater than the number of characters then their total CR should be greater than half the total levels but less than the actual total levels. (For example, from five to nine CR 2 monsters, four to six CR 3 monsters, exactly 4 CR 4 monsters, etc.)

Note: These values, especially when the creatures outnumber the characters, can produce very deadly fights, representing the dangers of Davokar and the larger world. The players should always be ready to flee if necessary.

Terrain

DAVOKAR MAY SEEM fairly predictable on a map, with clear lines drawn between its bright, wild and dark regions. But the forest is legendary for its treacherous nature, which anyone traveling under its foliage will quickly learn.

Once a day, a roll is made on the Terrain in Davokar table, modified by what part of the forest the characters are in. A successful Orientation check adds a –1 modifier to the roll, or –2 if the check succeeded with a difference of 5 or more.



The so-called Crypt Writings, with their strange letters, have raised the question of whether the old Symbaric language contained more than one alphabet.

TERRAIN IN DAVOKAR

1d20 + Mods	Examples	Effect
1–10	None	—
11–12	Easily traversable	The party covers 6 miles (10 km) more.
13–14	Swamp/marsh	The party covers 3 miles (5 km) less and each member must make a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or gain a level of exhaustion.
15–16	Sinkhole	Each member must make a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw or take 2d6 bludgeoning damage from falling.
17–18	Poisonous spores	Each member must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, take 1d6 poison damage for 1d4 + 1 rounds.
19–20	Vengeful terrain	Create an enemy group suiting the location.
21	Slightly corrupted nature	Make one roll on the Corrupted Nature table in the *Ruins of Symbaroum Bestiary*, page 23.
22	Corrupted nature	Make two rolls on the Corrupted Nature table in the *Ruins of Symbaroum Bestiary*, page 23.
23+	Severely corrupted nature	Make three rolls on the Corrupted Nature table in the *Ruins of Symbaroum Bestiary*, page 23.

The Treasures of the Ruins

PEOPLE CLAIMING THAT valuable remnants from past inhabitants of Davokar are simply lying around under the foliage, waiting to be found by ardent fortune hunters, have probably never set foot in the forest. No, it takes a great deal of effort and no small amount of luck to become the next Iasogoi Brigo or Elmea Rabbit's Foot!

The finds listed in the three tables below – Curiosities, Mystical Treasures and Artifacts – are things that can be found in the forest's more or less well-preserved ruins. Guidelines on how to handle the search and how many treasures can be found in a specific location are found under the Ruins heading (page 70), while this is where you determine exactly what items the player characters have uncovered.

Each character vigilant enough to find something starts by rolling on the Treasure Type table to determine what kind of item has been found. The outcome then points to one of three other tables, unless the find turns out to be debris. The debris category covers items like cracked vases, damaged figurines and broken tools, which can be sold for 1d10 thaler in the markets of Ambria.

Note: While treasure certainly counts as a Reward (see page 116), we've kept these tables with the other ones to allow generating both ruins and their treasure to be part of the exploration process.

The Value of the Finds

The value of a find depends on several factors: what condition it is in, what the material is worth and how many potential buyers there are. A curiosity is worth 10 + 1d10 thaler. A Mystical treasure is worth 100 + 1d100 thaler. Artifacts are rarely traded in thaler, but if one finds a buyer the item can be sold for 1,000 + 1d1000 thaler. Rolling 1d100 simply means that you roll 1d10 twice. The first roll determines the tens digit, and the second determines the ones digit. For example, if you roll a 3 followed by a 4, the outcome is 34. In order to roll 1d1000 you just add 1d10 for the thousands digit. The outcomes 00 and 000 equal 100 and 1,000, respectively.

TREASURE TYPE

Location 1d20:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Bright Davokar	D	D	D	D	D	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	M	M	M	M	A
Wild Davokar	D	D	D	D	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	M	M	M	M	M	A	A
Dark Davokar	D	D	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	A	A

Note: D = Debris; C = Curiosity, roll on Curiosities table; M = Mystical Treasure, roll on Mystical Treasures table; A = Artifact, roll on Artifact table

CURIOSITIES

1d100	Detail
1–2	Leather pouch containing stone marbles, fourteen shiny black ones and eight off-white, to play with or use as sling stones
3–4	Richly ornamented lyre of silver that can be fitted with new strings
5–6	Nail file with one rough side and one smooth, and a handle shaped like the silhouette of a wolf's head
7–8	Box containing twenty-four paper clips of patinated copper wire
9–10	Glass bottle containing a wooden model castle in a moorland landscape
11–12	Simple frying pan of rusted iron on which nothing ever sticks
13–14	Set of five bronze measuring cups, all in different sizes
15–16	Box containing thirty-six small, bone discs engraved with Symbarian cuneiform characters
17–18	Small basket woven out of miraculously living vines with healthy green leaves
19–20	Necklace made entirely from linked gold teeth

CURIOSITIES	
1d100	**Detail**
21–22	Silver brooch depicting a wraith owl, the rings around its eyes made from black, faceted stones
23–24	White-glazed and somewhat cracked porcelain plate, painted with the weathered motif of a straight-backed woman in a long dress, with a poleaxe resting against her shoulder
25–26	Comb made of lindworm bone with cuneiform characters on each tooth, which not only untangles one's hair but cleans away dirt and grease
27–28	Cracked ceramic serving platter, decorated with various types of fruit on a white background – two of the fruits are unfamiliar to present-day gardeners
29–30	Box in the shape of a rose with twenty-four golden petals in four rows, which must be unfolded in sequence to expose its empty interior
31–32	Silver fountain pen with golden details, which never seems to run out of ink
33–34	Bronze caliper, marked in cuneiform with an unknown unit of measurement
35–36	Flowerpot of dark blue ceramic, decorated with a white and red motif of daemonic couples in obscene positions
37–38	Copper box containing twelve ceramic figurines, each depicting the same goblin's head, but with different facial expressions
39–40	Patinated sheet of copper with cuneiform, listing the ingredients and procedure for brewing the alcoholic honey beverage Noid
41–42	Ornamented dagger with a dull steel blade that slides into the hilt when pressed against something
43–44	White-glazed porcelain mask that covers the upper part of one's face, shaped with an owl's beak, small branched horns, and red-lined eye openings
45–46	Wax stamp with a handle of pure gold whose mark represents the royal rune Labrys
47–48	Thick, cracked tallow candle which, when lit, emits a dark yellow smoke
49–50	Green, ceramic oil lamp with a shade of patterned glass that rotates while the lamp is lit
51–52	Brown, leather eyepatch with different-colored gemstones arranged in the form of an open eye
53–54	Model of a twin-masted stone ship; the stern can be opened to reveal sixteen tin figures spread across two decks
55–56	Black leather leash that connects to a collar of the same material, large enough to fit around a bull's neck and decorated with studs of pure gold
57–58	Badly damaged wooden box with moldy fabric inside; contains five well-preserved seeds which, if handled correctly (successful DC 13 Wisdom (Alchemist's Supplies) check), can grow into cherry trees with multicolored flowers and delicious fruit
59–60	Long, thin wooden box full of flat copper pieces of different shapes, all of them badly patinated; a puzzle with two missing pieces; washing off the patina reveals the motif of a daemonic abomination
61–62	Spoon of black bone, carved with runes filled with red paint that has partially worn off; nothing one eats with the spoon is absorbed by the body
63–64	12 × 9 game board with different-sized squares of various colors/materials (white bone, black wood, and patinated copper), in a frame of patterned hardwood.
65–66	The clappers and tubes of a wind chime made from melodious ettermite
67–68	Fist-sized, irregular, glistening black stone with magnetic properties
69–70	Silver case with sixteen dried-up, multicolored pieces of chalk; they are unused and can be restored for drawing after successful alchemical treatment – DC 13 Intelligence (Alchemist's Supplies) check.
71–72	Carved bone statue of an andrik with a cracked beak, armed with a crossbow and a hatchet
73–74	Silver tuning fork in the key of D
75–76	Stiletto with a wavy blade of strange green metal; the hilt is shaped as a human child with clasped hands
77–78	Statuette of an ox chiseled in black stone; raising its tail tilts the horns
79–80	Blackened walking stick, patterned like the scales of a snake or fish, with a fist-sized pearl for a knob

CURIOSITIES	
1d100	**Detail**
81–82	Circular belt or cloak buckle made of silver, with gold details depicting three crossed arrows
83–84	Copper spyglass with rotating segments; aiming it at the sun reveals colorful patterns which change as one rotates the segments
85–86	Hourglass of misty white crystal contained within a blue-gray metal stand, whose sand runs exactly twice as fast in one direction as it does in the other
87–88	Silver watering can whose long spout has been broken off; decorated with motifs of grotesque birds
89–90	Stuffed and mystically preserved ferret that has undergone a Symbarian rite of exaltation – equipped with predatory jaws, long claws, a crown of horns, and sickly yellow eyes
91–92	Bone flute, as long as one's palm and as thin as a little finger; attracts 1d20 small birds if played by someone proficient with Performance.
93–94	Shimmering pink pearl with streaks of red, the size of an eyeball, with the sweet-sour taste of berry compote; never loses size or flavor
95–96	The parts of a broken dream catcher that can be repaired – DC 13 Dexterity (Smith's Tools) check. Brings peace to the sleeping; those burdened by Nightmares have advantage on their saving throws
97–98	A clay cruse stoppered with a wax-sealed cork, bearing a life-sustaining seal that has kept its contents fresh for hundreds of years – red wine of excellent quality from a particularly superb vintage
99–100	Statue of glossy, dark gray stone, as tall as a forearm, in the form of a daemon. The base bears a cuneiform inscription that can be interpreted by someone with Loremaster: "Jeberaja"

MYSTICAL TREASURE	
1d20	**Detail**
1	Tall, thin vase of glazed porcelain, purple with a motif of bright red vines. Plants placed in the vase will not age, wither, bloom, or bear fruit.
2	Facial mask made of seashells in pink, white and light blue. Its wearer can hold their breath under water at a depth of up to 30 ft. (10 meters), for a maximum of ten minutes.
3	Handheld fan painted with stormy mountain scenery, which actively cools the air when waved. Roll 1d6 when used – a result of 6 inflicts 1d4 cold damage and causes facial hair to freeze.
4	Bronze bell whose inside and clapper is engraved with cuneiform characters. If carried so that it is hanging freely, it tinkles faintly whenever there is an abomination within a 300 ft. (100 meter) radius, but at the risk of being detected – a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check.
5	Notebook with thin pages of parchment and pearl-covered binding. Text written in the book is only visible to the person who wrote it.
6	Metal canister whose white color has largely peeled off. It is half full of a powder which conceals signs of aging on human skin for twenty-four hours, at the cost of 1d4 temporary Corruption; contains enough powder for 10 + 1d10 applications.
7	Amulet set with a gray stone that emits a slimy secretion, which dries into an ineffective resin after a while. The secretion is enough for two individuals per day. If applied on the skin, it has a repellent effect on insects, including applying disadvantage on an insect's melee attacks against the treated creature.
8	Eight sticks of incense in a cylindrical leather case. Can be burned during negotiations, granting the user advantage on Persuasion checks.
9	Wedding ring of pure gold, adorned with six sapphires. A loving spirit is bound to the ring and can act in the wearer's defense; once per short rest the wearer has advantage on a saving throw (including death saving throws). But the spirit is jealous and will haunt the wearer's romantic partner with horrifying nightmares.
10	Smooth wooden box containing two frameless spectacle lenses. Makes it easier to follow tracks in the wilderness (advantage on Survival checks), but weakens the other senses so that the wearer becomes less aware of their surroundings (disadvantage on Perception checks).



Unearthing artifacts is the dream of all treasure hunters.
However, sometimes the find turns out to be a pure nightmare.

MYSTICAL TREASURE

1d20	Detail
11	Three beautiful, iron-cast animal heads each the size of a clenched fist, completely free of rust – a wolf, a bear and a wild boar. Loops underneath allow them to be tied together into a bola, which provides advantage when thrown at creatures of the Beast category.
12	Long-stemmed briar pipe whose bowl is shaped like a woman's face with her eyes closed. Can be used when performing the *commune* ritual, with its smoke conveying visions, allowing either a fourth question or more clear answers to the first three. Requires a short or longer rest to recharge.
13	Lantern with red glass in a metal frame, about the size of a tankard. When lit in an otherwise dim environment, it can expose people who are trying to hide intense feelings (such as outrage, love or grief). It takes one successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check per target to notice their seemingly glowing outlines.
14	A simple right-handed chainmail gauntlet that needs relining. The person wearing it can never involuntarily lose their grip on their right-hand weapon.
15	A modest ring of low-karat gold, with cuneiform runes engraved on the inside ("The cleansing one"). Its owner can conceal any skin damage for one scene per day, including scars and tattoos. These can still be detected with truesight and similar magic.
16	Key of blackened silver that can slide into most locks. Roll 1d6: on 1–4 the lock opens; on 5–6 the mechanism melts, surrounding the key and making it impossible to unlock.
17	Staff of smoke-colored crystal, as long as one's palm, with one end shaped like a rounded point. When pointed at the North Star it gives a faint glow, providing advantage on Wisdom (Survival) checks to find your way, even underground.





This transcript, partly damaged and unreadable, was found in the pocket of an explorer who fell down and died right outside the North Gate of Thistle Hold. It is said that the expedition she was part of aimed to find the fabled city of Symbar at the heart of Davokar.

MYSTICAL TREASURE

1d20	Detail
18	Small copper pot, large enough to brew one dose of a single elixir. Adding an amount of silver equal to one (1) thaler makes the elixir one level stronger.
19	Knife with a handle of scarlet wood and a ten centimeter curved blade, engraved with a running predator. Adds advantage on Dexterity checks when harvesting a monster trophy.
20	Cracked, uncut ruby that emits enough heat to steam in cold and damp weather. If set in the hilt or grip of a one-handed weapon it can be activated with the bearer's bonus action. While active, it adds 1d10 necrotic damage to each successful attack and adds 1 temporary Corruption to the bearer each round.

ARTIFACTS

1d12	Artifact	Page
1	Ashiki's Twin Blades	125
2	Bunefer's Death Mask	126
3	Feud Crystal	129
4	Girakosh's Steel Circle	130
5	Iloona's Mirror Shield	134
6	The Living Chain of Hogarz	132

ARTIFACTS

1d12	Artifact	Page
7	Nema's Orbit Statue	136
8	The War Horn of the Stormhowler	137
9	The Whispering Necklace of Lapi-Esha	135
10	The Wraith Mark of the Eternity Legion	128
11	Worldcleaver	140
12	Xtala's Hourglass	143

Ruin Details

MANY OF THE ruins in Davokar are as much as two thousand years old, remnants of the people who long ago fled west from the devastated Asbarast and their descendants. Older remains also exist, but not of human design – if encountered, they originate from the cultures of trolls, arachs or some other breed of humanoids that dominated the land in different eras, before the arrival of elves and humans.

Irrespective of who once created the structures, the ruins are often of interest for player characters. They can be a target in their own right, or a base of operations for their enemies.

This section presents a series of tables which can be used to design complex and interesting ruins. They can be used while playing, to randomly have the location take shape while the player characters are exploring it, or they can be seen as a source of inspiration for the Gamemaster who would rather design the site before the session starts.

ORIGINAL PURPOSE

The Gamemaster can use the original purpose of the ruin as a guideline when describing it – what material it is made from, which shape it has, how the rooms are arranged, and so on. The list mainly focuses on Symbarian ruins, but with a bit of imagination and some adjustments, the generator could also apply to structures left behind by trolls, elves or others.

RUIN'S ORIGINAL PURPOSE

1d10	Function (Details 1d4:) 1	2	3	4
1	Fortification	Small fort	Stone fort	Fortress ruin	Massive fortress (with walls and moat)
2	Prison	Mighty individual	Dangerous artifact	Hungry monster	Shackled deity of nature
3	Pyramid	Ziggurat	Ziggurat	Traditional	1d4 ziggurats
4	Labyrinth	Garden	Entertainment	Used for experiments	Used for experiments
5	Mine	Precious metal	Gems	Alchemical compounds	Crystalized Corruption
6	Temple	Ancestor worship	Spider worship	Serpent temple	Hero cult
7	Seat of power	Magician's tower	Priest's estate	Royal palace	Imperial pleasure palace
8	Tomb	Lord/lady	Revered mystic	Petty king	Member of the imperial or royal family
9	Exhibition halls	Art & sculptures	Antique jewelry	Historical objects	Monster display
10	Ritual chamber	Funerals	Daemon summoning	Fleshcrafting	Daemonic exaltation

REMAINING LEVELS

All ruins encountered in the woods have a number of intact levels above and below ground; separate rolls are made for each of these.

- **Above ground:** 1d20 – 10. A zero or lower indicates that the ruin is completely destroyed above the ground.
- **Below ground:** 1d10

OVERALL FEATURES AND TRAITS

The ruin's overall feature indicates what condition it is in. The feature pertains to the ruin in its entirety and is purely descriptive. The ruin's trait refers to more substantial effects which affect all visitors.

RUIN OVERALL FEATURES

1d6	Features
1	Water damaged
2	Dusty and desolate
3	Overgrown
4	Untouched and ominously clean
5	Inexplicably cold/hot
6	Darkened (all light sources are diminished, half normal range)

RUIN OVERALL TRAITS

1d6	Features
1	**Corruptive.** Inside the ruin whenever you gain temporary Corruption you gain 1 more point than normal.
2	**Sparse with treasure.** You have disadvantage on treasure value rolls.
3	**Crowded.** Use 1d8 instead of 1d6 to determine the number of creatures in a room.
4	**Desolate.** Use 1d4 instead of 1d6 to determine the number of creatures in a room.
5	**Rich with treasure.** You have advantage on treasure value rolls.
6	**Lesser corruption.** Reduce any temporary Corruption gained within the ruin by 1 point (minimum 1 point gained).

INHABITANTS

The ruin's inhabitants – or temporary visitors – are living (or not) agents which the characters can interact with or be forced to fight. The Gamemaster decides on the appropriate challenge level, based on the creatures included in the *Ruins of Symbaroum Bestiary*. Each entry also has a multiplier included, this is normally applied to a 1d6 roll to determine a total number of creatures but also can be adjusted to create a challenge for the group.

INHABITANTS

1d20	Inhabitants
1–3	Treasure hunters (×2)/Plunderers (÷2, minimum 1)
4–6	Goblins (×3)
7–8	Beasts (×2)
9–10	Arachs (×2)
11–12	Bestiaals (×1)
13–14	Trolls (÷2, minimum 1)
15	Elves (×1)
16	Undead (×2)
17	Abominations (÷2, minimum 1)
18–20	Make two rolls and keep both creatures; ignore further results of 18–20

The following types are covered by the table:

- **Treasure hunters.** A group of treasure hunters or explorers is camped inside the ruin.
- **Goblins.** A group of goblins has made the ruin their home, or been forced into servitude by something else.
- **Beasts.** A beast, or a pack of them, has sought shelter or is nesting inside the ruin.
- **Arachs.** A group of arachs uses the ruin as a base while hunting for artifacts in the area.
- **Bestiaals.** One or more bestiaals has sought temporary refuge in the ruin.
- **Elves.** A group of elves has made the ruin their base, or guards it from intruding plunderers.
- **Trolls.** A group of trolls has their den inside the ruin, or sneaks around looking for lost troll artifacts.
- **Undead.** The ruin's previous inhabitants are not happy to stay in the tomb.
- **Abominations.** The ruin is corrupted and attracts – or spawns – abominations.

If two groups inhabit the ruin, the Inhabitants Relationship table can tell you how they relate to one another. The Gamemaster is, of course, free to make changes if this does not suit their particular scenario.

INHABITANTS RELATIONSHIP

1d6	Features
1	The groups are bitter enemies.
2	The groups are unaware of each other.
3	The groups are aware of each other, but do not interact.
4	One group has been subjugated by the other.
5	The groups work together to an extent, but there is tension between them.
6	The groups work together harmoniously.

ENTRYWAYS TO OTHER LEVELS

Each level has one or two entryways to the level directly above and below it (separate rolls for each of them). If there are two entryways, they go through different rooms, provided that there is more than one room on the level in question.

ENTRYWAYS TO OTHER LEVELS

1d8	Entryway
1	**Intact stone staircase:** difficult to destroy (damage threshold 20, AC 17, 120 hit points)
2	**Intact wooden staircase:** can be destroyed (damage threshold 10, AC 15, 60 hit points)
3	**Damaged staircase:** easy to destroy (AC 13, 30 hit points)
4	**Destroyed staircase:** replaced by rope ladder/bridge (AC 10, 10 hit points)
5	**Completely destroyed staircase**
6	**Hole in the ground/ceiling**
7	**Hole in the ground/ceiling**, with a ladder which can easily be pulled up/down
8	Roll twice, ignoring further results of 8.



As these are the only ways to reach the other levels, they are natural positions for guard posts, barricades and traps. Groups of inhabitants who dominate certain levels usually set up safeguards at one or more of the entryways leading to their turf. However, between levels within said turf, such safeguards are less common (–1 modifier to the roll).

SAFEGUARDS FOR ENTRYWAYS

1d10	Safeguard
1–2	No safeguards
3–4	Barricade only
5	Lone guard
6	Guard post
7	Trap
8	Lone guard and barricade
9	Guard post and barricade
10	Double guard post and barricade

Notes:

- **Barricade:** Attackers must spend an entire turn climbing to enter close combat. If in a hurry, a DC 13 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check is required to get past it. Otherwise, doing so silently requires a DC 15 Dexterity (Stealth) check. Defenders can fire projectiles through or over the barricade without penalty, while attackers firing back at them have disadvantage on their attack rolls.
- **Lone guard:** A humanoid or guard beast tasked to raise the alarm in case of intruders.
- **Guard post:** 1d4 humanoids, beasts, abominations or undead.
- **Trap:** Can be detected with a passive Perception of 15, or a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) [Vigilant –3] check, deals 1d12 damage plus poison (Roll 1d4; 1–2: 1d6, 3: 1d8, 4: 1d10). Requires a successful DC 17 Strength (Athletics) check to break loose, and triggers an alarm which is heard across the entire level. Disarming it requires a DC 17 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand or Thieves' Tools) check.

ROOMS PER LEVEL

Each level consists of 1d8 rooms (where 1 = a single, vast hall). The exact layout is for the Gamemaster to decide. Each room has at least one door or doorway leading to another room.

ENTRYWAYS TO OTHER ROOMS

1d8	Detail
1	**Opening**, no door
2	**Broken wooden door.** Opening it requires a DC 13 Dexterity (Stealth) check.
3	**Wooden door, intact, unlocked** (broken lock).
4	**Wooden door, intact, locked.** Picking the lock requires a DC 13 Dexterity (Thieves' Tools) check. Forcing the door requires a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check.
5	**Reinforced wooden door, intact, unlocked** (broken lock). Opening it requires a DC 13 Dexterity (Stealth) check.
6	**Reinforced wooden door, intact, locked.** Picking the lock requires a DC 17 Dexterity (Thieves' Tools) check. Cannot be forced, but can be destroyed: AC 15, 20 hp, damage threshold 5.
7	**Copper or iron door, unlocked.** Opening it without it creaking loudly requires a DC 17 Dexterity (Stealth) check.
8	**Copper or iron door, locked and rusted/corroded shut.** Picking the lock requires a DC 19 Dexterity (Thieves' Tools) check, then the door can be opened with a DC 17 Strength (Athletics) check. Anyone within 300 feet of the entryway hears the ensuing noise.

THE DETAILS OF THE ROOMS

The following table determines what each room contains, such as inhabitants, traps or other dangers, or treasures in the room.

DETAILS REGARDING THE ROOM

1d20	Details
1–6	**Nothing of interest.**
7	**Lone creature:** A single creature of the group dominating the level or a nearby area.
8–10	**Group:** A number of creatures equal to the number of characters (same type as above).
11–12	**Crowd:** A number of creatures equal to twice the number of characters (same type as above).
13	**Trap:** see page 146 or use poisoned spike trap: each creature crossing the room must make three DC 15 Dexterity saving throws, receiving 1d6 piercing damage and 2d6 poison damage on a failure. Creatures that treat the area as difficult terrain get advantage on the saving throws.
14	**Collapsing ceiling** (DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, receiving 1d12 bludgeoning damage on a failure or half as much on a success, creates a hole in the ceiling).
15	**Collapsing floor** (DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or fall 15 feet (5 meters) and take 2d6 bludgeoning damage, creates a hole in the floor).
16	**Remains:** Fresh or old corpse/skeleton of a cultural being, wearing jewelry and/or coins worth 1d10 thaler.
17	**Wealthy remains:** Fresh or old corpse/skeleton of a cultural being, wearing jewelry and/or coins worth 5d20 thaler.
18	**Assorted items:** The Gamemaster decides or allows each character to roll once on the Curiosities table, page 73.
19	**Treasure trove:** Requires DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check to find. Roll 1d4 + 1 times on the Treasure Type table on page 73.
20	Roll twice on the table, ignoring any further results of 20.

Expanded Missions

THIS SECTION COVERS several different goals that the player group might choose to focus on: establishing an outpost, military conquest, a holy mission, a monster hunt or staging an expedition.

What they all have in common is a close connection to the game's central conflict, and the fact that they are written with Ambrians in mind as the active party. But the guidelines should be general enough to work well in other contexts as well – based on other lines of conflict and with other cultural beings as active parties in the drama.

The point of goal-oriented play is basically that the players are steering the narrative toward a common goal they have set for their characters. The player characters develop strategies and act, while the Gamemaster assumes an almost reactive role. Sure, some degree of planning and reflection is still required before the game begins. But the Gamemaster's main function will be to turn the player characters' initiatives into exciting, varied and appropriate challenges on their, more or less winding, journey towards achieving the goal.

Each of the chapter's five sections begins with a brief introduction, which is followed by five phases which together provide tips and advice regarding what challenges need to be faced and what problems must be solved for the goal to be fulfilled. The number of phases can be increased or decreased, they can be played for a long or short time, and be more or less challenging – all depending on your, and your gaming group's, preferences.

Establishing an Outpost

IN THE SOUTHERN part of Davokar, called Odovakar by the clans, there are plenty of natural resources to harvest. Most obvious are of course different kinds of trees – some for construction works, others for making furniture and bows, still others for making cheap variants of blackbrew. Other resources can be valuable herbs, mushrooms and berries; caves close to the surface filled with lichen or bugs with special properties; and ponds or streams whose waters have mystical qualities.

Anyone who gets wind of a sought-after resource and wants to establish an outpost nearby has a long walk ahead, but may eventually be richly rewarded in both thaler and fame. Simply put, the wannabe entrepreneur has five challenges to handle, every one of which may be turned into several gaming sessions. Also, nothing says that the phases align like knots on a string – on the contrary, they are likely to intermingle and challenges that you thought were dealt with will often reemerge, when you least expect it.

PHASE 1: THE CLAIM

All who wish to establish an outpost in Davokar must have the Queen's permission to do so. Practically this is done by buying an Explorer's License covering the number of people needed to run the outpost and all the amendments you will qualify for (see page 22 in the *Ruins of Symbaroum Player's Guide*). Now, this is the easy part.

A bigger problem stems from the fact that all interesting sites between the forest's edge and River Eanor are much coveted. If competing for a rich spot, you will have to convince the Queen's representative, for instance Suria Argona in Thistle Hold, that you are the best candidate, or try and find a way to persuade other stakeholders to revoke their bids. Trying to bribe the agents of the realm will likely get you nowhere. However, they are often in need of someone to perform services for them, which in turn can affect the decision-making.

Competitors can be threatened, bribed or possibly scared away. But the characters may also be required to find a partner (an influential nobleman, fortune hunter or merchant) who can provide them with support and thaler – naturally in exchange for a share in future earnings.

PHASE 2: CONSTRUCTION

Many outposts are built in or close to different kinds of ruins, simply because this shortens the construction time significantly. No matter if you choose to go that way or start building from the ground up, you first have to secure the area – drive local beasts away, identify and clear away dangerous plant life, cut down all trees near the headquarters and mark out the territory, for instance by coloring or scent-marking tree trunks along the circumference of the site.

When this has been done, building materials and provisions must be transported to the site. The journey itself may be a challenge, but even more so since robbers and barbarians are happy to raid caravans on the move. Additionally, the caravan guards you hired may decide that they would rather lay claim to your goods than work and wait for a miserly wage.

Then there is the construction itself. If you depart from Thistle Hold, the usual is to employ goblins from Karabbadokk or daythalers from Blackmoor – both groups having a tendency to make trouble if they consider themselves to be treated unfairly. A strike can be handled in various ways, with carrots or the stick. The former can lead to continued refusal to work, in the hope to raise the pay even more, while the latter can result in a bad reputation or even in the making of real enemies among the goblins and/or the people of

Blackmoor. Oh, and as if that were not enough, the risk of being attacked by robbers, barbarians or elves is of course much greater until the palisade is in place.

PHASE 3: HARVESTING

A lot of things can happen to an outpost in the wilderness. Normally, the resource is spread out across a vast area, meaning that those who harvest it must leave the safety of the headquarters for most of the day – making them attractive prey for beasts and human antagonists. Additionally, there are forces in the woods that do not hesitate to attack a fortified outpost, be they elves, rage trolls or barbarian raiders.

There are also threats from other sources. Maybe you won the site in some kind of bidding contest, and maybe the loser decides to do all in its might to make you suffer. Or a newly interested party may hear about your "gold mine" and become intent on acquiring it for themselves – first by offering reasonable pay, but if that does not suffice by employing intrigues, lies and manipulation in order to get the Queen's Legation to revoke the license and pass it on to them instead.

Finally, it should be mentioned that the harvest itself is risky. Maybe it is revealed that the resource you are after is more or less contaminated by the powers of corruption? Or you can happen upon something, or someone, plagued by corruption instead. And even if it is not something related to the blight of Davokar, the outpost can be afflicted by other kinds of contaminants, which require you to seek medical aid. The wilds are treacherous and have a troubling tendency to transform the most beautiful pipe dream into the worst of nightmares.

PHASE 4: VENDING

No matter what the player characters are harvesting there are plenty of potential buyers in Ambria's towns and villages. That said, there are also competitors in the region, competitors who shun no means when it comes to winning over customers to their side.

You may come up against rivals who lower their prices to the extent that they sell at a loss. Others dilute the resource with similar substances and materials, and are thereby able to set their price much lower. And then there are of course those who do not hesitate to use violent methods to sabotage others, for example by attacking warehouses and transports.

At other times, you may get involved in feuds between two or more customers who are prepared to do whatever it takes to acquire your product. It has actually been known to happen, that the peddler of an especially coveted ware has been accused of being an accomplice to everything from murder to public endangerment because an avid bidder took it upon herself to eliminate other potential rivals.

PHASE 5: GROWTH

Last but not least, if the characters have the ambition to see their enterprise grow – maybe to set up more outposts and strive to reach markets in other parts of the realm – all challenges described above will multiply and grow harder to handle. To compete with some other group of entrepreneurs is something entirely different from being the rival of businesses financed by counts, dukes or senior commanders in Queen Korinthia's army. With enemies like that you would likely do best sleeping with one eye open and always making sure to watch what happens behind your back.

If you are to keep your enterprise running for years and years, you must have hard hands and a thick skin; probably also access to protectors in the form of leading representatives of Ambria's power factions. If you are not prepared to take risks and work very hard, you should probably sell your business to the first bidder!

Conquest

IN DAVOKAR, AS well as on the plains in the west and in the surrounding mountains, there are still areas not yet claimed by Queen Korinthia. In many cases there are of course local rulers in the form of a clan chieftain or the leader of a settlement, but the wilder parts of the mountains and forests have territories exclusively inhabited by wild beasts, goblins, arachs, and other non-humans.

Ambitious player characters may want to claim a certain area for themselves, but most likely the conquest will take place on someone else's initiative. It could be the Queen who views the region as central to Ambria's continued expansion, or a noble or wealthy merchant prince who has decided to establish and build a realm of his/her own. Whether the player characters act on their own account or on behalf of someone else, they have a host of challenges ahead of them.

PHASE 1: GATHERING INTELLIGENCE

The first step for those seeking to conquer new territory is always to learn as much as possible about its current rulers – their character, resources, potential allies, and not least what fortifications are in place. Such information can be obtained in a number of ways.

Ambrian archives can be a good place to start, and clanfolk living in the area should also have important knowledge to offer – the more successful the player characters are in searching the archives and questioning people, the more plentiful and important the information will be. Perhaps the territory has previously been engaged in a conflict with some other ruler or faction, who in that case will have important knowledge to sell or offer in exchange for a favor or future trade deals? One must always be on guard, however, in case the

Information and Degrees of Success

If the Gamemaster wishes, the characters can obtain more and/or more vital information depending on how well they succeed with their Insight, Perception and Persuasion checks (amid others) when gathering information – having a success by 5 or more yields better results. As for conquering new territories, a great success could mean that the characters learn about the enemy's special weakness or find out about a secret hideout to which the leader retreats in times of danger.

informer has a reason to spread disinformation or go behind the characters' backs and sell information about their meeting to the enemy (who will then be alerted to what is going on).

It would of course be even more interesting if the player characters personally go to the location for reconnaissance. In that case, they will probably have to use false identities, disguises, and stealthy maneuvers (possibly combined with mystical rituals) to infiltrate the enemy's territory and centers of power – a fort, a fortified village, or a large camp in a secluded valley. The Gamemaster can prepare a number of important discoveries that can be made, which in turn affect the success of the characters' conquest. It may even be the case that highly skilled/fortunate player characters can obtain information that makes military means unnecessary, something that allows them to extort or otherwise force the enemy ruler to accept defeat?

PHASE 2: MUSTERING TROOPS

Not until one has taken full stock of the enemy's capabilities is it possible to determine the composition of the force necessary for the conquest to succeed – in terms of numbers and resistance level. See the Hiring Troops table (page 183) in the chapter War and Battles for guidelines on recruiting sellswords and freelance warriors.

In the Davokar region there are plenty of commanders to turn to for people wishing to build an effective combat unit. If the conquest takes place on someone else's behalf, that person can probably provide a considerable chunk of the force, otherwise one must seek out barons, counts, clan chieftains, or owners of sellsword companies with troops to spare. Payment can be made in the form of thaler, writs of debt (see page 160 in the *Player's Guide*) – or in the case of nobles and barbarian chieftains, a share in the spoils, a future trade agreement, or a military pact against a third party. Either way the negotiations will likely be tough, and if the player characters behave badly there is a risk that whoever they are talking to will offer his/her services to the enemy instead.

Oh yes, one must be very careful when building an army! Both commanders and individual soldiers might turn out to be spying for the enemy, or be willing to betray their superiors if they are mistreated and the price is right. Perhaps the player characters obtain information that identifies one or multiple suspicious recruits, which compels them to look into the matter and seek to prove the treacherous activities before the culprit can be brought in for questioning. Perhaps it eventually turns out that both the information and the "proof" were fabricated – something that might cause serious problems with morale if the victims of the conspiracy have already been punished...

PHASE 3: THE MARCH

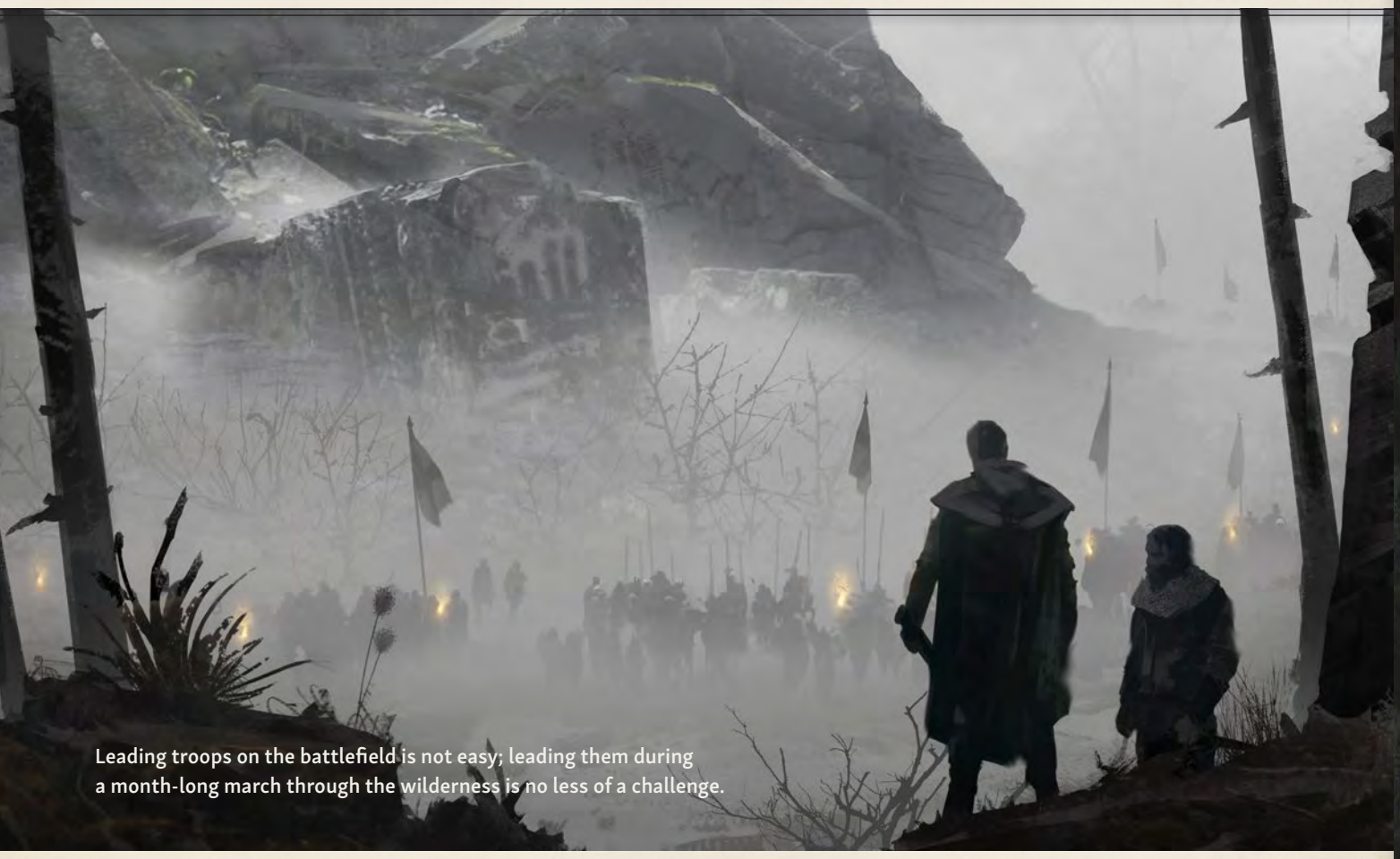
Leading an army of hundreds or even thousands of soldiers, scouts and mystics through the wilderness is an adventure in itself. How things develop depends largely on where the desired territory is located, at least with regard to challenges related to nature and provisions. Guidelines and rule suggestions regarding how to keep an unruly army in check can be found under the heading The Player Characters as Commanders on page 181, including a list of Misfortunes that might occur on the journey.

Other challenges have to do with the army's members. No matter where the men come from, there can always be internal conflicts, based on past grievances, varying loyalties or events on the road. An inventory could show that some vital supply, such as medicine, or a personal item of great value has been stolen or sabotaged by someone who is probably an enemy agent. One can also imagine an outbreak of disease forcing the player characters to react promptly and decisively to stop the malady from spreading to the entire force. All such incidents could bring the march to a halt until the danger passes – which in turn causes other problems: supplies running out, the timing of the attack plan getting ruined, the stationary army becoming a tempting target for predators or enemy surprise attacks.

PHASE 4: THE BATTLE

When it comes to the battle itself, the Gamemaster is referred to the chapter in this book that covers precisely that (see page 178). But it is possible that the player characters will want to take on one or several specific tasks to handle during the course of the battle, out of necessity or according to previous plans.

Perhaps it falls on them to deal with the true leaders of the place/region, who are staying away from the fighting – in the safety of a fort, behind an iron ring of capable bodyguards, or hiding in a nearby ruin, cave or smaller fortification camouflaged by mystical means. Or perhaps the player characters decide to penetrate the enemy's stronghold and open the gates from inside, raze the wall/palisade or set fire to its buildings. Getting across, under or past the wall would



Leading troops on the battlefield is not easy; leading them during a month-long march through the wilderness is no less of a challenge.

only be the first of several challenges; it will be at least as difficult to carry out the mission itself, while remaining undetected until allied troops are ready to advance.

Other reasons to go behind enemy lines, or even into their fortified stronghold, could be to free a prisoner, or kidnap or steal some means of leverage. The former case might concern an allied spy or warrior whose freedom will have a positive effect on the player characters' plans, because of the insights they possess or because they raise the army's morale to new heights.

It could also be a relative of a potential ally refusing to take up arms until the kidnapped individual has been freed. And speaking of kidnappings, perhaps the abduction of the enemy leader's child, husband or elderly mother would be leverage enough to prevent bloodshed, so the conquest can take place around the negotiating table instead?

It does not even have to be a person at all – an item of great importance for the area's most senior commander might be enough: an artifact, a family heirloom or some form of legal document.

PHASE 5: ESTABLISHING DOMINANCE

Conquering an area has often been described as easier than establishing dominion over its lands and particularly its population. The first step is to clean up after the battle – tending to the wounded (on both sides?), rebuilding fortifications and infrastructure, and mustering (and, if necessary, reinforcing) one's army.

But the trickiest part is always what comes next: winning over the locals. Even if the previous ruler was a vicious tyrant, there will probably be some who are opposed or hostile to the new power – expecting it to be as despotic as the old one, or seeing a chance to take control of the region themselves. Local leaders of different factions must be handled, with either stick or carrot, and the general public must be persuaded that a brighter future lies ahead after the battle that probably claimed the lives of many of their sons and daughters.

At this point there is an endless source of challenges for the player characters to face. Perhaps some key figure from the overthrown government managed to escape and immediately tries to organize a resistance from her hideout? Perhaps parts of the population rebel in some peripheral part of the conquered region? Perhaps some discharged members of the player characters' former army feel unfairly treated and remain in the area as brigands? The chapter titled Domains, beginning on page 163, can provide the Gamemaster with inspiration when it comes to the challenges of establishing and maintaining dominance over a specific territory.

Holy Mission

THERE ARE LOTS of humans and other cultural beings who have not yet come to know the love and laws of Prios. We are primarily referring to the barbarian clans, particularly the marginalized groups who for various reasons do not feel (or are not considered) part of the community. Other examples include the goblin settlements of Ambria and Davokar, the troll realms of the Underworld, and the mountain passes where the Bestials are growing in strength and number. There have even been attempts to convert members of the Iron Pact, though most Prios worshipers consider such efforts pointless and bordering on heretical.

Perhaps the player characters are a group of missionaries bent on spreading the Lawgiver's blessing to those still stumbling in spiritual darkness. Alternatively, they could be hired as bodyguards to escort a group of sun priests from Thistle Hold, Kastor or some other border town. In that case they will find the challenge of educating and converting the heathens just as difficult as the journey to their god-forsaken corner of the world.

PHASE 1: THE SUN MARCH

The term Sun March has historically referred to actual heretic persecutions, often carried out by the Templars and resulting in the total destruction of "dark" settlements, outposts or villages. But more recently the word has also come to describe peaceful missionary tours to remote villages in the wilderness of the Davokar region, primarily in the mountains or forests. Besides the hardships that can befall those traveling through such areas (see page 62), a group of missionaries might encounter more specific types of challenges.

The table "Events During Sun Marches" describes a number of events or situations that may arise during the sacred Sun March. How often you roll on (or pick events from) the table is up to the gaming group to decide, but once every three to five days of travel can be a good benchmark – the shorter the trip, the more frequent the intervals.

PHASE 2: ARRIVAL

Whether the missionaries' destination is a human settlement or a community of goblins, trolls, or something else, it is often difficult to know in advance how their arrival will play out – the reception could be anything from peaceful or hesitant to downright hostile.

Being warmly welcomed to a wilderness community is certainly nice, and its people may actually be open and favorably disposed toward strangers. But experienced missionaries know not to let their guard down! All of a sudden, the locals turn out to be man-eaters just waiting for the main course to fall asleep in their assigned hut. They might also be in need of new slaves, or sacrifices to their imaginary (or very real) god. No matter the nature of the reception, the first day will greatly affect the mission's outcome: if the player characters manage to fend off an attack, or behave in a way that earns the heathens' respect or sparks their curiosity, they will most likely get a chance to explain why they have come and what they have to offer, in the form of truth and salvation and possibly a worldly gift or two.

If the settlement they visit is already under the control of some other power in the area, the missionaries' arrival will be very different. The power in question could be a neighboring community, a powerful beast, or a long dead ruler who has risen from the grave and resumed his former position. Such situations could cause problems, like the player characters being welcomed at first, only to later be imprisoned and brought before the local leader. But they also present opportunities. If the missionaries figure out what is going on and manage to defeat or expel the tyrant, they will probably have an easier time convincing the sinners of Prios' greatness!

PHASE 3: SALVATION

Converting heretics is usually a test of patience; it can take weeks or months for the sermons to bear fruit. It is always easiest if the target has never heard of Prios before and their lifestyle is such that they are impressed by the missionaries' appearance, equipment and problem-solving skills – that is, if the player characters with a few quick suggestions

The Trial of the Sun

The Trial of the Sun is a ritual that can be performed, willingly or otherwise, by an accused heretic wishing to prove their innocence. The heretic undresses their upper body and washes themselves with water blessed by a sun priest, before being shackled in a place bathed in sunlight. If the person really is a heretic, the skin starts to redden and sting after about ten minutes; within an hour there will be blisters on the heretic's head, torso and arms; in the following hour the symptoms are exacerbated and the pain gets worse and worse. If left in the sunlight, the heretic will lose consciousness after 1d4 + 2 hours and spontaneously ignite after yet another hour.

It should be duly noted that this method requires the water to be blessed in a particular way, with a combination of Prios' word and a few drops of extract from the Graymilk Root. And the sun priest must of course be sure that the person on trial is in fact a heretic, as the symptoms can affect even the most pious of Sun God worshipers...

EVENTS DURING SUN MARCHES

1d20	Event	Description	Effect
1–3	Cursed	A missionary claims a deer gave him the evil eye, causing concern among the whole expedition.	All participants must succeed at a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw or gain a level of exhaustion.
4–5	Punished	A missionary claims to have dreamed that another member's thoughts have displeased Prios, overwhelming everyone with shame and guilt.	All participants must succeed at a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw or gain a level of exhaustion.
6	Infected	A missionary gets an impulse to pick berries from an unknown bush and offer them around – likely not from Prios, but from some false god.	All participants must succeed at a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or become Poisoned for 24 hours.
7	Unlucky	It is as if the sun no longer shines on the group; nothing seems to be going right.	Each creature has disadvantage on ability checks until they succeed at a check, after which the effect ends for them.
8	Prios' Judgment	The expedition leader sees the fingers of Prios (sunrays) pointing at a body of water and encourages everyone to drink from it.	All participants must succeed at a DC 20 Constitution saving throw or become Poisoned for 24 hours.
9–11	Nothing Happens	—	—
12–14	Blessed	A missionary hears Prios' voice whispering words of love in the wind rustling through the trees.	All participants must make a DC 20 Wisdom saving throw. On a success, they have advantage on ability checks until they fail a check.
15–16	Sanctified	An expedition member wakes up with a never-before-heard hymn to Prios stuck in their head.	Singing the hymn allows a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw. On a success, they have advantage on ability checks until they fail a check.
17	Sun Temple	The expedition comes across an ancient, overgrown ruin; there is a sun symbol carved above the entrance.	It takes a full day to explore the ruin (see Ruins, page 70), which turns out to be a nest of hungry spiders (of suitable challenge rating).
18	The Wellspring of the One	The group passes a wellspring where a few points of light glitter despite it being in the shade.	1d8 drops of natural Water of the Dusk (page 141) are drifting around in the spring; collecting them requires a DC 15 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check per drop; failure causes one drop to burst and mix with the water.
19	Revelation	A dazzling golden-white figure descends through the foliage and touches all missionaries (but no companions) on the forehead with a finger.	Those it touches may choose one benefit: ◆ (1d6 × Level × 100) XP ◆ Lose 1d4 permanent Corruption ◆ Gain resistance to damage from abominations and undead for 1 month
20	Divine Gift	The group stumbles upon the decayed remains of an arach; all equipment has long been destroyed, save for a single object.	Prios has left a gift for the missionaries. Choose an OGL magic item (page 121) or a greater artifact (page 124).

("inspired by the Sun God") can make the inhabitants safer and better fed. The most difficult scenarios would probably be to convert Ambrians who have deliberately turned their backs on Prios, and obviously members of the Iron Pact who believe the Sun God's laws call for the pillaging of Creation.

The optional rule Group Indoctrination (see textbox) can be used to determine how the work proceeds. An impressionable group starts out as Welcoming (–5), while an isolated settlement of pagan worshipers begins at Hateful (–50). A new roll is made for every week the missionary effort progresses, but there is also reason to roleplay a number of scenes where the player characters are tested, or where they themselves take the initiative to influence the settlement.

Staging a miracle is a tried and tested way of setting unbelievers on the right path – something that is best achieved through the use of spells such as *cure wounds*, *create food and water*, or *daylight*; a group could also resort to illusions or downright trickery. Another successful method can be to attack an "overwhelming" threat in the area and use one's victory as proof of Prios' greatness.

Naturally, there are more brutal methods as well. If the settlement already has a shaman or some other spiritual leader, perhaps a duel between the champions of the respective gods can be a route to success – preferably a fight to the death so the problem gets a permanent solution. There have also been occasions when missionaries have staged "accidents" that killed the most ardent skeptics, to show that Prios always punishes heretics. Last but not least are the methods employed by the Whip of Prios, meant to expose ungodly individuals who displease the Lawgiver. The most famous of these methods is the so-called Trial of the Sun – it is not for the faint of heart, but worth knowing about if the heretic crowd is difficult to convince!

PHASE 4: THE TEMPLE

When the entire, or at least a critical mass of, the population (including its worldly leader/s) has professed their faith in the Lawgiver, it is time to start building the settlement's sun temple. The size and building material may vary, depending on the size of the congregation and the natural environment in the area; ideally the dome should of course be made of copper, but yellow-painted stone or wood will also suffice. The most important things are the sun podium and the windows or openings that allow the evening sun to shine down on the preaching liturgy.

As a rule there is always at least one faction among the locals that wishes to stop the construction, because they disapprove of the "outsider's" influence, because the new order strengthens the current chief's/leader's position, or perhaps because they refuse to abandon their heretical ways. The resistance could take place openly, in the form of protests and occupation of the construction site, but it is not uncommon for the heretic minority to act in secrecy – trying to sabotage the construction effort or even eliminate the new god's prophets: the player characters.

Other challenges will result from the accidents (real or orchestrated) that inevitably occur during major construction projects. Heretics in the area will probably point to these

Group Indoctrination

Converting a group of humanoids to the Church of the One is a lengthy process that requires patience and persistence, especially if the target group is initially averse to the idea. The Initial Attitude table provides suggestions on possible starting values, and only once the Salvation Value reaches 0 has a critical group been saved in the name of Prios.

The missionary work itself is conducted through a combination of manipul... sorry, conversations about Prios' greatness and bold action. The Miracles and Wonders table offers suggestions on the latter, including how many salvation points such efforts can yield. We propose that a respective effort only give points the first time it is performed; furthermore, performing wonders can only give points once per week – if miracles happen too frequently, they may seem less impressive to the target group.

As for the daily conversations and sermons, the missionaries can make one Charisma (Persuasion) check per week, with the DC indicated in the Initial Attitude table. A successful check increases the salvation value by 1; on a success of five or more, the value increases by 2. On failure nothing happens, but if it fails by five or more, the value decreases by 2. Note that these principles can be applied in other contexts as well, when convincing a group of people to accept a new ruler, ideology or deity.

INITIAL ATTITUDE

Attitude	Salvation Value	DC
Welcoming	–5	10
Neutral	–10	12
Apprehensive	–15	14
Disapproving	–20	16
Distrustful	–30	18
Hateful	–50	20

MIRACLES AND WONDERS

Activity	Description	Salvation Points
Healing	Using *cure wounds* or *healing word*	1
Unmasking	Using *true seeing* to see through illusions	1
Foretelling	Using *commune* to make a prediction that comes true	1
Blessing	Using *hallow* to heal Corrupted Nature (see *Bestiary*, page 22)	1–2
Banishing	Using *exorcism* to banish a spirit from a possessed individual	1–2
Duel	Defeating a champion of the opposing faction	1–2
Heroic Deed	Defeating a (higher challenge rating) monster	1–3
Liberating	Destroying or driving away an external power plaguing the target group	2–3

incidents as proof that the temple is an abomination in the eyes of the old gods; the player characters must get their loyal followers to see them instead as wicked powers struggling against the supremacy of Prios, and then show them that the Sun God cares for the families of the killed or wounded.

Finally, the construction might also attract external threats. The constant hammering and clattering can attract flocks of predators or agitate larger beasts roaming the region. But the worst-case scenario would probably be if the Iron Pact realizes what is going on – the elves do not want the Queen's people to increase their influence in the forests and mountains. If the player characters are lucky, the first threats will come from a diplomatic faction. But no matter the makeup of the warband, it will definitely end in bloodshed unless the construction stops and the missionaries leave the area at once – possibly the most common cause of death among Ambrian missionaries, at least in Davokar. Here the groundwork is put to the test; will the converts take up arms against the Iron Pact or abandon the player characters in their hour of peril?

PHASE 5: MAINTAINING THE CONGREGATION

When the temple is finished and all internal and external threats have been addressed, it is time to start thinking about the journey home. But no matter how convinced the missionaries are that Prios has taken the settlement under his heavenly wings, it is important to prepare the population for a life without the Lawgiver's prophets. "Prios" must appoint a worthy high priest and a group of associates who can carry the Sun God's banner through years, decades, even centuries. In the future these select few must also be presented with privileges and gifts – to prevent them from being seduced by dark forces, but also to make them seem favored and respectable in the eyes of the populace.

No matter how well they succeed in appointing their successors, the player characters must keep an eye on what happens in the area. They should provide the high priest with a bunch of homing pigeons or some similar (possibly magical) means of conveying news and periodic reports. Perhaps situations will arise that force the player characters to revisit the settlement. For instance, they could hear about wavering faith and growing doubt among the populace, or about missionaries from a nearby heretic nest having come to spread their erroneous beliefs. Reports of a fire at the temple, or about a priest (or several) dying under mysterious circumstances, would make matters even more urgent. The most worrying scenario would of course be if all communication with the settlement suddenly went silent...

Monster Hunt

THE WILDERNESS MUST be tamed, if not outright beaten into submission. One way of demonstrating the superiority and dominance of the Ambrian people is through monster trophies – proof that not even the mightiest King Toad, Drakworm or World Serpent is safe in the world of humans! Suitable game is everywhere, in the forests, mountains and waters. Such creatures are sometimes difficult to find, and often even harder to kill, but those who manage to drag home a magnificent specimen can often expect great amounts of glory, wealth and fame.

Perhaps the player characters are members of a monster hunting society, as described in the *Ruins of Symbaroum Player's Guide* (page 106)? They could also be offering their services to some rich individual seeking a majestic trophy for the wall, or to the residents of an outpost or border town who want to get rid of the fiendish creature terrorizing their lives. Whatever their motivation may be, the monsters of the wild will present the characters with great challenges.

PHASE 1: THE PREY

How the player characters decide which prey to pursue can vary considerably. Perhaps they themselves have strong opinions on the matter? Perhaps they receive a specific request from some quest giver? In towns like Kastor and Thistle Hold they may also seek out or run into various hunters, explorers and others who like to tell wild stories about their past exploits. This can be a valuable source of knowledge even if the prey has already been decided on – why chase after some half-wounded young Manauit if someone can point the way to a fully grown, magnificent King Toad; why target a Scorner "living" in some corruption-oozing blackland when another is said to be haunting an easily accessible burial mound?

Also, one cannot rule out the possibility that the player characters' monster hunt is just a brief guest appearance, prompted by the pleas of some vulnerable village or accepted as a paying assignment from someone who wants a specific beast dead – to avenge a loved one it devoured or to decorate the throne room with the trophy of a famous beast.

PHASE 2: THE TOOLS

Before the hunt begins it is important to study the targeted prey. Perhaps there are people who have actually encountered the monster in question; perhaps there are written sources to consult, or legends to be heard? Whatever the characters decide to do, they must try to learn as much as possible about the strengths and weaknesses of the individual beast and the species as a whole. But such insights rarely come for free, and there might be others who seek the same exact information – which can lead to everything from bidding wars to violent confrontations.

Collecting Trophies

For anyone who slays monsters and collects trophies there is money to earn, even if the procurement of the valuable parts can cause problems for the untrained – putrefaction spoils many trophies completely and lowers the price on others. A check to collect the trophy is required. The DC to harvest the trophy successfully is 10 plus the monster's challenge rating (round fractional challenge ratings to 0). A character can use Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Medicine). A success by 5 or more earns a trophy in good condition, an ordinary success is worth a trophy in poor condition. A character with the Beast Lore feature or the Bushcraft trait has advantage on this check.

See the table Approximate Value of Monster Trophies for a list of obvious and more exotic trophies that monster hunters can collect during their hunting trips into the woods.

APPROXIMATE VALUE OF MONSTER TROPHIES

Challenge Rating	Examples	Good Condition	Poor Condition
0–1	Jakaar, Mare Cat	1 thaler	—
2–4	Baiagorn, Marlit	10 thaler	1 thaler
5–8	Aboar, Dragon Fly, Managaal	100 thaler	10 thaler
9–12	Coloss, Liege Troll, Raskaal	500 thaler	50 thaler
13–16	King Toad, Lindworm, Shelob	1,000 thaler	100 thaler
17–20	Arch Troll, Drakworm, World Serpent	5,000 thaler	500 thaler
21+	Unique individuals	10,000 thaler	1,000 thaler

The knowledge gathered will prove useful when it is time to purchase equipment for the journey. Perhaps the assumed weaknesses of the prey make it particularly vulnerable to mechanical traps, a certain type of poison or weapons with a particular property or damage type? Perhaps the characters' insights indicate that they should favor a certain means of protection, or buy a large number of hunting dogs to distract the monster while the hunters try to kill it? Having the right tools can be just as important for monster hunters as for craftsmen and artists.

Finally, the characters must prepare for the journey itself. They must acquire an Explorer's License, the right equipment, and possibly a guide who is familiar with their destination. There will no doubt be maps for them to buy, from people claiming that their particular route is the fastest and safest way to the beast's habitat. But whom should they trust, and how much are they prepared to pay? It is always safest to compensate others in the form of future shares (see page 161 in the *Player's Guide*), but on the other hand, that means someone else will claim a large piece of the profit – often as much as 30–50%.

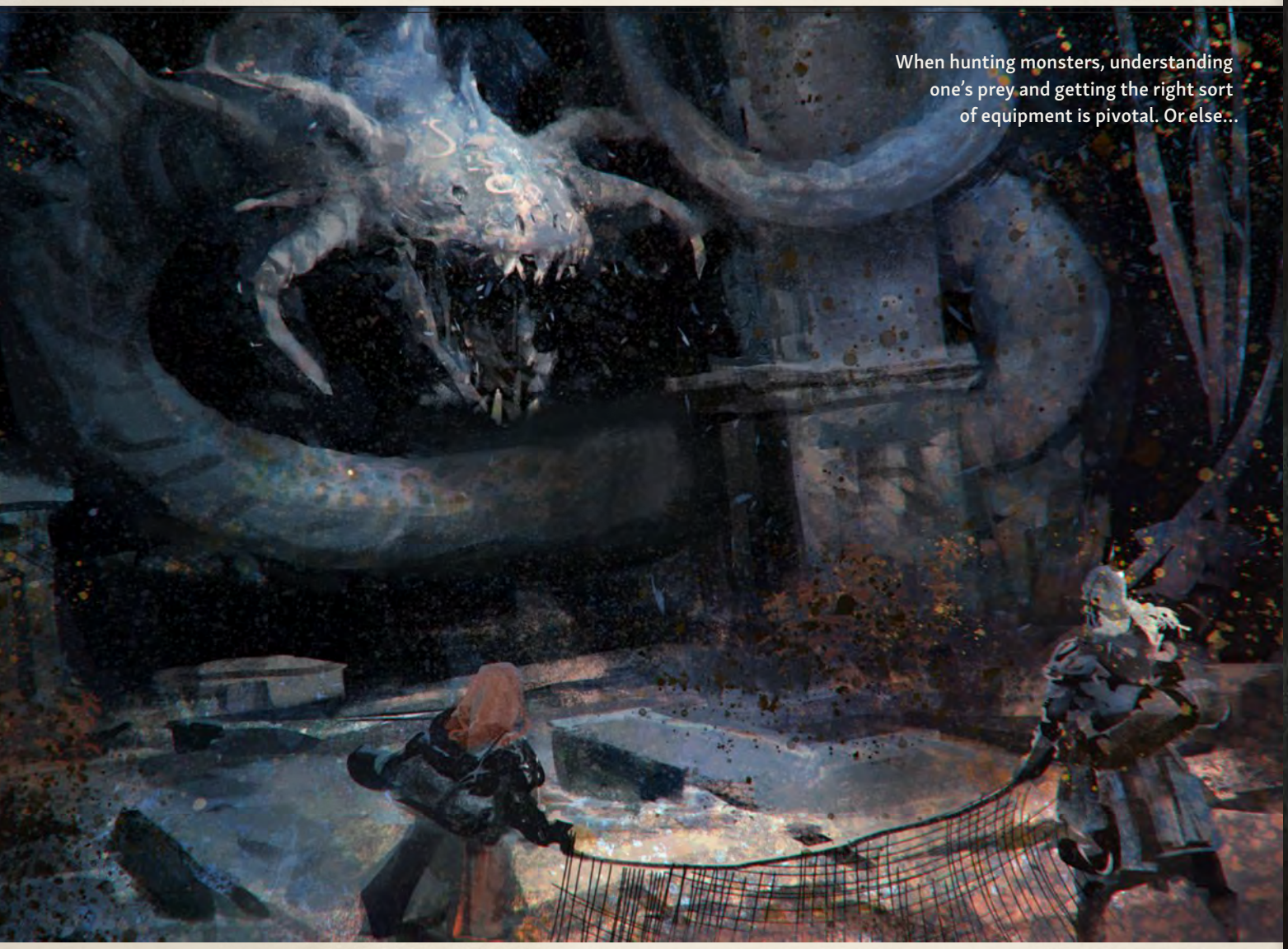
PHASE 3: THE HUNT

Journeys through Davokar are always dangerous and eventful. First the player characters must make their way to the area where the prey is supposed to be, and that alone can be challenging. Elven warbands, ardent rangers and packs of prowling predators are always a threat. Or perhaps the player characters are in a race with one or multiple rival hunting parties, who seek to sabotage any competitors by attacking them in their camp, destroying their supplies or running ahead to set nasty traps.

Once they have arrived, the real work begins. Some prey can be found in a specific location, such as a ruin, a cairn, a sinkhole or a cave. In that case the place must be reconnoitered, the entrances located, and potential dangers identified – tasks which become particularly interesting if other hunting parties have also arrived in the area. Other prey are constantly on the move and must either be tracked or lured into a trap. The risk of such a hunt is that the prey may have already left for some other pasture or hunting ground, which poses challenges the player characters may not be prepared for. Another risk is that the prey might realize it is being hunted, and set a trap or lay an ambush for the player characters...

PHASE 4: THE DEATHBLOW

When engaged in a monster hunt, the hunters' confrontation with their prey should of course be a climax, particularly if this is something the gaming group occupies themselves with for several sessions in a row. Try to create some variation between the adventures, in terms of setting and enemy strategies. Regarding the former, the great ruins of Davokar may seem like the obvious choice, but even that can become tiresome unless varied with overgrown valleys, open glades, wet marshes or underground vaults. As for strategies, the traits presented in the *Ruins of Symbaroum Bestiary* (pages 215–223) can be combined in lots of ways, which (mixed with the chosen battlefield) will force the



When hunting monsters, understanding one's prey and getting the right sort of equipment is pivotal. Or else...

player characters to use the full range of their capabilities in order to succeed in their hunt.

Also, it would not hurt if each confrontation offers at least one unpleasant surprise. If the player characters are well-prepared and have carefully surveyed the area, the Gamemaster should of course reward them by not changing the circumstances completely. But the forest of Davokar is capricious, and its inhabitants unpredictable! Perhaps the prey has features they do not know about? Perhaps there are other threats nearby; threats that do not reveal themselves until the player characters attack? Even the weakest prey can be difficult to kill if it turns out to be protected by a so far invisible spirit, or if a blight mist suddenly comes drifting in on imperceptible winds.

PHASE 5: THE RETURN

Regardless of whether the player characters return with a slain prey or a live captured monster, the journey back should transpire without any serious difficulty. Exceptions can be made, however, if only to maintain the suspense – a rival hunting party lies in ambush; a group of Iron Pact agents comes to avenge or free a captured prey; the stench of the trophy or noise of the captive attracts trolls, predators or swelling abominations. But otherwise we suggest that the real challenges present themselves on the characters' return to civilization.

At this point, any envious competitors become a serious problem, as do the Ironsworn who (whatever the purpose of the hunt) view the characters' actions as a crime against Creation. And unless they are hunting for sport or to mount the trophy on their own wall, the characters will probably face other challenges as they finally deliver the captured/dead creature. A quest giver may very well refuse to pay the agreed price, or claim that the reward was paid in advance. Perhaps agents of the local ruler show up, asserting that the trophy or the living beast is "the property of the Queen" and demanding that it immediately be handed over to its "rightful owner"?

Staging an Expedition

MANY ARE THOSE who have arrived at the edge of Davokar hoping to win wealth, glory and fame by plundering the ruins of the long lost empire of Symbaroum. Most will never leave town or are so ill prepared that they quickly have to turn back; most of the rest will reach their targeted site but never return. Despite this, the stream of fortune hunters never seems to dry up, probably because the few who actually make it all the way in and out often do so lugging a veritable fortune.

For the group of characters dreaming about staging an expedition into Davokar, a long and perilous journey awaits, starting long before they even set foot under the trees. And for the Gamemaster it should not be a problem to provide the players with exciting and testing challenges – on the contrary: adventures and campaigns dealing with treasure hunts are precisely what *Ruins of Symbaroum* is built for!

Rules and guidelines for journeys through the wilderness can be found in the chapter Movement in Davokar, starting on page 62. In the chapter Events (page 70) you can also find tables to randomly decide the challenges of the excursion.

PHASE 1: SELECTING THE SITE

First of all, the player characters have to pinpoint the target of their endeavor. In the setting information both in the *Player's Guide* and this book several persons with knowledge about ruins in the forest are described, and adding to that there are plenty of both false and true rumors circulating among the taverns in town. There is also the option to get in touch with organizations like Ordo Magica or adventurous nobles, in the hope that one of these knows of a promising site and is in need of assistance exploring it.

No matter how you find your target, you can be sure that other groups of explorers also have the same target in sight. It may come to bidding wars or even physical fights over the right to a credible treasure map, so that you will have to resort to lies and manipulation or maybe even use force to lay claim to the piece of cloth, leather or paper. Or the seller may decide to take money from several different groups, which then are left to compete in a race for the treasure.

If you reach out to one of the major factions, it is likely that they already have one or more groups of freelancing explorers just waiting for the next expedition to start. In that case, the player characters need to find a way to come off as more competent than the rivals, while those rivals probably will come after them in force. Maybe two or more freelance groups even join up to sweep the newcomer off the field.

PHASE 2: FINANCING

Of course, anyone can put their boots on and wander off into the forest, but to have a reasonable chance at success the player characters must be prepared to spend a considerable sum of thaler. The cost of the Explorer's License for a month alone, covering five persons aiming to mine the soil of Davokar, can be as high as between seventy and a hundred thaler. Added to that are the cost of equipment and the salaries for any fellow companions, for example a guide and some extra sellswords.

For a group that has yet to secure the travel funds, there are numerous ways to earn thaler in Thistle Hold and other towns. The paragraph on page 32 gives hints, or the player characters might find themselves contracted on behalf of a financier. Another option is to find a wealthy partner who can fund the project in exchange for a share in any future profit (see page 161 in the *Player's Guide*). The Ambrian nobles, retired fortune hunters and prominent antique dealers are all conceivable options. In the end, maybe you would do best talking to several candidates and attempting to pit them against each other to reach the best possible agreement.

When it comes to negotiating the cost of the Explorer's License, that can be an adventure in itself. There are thaler to earn by convincing the Queen's lackeys that you possess the competence needed for the expedition and that your activities will not disturb the forest very much. And if you do not work hard to come off as pleasant and forthcoming (for instance by performing some small personal errands for the licensors) you'll most likely find your costs arbitrarily rising. Great recommendations from other treasure hunters or prominent individuals – honest ones or skillfully fabricated – can prove to be very valuable in this context.

Gaining hold of trustworthy companions can also lead to some interesting challenges. What do you do if all skilled guides are already on missions? Well, either you ask around the local fortunehunter's district or you dare turn to some nearby goblin village in search of both guides and workers. What sellswords can you trust, after having heard stories about mercenaries ganging up on and killing their employers in their sleep?

PHASE 3: THE JOURNEY

Lots of expeditions must abort their mission before even reaching the destination, others disappear without a trace. In a forest like Davokar, the reasons behind such tragedies can be many. Packs of predators, elven warbands, roving barbarians, rampaging rage trolls, hidden sinkholes, corrupted nature surrounding the carcass of a dead abomination – the list of dangers goes on and on.

And if the forest and its inhabitants are not enough to cause trouble, there are plenty of other possible threats. The directions you follow may prove to be misleading or vague. Treasure hunting competitors may very well trail the expedition, hoping to steal away with your loot. Or it can be that there are two, three or even more groups that are already racing to arrive first and that are not afraid to sabotage each other.

Also, problems may arise within the expedition. Infectious outbreaks, lack of discipline and outright mutinies have caused as many failures as threats from outside the group. If you, for instance, get lost or if it is revealed that what you are searching for cannot be found where you thought it to be, the risk for internal conflict increases dramatically. All of a sudden you are short on supplies, which can be disastrous if you are in a region contaminated by corruption. Quarrels may arise about whether the party should return to Ambria or keep going, and in the latter case regarding what area to head for next.

Finally, even if we would suggest that the player characters who manage to reach the target and harvest its treasure get a chance to breathe easy, everything written above is just as true when it comes to the journey back home.

PHASE 4: THE TREASURE HUNT

After reaching the alluring destination of the expedition, the next series of challenges begins. The ruins may be difficult to survey or be totally overgrown. The area can be the habitat of a flock of predators, a goblin tribe or a group of rage trolls led by an unwelcoming liege troll. Or you may discover that one or more other expeditions have already found their way to the site, and they are extremely reluctant to accommodate any competition. Irrespective of which, you first need to gain an easily defended foothold and then take control of the area through the use of force or negotiation.

Once this is done, it is time to take on the ruin or ruins. There awaits treasure in the form of art objects, artifacts and arcane knowledge that the right buyer will gladly purchase for a handsome sum. But there are also fiendish traps, the risk of collapsing floors and ceilings, labyrinthine tunnels and well-hidden pathways. And to add to the troubles, there is always the risk that the ruin's former inhabitants linger – in the form of a famished pack of Dragouls, as blight-born abominations or as a long dead family of Cryptwalkers that are opposed to any intrusion into their private sphere.

In the end, it is all about surviving and leaving the place with as many of its valuables as possible. Maybe the showpiece of the ruin is extra hard to reach – hidden beyond a cruel trap, surrounded by a horde of undead or standing on a rock in an underground lake infused with corruption. If so, the players must decide if they are to settle for more accessible loot or risk their lives trying to reach the showpiece. Or maybe they are not happy with their initial finds and agree to stay at the ruin, hoping to unearth richer loot behind rubble or some yet uncovered passage – all the while being attacked by a never ending flood of Dragouls or while some external threat closes in on the site (rival treasure hunters, attracted abominations or vindictive relatives of the group which was pacified when the player characters arrived to the area).

A totally different kind of challenge may arise for those who have scored the mother lode – deciding what to bring along and what to leave behind. No matter how many are involved in the expedition there is a limit to how much they can carry and still survive the journey home.

PHASE 5: RETURNING HOME

If the player characters manage to get back to Ambria with their loot, they must find a way to turn the valuables into the biggest earnings possible. First, the finds must be registered at one of the Queen's Legations, and when that is done the problems usually appear. Whichever precautions are taken, there is a risk that rumors start spreading about their catch, and suddenly the characters are transformed from treasure hunters to prey.

All who are occupied in the trading of antiquities and treasures of knowledge will try to get their attention. Other fortune hunters will grow jealous and decide to pick a fight, or even worse: they will band together hoping to steal both treasures and lives from the player characters. A financial partner may suddenly put forth a falsified contract by which he or she is entitled to an even greater cut of the loot than what was decided before departure. In such a situation, the group who early on managed to engage a loyal and influential partner will have all the reasons for thanking their lucky star!

However, there are alternatives to the legal way. The character may for instance hide their loot and sell the objects one at a time, in some town or outpost. That way, they can avoid most of the hysteria, but will on the other hand have to worry about the secret leaking out and that someone will try to locate and attack the hiding place of the valuables.

THUS SPOKE AROALETA

"... and Gorameios filled his lair with gold and jewels, stolen from the dark vaults of Saar-Atman; so infected by taint were the treasures, that the serpent was suffocated into an early death and the spirit of the conjuror won back the riches. In the nest of Gorameios does Saar-Atman forever brood."



SECTION 4

Setting & Adventure Design

When I first laid eyes on the site, I remember commenting: "it looks like any other shithole in the outskirts of the forest; why would anyone live here, and why are we even contemplating fighting here? Let it be swallowed by the mud it rose from!"

That was me, in what feels like an entire lifetime ago. It has been three weeks. Alone in Davokar with a dozen other sellswords and the Raghar family who hired us to clear their land. Oh, and the farm ogre, called Verbena; he eats flowers and smiles. He also dug a ditch this afternoon, just because he could, and hence created another acre of farmland out of the marshes. The rest of us just laid panting on the ground, dead tired after fighting the seemingly endless stream of dragouls coming out of the ruins at night.

I just learned the names of the children, all bloody nine of them. The little one – Ethra – gave me water today, I think as play but I could hardly hold my tears back. Nine reasons to fight. Tonight the dragouls will be back, and we hope the dark force that drives them will come as well, so we can end this once and for all. The raid into the ruins two days back got us the chalice, and we think the lady of this dark domain needs it – so she must come. I know Prios is watching now; may he grant us the strength to persevere, or welcome our souls to his side if we don't."

ONE OF THE most challenging but potentially rewarding aspects of being a Gamemaster is arguably the process of creating adventures – interactive stories through which the game world comes alive, causing the players to become engaged and invested in the setting. This section is meant to make the challenge a little less daunting; hopefully the advice and guidelines it offers can also lead to greater rewards, in the form of smiles and words of encouragement from your players.

In the first chapter, we describe our thought and work process when developing the Davokar region, in the hope that it will be useful to you in creating your own adventures, adventure landscapes, or even game worlds. This is followed by two chapters offering advice regarding the design of standalone adventures and adventure chronicles, sometimes called campaigns or adventure paths. Lastly, the section features a chapter on rewards, with a special focus on the form of magical items called greater artifacts.

Building Game Worlds

THERE ARE MANY different ways to go about creating worlds for roleplaying games, or geographically limited areas within already established worlds. Consequently, this chapter must not be seen as a step-by-step guide, but rather a set of tips and inspirational ideas based on how we who have written *Ruins of Symbaroum* usually work. If you take an active and reflective approach to the text, we hope that it will help you hone your skills as a worldbuilder, while at the same time providing insight into how the Symbaroum game world was designed.

As an initial note, we would argue that the construction of a world well-suited for roleplaying is in many ways similar to the design of the game's rule system. If the rules set the framework for combat, problem solving and character creation, the world becomes a kind of social playing field, with individuals, groups, organizations, and factions, all connected in a structure of conflicts and collaborations, history and future plans, moral principles and practical ideals. Each individual element inevitably interacts with the rest of the system's components, and every time something new is introduced, that individual, group or phenomenon must be suited to the system as a whole. This may sound a bit cryptic, but what it means will hopefully become clearer as you keep reading.

This chapter is divided into four sections – two focusing on what we (for lack of a better term) call building blocks, followed by a discussion on what the creation process itself might be like. The examples and references are mainly to Symbaroum, but we also refer to other roleplaying games we have worked on, as well as our experiences from other industries, particularly computer games and fiction literature. The last section explores the process of setting Difficulty Classes and choosing appropriate skills for challenges within the narrative.

Primary Building Blocks

THE DIVISION INTO primary and secondary building blocks has to do with the procedure we try to follow when creating new game worlds. We will come back to the process later in the chapter, but at this point it is worth noting that what we call Theme, Main Conflict, Stories and Tone ought to be discussed and established (even if only in a preliminary fashion) before the building blocks presented in the next section.

THEME

The theme is what the game is fundamentally about. *Ruins of Symbaroum*'s theme could be described as "the struggle between civilization and nature" – it is about (mainly) mankind's efforts to cultivate, structure and exploit nature, and how nature is affected by and reacts to this. The fact that the game belongs in the fantasy genre allowed us to clarify the theme by giving Symbaroum's nature an obvious ability to respond to what is done to it – in the form of corruption, blight marks, darkening, etcetera.

Other games we have developed and worked on have also had a more or less explicit main theme. The game world of *Mutant: Heirs of Doom* was in many ways about social injustice, while *Coriolis: The Third Horizon* was characterized by the meeting of (or struggle between) different cultures. And the reasons we want to keep working this way are what we see as three important elements of interesting and functional game worlds: the world should be recognizable, consistent and marked by clear conflicts.

Recognition is important for making us who "inhabit" the game world find it interesting, relevant, and worth fighting for – whether we are writers, illustrators, Gamemasters or



The Ambrian Sun Church and the Iron Pact represent the extremes in *Ruins of Symbaroum's* main conflict.

players. For us to feel engaged, the game world must touch on subjects, problems and situations we can identify with and even relate to, if only on a symbolic level, perhaps without even being fully aware of the similarities between the game world and our own. It can be more or less explicit, but if the game is built on a theme which is important to many Gamemasters and players, it is more likely that they will find the setting appealing as well.

That the world should be consistent means that there must be a common thread through the creation process, which can later be seen in all aspects of the game, preferably from each of the core rulebooks to even the tiniest one-shot adventure. Not only does this give the game a distinctive character compared to other games; it also creates a feeling that people and things are connected. Another benefit is that this thread helps game designers set priorities and boundaries. No matter its geographical size and population, it is impossible to offer a nuanced and varied description of an entire world, and the theme can help you decide what to embrace and what to leave out (at least for the time being).

Last, but perhaps most important, is what is described in greater detail under the next heading, namely the game world's conflicts. A well-defined theme will point to one or several clear lines of conflict, which in turn can guide you in developing everything from history to geography, religions and ideologies, nations, factions, and finally, particularly important individuals.

MAIN CONFLICT

Conflicts are the backbone of the game world, or perhaps its engine. Or both: its backbone engine. Conflicts tell the worldbuilder what factions and groups exist in the world, and what they are negotiating and/or fighting for. In other words: the conflicts precede the creation of ideologies, organizations, and other forms of communities.

In *Symbaroum* the theme is (as already mentioned) the struggle between civilization and nature. In its most basic form, this points to a conflict between those who value civilization over nature, and those who take the opposite view; you know these factions as the Ambrians and the elves of the Iron Pact. The conflict also has room for those who seek balance, believing that both extremes are equally important – in the case of *Symbaroum*, this is represented by the barbarian clans and particularly the Witches.

But those wishing to design a world that is nuanced and believable can hardly stop there: there are just as many conflicts within said groups as there are between them. The Iron Pact's members may all stand for the sanctity of nature, but they can have different ideas about what is and is not included in the concept of "Creation," and they can have different views on which methods are justified when defending nature. The Ambrians are even more heterogeneous in how they relate to the world around them – from the Sun God worshipers who claim humanity's purpose is to "cultivate God's creations" (that is, exploit nature as much as possible),

EXAMPLES OF CONFLICTS	
Conflict	**Resolution**
Nature vs Civilization	Groups/individuals have different views on how civilization should relate to nature.
Individualism vs Collectivism	Groups/individuals have different opinions on what should be prioritized – individual rights or the collective good.
Openness vs Isolationism	Groups/individuals have different opinions on strangers in general, particularly their ability to contribute to society.
Tolerance vs Dogmatism	Groups/individuals have different opinions and/or lifestyles, but also differ in how accepting they are of people not part of one's own group.
Progress vs Tradition	Groups/individuals who think everything is great the way it is (or used to be) are pitted against people who desire change/progress without regard for the past.

through those who see nature as a gift to be nurtured and managed, to those who for various reasons have joined the Iron Pact's more uncompromising stance.

The next section, which is about secondary building blocks, will provide further examples on how the main conflict can be used as a backbone engine while the game world is developed and set in motion, but first we should mention a thing or two about what kind of stories the worldbuilding is meant to facilitate.

Other Conflicts

Note that the existence of a main conflict does not necessarily exclude other potential lines of conflict. For example, there is of course a struggle for power and influence within all societies and organizations, which is why two groups or individuals who agree on the relationship between civilization and nature can still be at odds with one another, competing for higher positions within their faction.

STORIES

As a worldbuilder it is important to early on consider what kind of stories the setting should support. Some games are clearly focused on one type of narrative, while others allow for many different stories. Another difference can be seen between games meant to support stories of a certain format (from one-shot scenarios to epic campaigns) and those that open the way for multiple formats. In both cases, *Ruins of Symbaroum* belongs in the latter category – it is designed for different kinds of stories in different formats.

Sure, in its simplest form, the theme of *Ruins of Symbaroum* points to stories about Ambrians violating nature and facing resistance from the Iron Pact, possibly with the barbarian witches as a mediating/complicating factor. But such a plot can be molded into lots of different stories, large and small – a treasure hunt or exploration mission; a whodunit where a representative of one of the drama's three parties is found murdered; an adventure landscape centered around a logging outpost; a rescue operation or a diplomatic mission aimed at bringing back some captured Ambrians; and so on.

The stories do not necessarily need to be directly linked to the main conflict. For example, *The Mark of the Beast* and *Fever of the Hunt* are two adventures in which the plots are clearly linked to the game's theme. In other cases, this link is more implicit, with key characters belonging to factions that were founded based on the conflict between civilization and nature. Two clear examples of this are the adventures *The Howling of Damned Gods* and *What's Bred in the Bone*, both of which are based on situations caused by the schism within the Ambrian Sun Church. The *Chronicle of the Throne of Thorns* is also primarily about the game world's factions and the struggle between them, though the game's theme is the basis on which these factions were created and the episodes are obviously set in a world marked by the game's central conflict.

TONE

As a final primary building block, we would like to briefly touch on the game world's tone or style. With the above points and reasoning in mind, the world of *Ruins of Symbaroum* could easily be painted in black and white, perhaps portraying the representatives of civilization as greedy and ruthless, and the defenders of nature as kind-hearted heroes. The game can certainly be played that way, but we have opted for a different tone.

Treasure hunters plundering ruins, explorers investigating old tombs, nobles establishing logging outposts, or alchemists refining crops are not evil. The individual or group in question may not be strictly speaking good, but in most cases, they at least perceive themselves as righteous, well-meaning folk. However, their actions can certainly have both "good" and "evil" consequences. A treasure hunt might save the fortune hunter's village from the brink of starvation,

Genre

Some of you may wonder why we have not yet touched on the subject of the game's, and therefore the world's, genre. The reason is that we just do not find genres particularly useful when it comes to creating game worlds, at least not initially. Simply put, genre is more about presentation than content; the theme, main conflict, and stories we associate with Symbaroum could easily be clothed in the garments of other genres.

Now, someone will probably object that genre usually covers more than just the surface, and that is certainly true – science fiction often addresses existential questions, post-apocalypse deals with the matter of human worth, while fantasy is often about the struggle between light and dark, good and evil. But in our opinion, that is not a good reason to let genre guide you in designing a game world – it can provide inspiration and serve as a sounding board, but at a later stage, when creating the secondary building blocks.

Further Reading

The method of building social structures based on conflicts/relations rather than objects is based on post-structuralist theory and method, especially the work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Those who want a fairly accessible introduction to the framework can look up his collection of essays titled *Practical Reason – On the Theory of Action*.

but might also cause outbreaks of corruption or attract a vengeful monster from the forest. Similarly, the alchemist's refined crops might contribute to better harvests and fuller bellies, at the cost of darkened soil that becomes infertile or even deadly. The game's stories must take this into account; they must make clear what is at stake and show that the actions of those involved (including the player characters) have both positive and negative consequences.

In addition to the moral gray area that characterizes the game world as a whole, *Ruins of Symbaroum* contains elements that most people would associate with pure evil. We are not referring to cultists, sorcerers, or Dark Lords – whatever we may think of their actions, the vast majority of them would probably claim to be doing what is right, based on their (twisted) world view and the belief that the end justifies the means. No, in *Symbaroum*, the unquestionable evil is represented by the Abominations – altogether destructive and ruthless creatures who live only to slaughter and devour. On the other hand, one might ask to what extent these creatures are responsible for their bloody deeds. Perhaps the blame should be put on the individuals, groups or factions who (more or less deliberately) woke and provoked them?

Whatever your answer to this question may be, and no matter how amused you are by such philosophical dilemmas, *Ruins of Symbaroum* is meant to facilitate the creation of such thought-provoking problems, though you can of course go with simpler, more direct stories if that is your preference. To put it another way, the game is more about the questions than the answers. And above all, we personally think that game worlds where not everything is either black or white are more interesting and entertaining to visit, at least as players around a gaming table.

Secondary Building Blocks

So, *Ruins of Symbaroum* is meant to offer nuanced and varied stories of different formats that address the conflict between civilization and nature. The question is then how the game world should more specifically be designed to achieve this – what is its history, its nature, its cultures and population?

HISTORY

The history of a world is impossible to grasp. Period! The question of whether an objective historiography can even exist is irrelevant; as no one will ever be able to experience or describe the past in its entirety, we must content ourselves with perspectivist portrayals of limited regions, cultures, eras, and so on. This insight is of course highly relevant in the creation and presentation of game worlds, as the worldbuilder most likely cannot design, let alone describe, the history of her creation in exhaustive detail.

Here the theme can help you set boundaries for both thought and text. No matter what game world we are working on, we are initially content with setting out some loosely worded milestones, linked to the game's theme and easy to move around and reshape. In the case of *Ruins of Symbaroum*, these milestones were historical examples of civilizations that perished after awaking the retaliating powers of nature; with *Coriolis* they were periods when various factions/cultures in the three horizons collided, causing a shift in the balance of power.

Only when we have to put the milestones in writing do the details emerge, even for us. It may become necessary when describing the background of an adventure, or a

faction or single non-player character's motives for acting a certain way. But we still do not try to provide exhaustive accounts, as it is both impossible and demystifying, and often less relevant than subjective impressions – the present is usually shaped by cultural beings' perception of the past, rather than by objective historical facts.

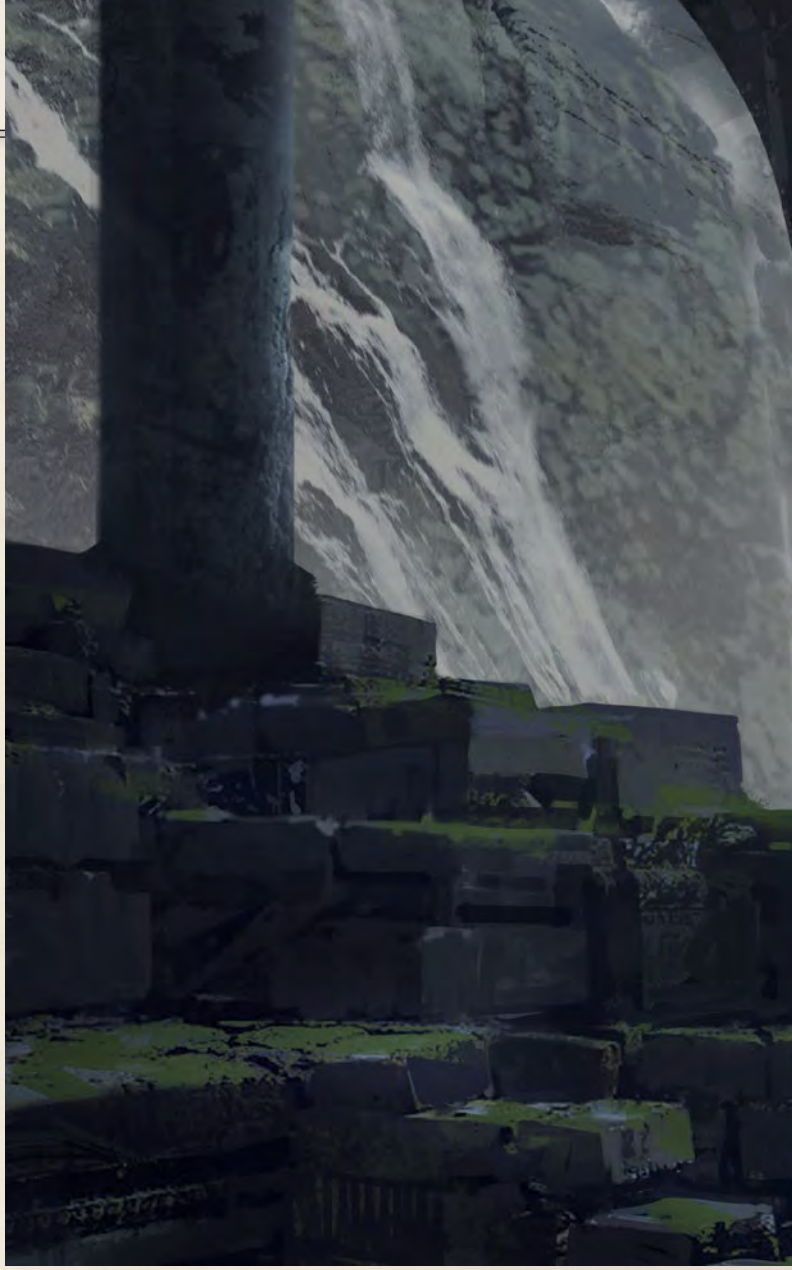
The section The Return of the Queen on page 8 in the *Ruins of Symbaroum Player's Guide* is one example of this: it provides a brief account of the background to one of the game world's most obvious conflicts between civilization and nature. The text could well be fleshed out with more details, other perspectives, and in-depth discussions; it could grow into a separate book in itself, or even a whole series of hefty tomes. But it already serves its purpose of establishing the game's theme and main conflict in a clear and concise way.

NATURE

Nature and its properties are essential to all forms of game worlds. What matters most is not what it looks, smells, or sounds like, but what resources it contains and in what concentrations. The history of our own world can (at least from a certain perspective) be understood as a struggle for natural resources – land, mountains, water, and what they provide.

Again, we would advise the worldbuilder to make decisions about her creation's nature based on the game's theme and main conflict. A game like *Mutant: Year Zero* would not be the same if the world was rich with natural resources and freshwater; *Ruins of Symbaroum* would be something completely different without the vast wilds of Davokar and the corruption generated by cultural beings' violence against nature. Nature is of course particularly important in *Symbaroum* – the theme requires it to be lush and florid, but also able to "fight for its cause" in various ways, even though the Ironsworn are committed to helping on that front.

Aside from the theme, the world's nature should be designed according to the stories that will take place there. If *Ruins of Symbaroum* were only meant for treasure hunting and exploring the forests, its world could have focused solely on Davokar and Thistle Hold – without Ambria's towns and farmlands, the rolling plains of the west, and the wild mountain ranges of the south and east. The fact that the Davokar region is landlocked was also a deliberate decision. Although long distance travel is also possible on land, we hope that this design makes the game world feel more isolated and intimate, with less inflow of people, goods, and news from distant shores. Perhaps it also dampens the player characters' (and the players') desire to fantasize about what lies "beyond the sea" or out there on the big blue, so the story can focus on the fates of Ambria and Davokar.



CULTURES

By "cultures" we mean realms, clans, and other clearly defined peoples and communities characterized by shared values and a dominant lifestyle. It has been said before but bears repeating that all such societies are heterogeneous – they contain lots of deviations and variations in terms of lifestyles, values and norms. Nevertheless, in order to describe a world we must stoop to certain simplifications and generalizations, while being aware that this is the case.

With the theme and main conflict as a basis, it can be wise to create two cultures that together describe both extremes of the central conflict. In *Ruins of Symbaroum*, these are the Ambrians and the Iron Pact; in *Coriolis*, the Zenithians and the Firstcome are presented as the two dominant, and quarreling, cultures. In contrast to these factions, both worlds contain groups that, while linked to the main conflict, are more nuanced in their stances – for example the Witches and Reformists in *Symbaroum*, or The Legion and the Free League in *Coriolis*.



Another piece of advice is to create a clear cultural center for each respective culture, a place where that culture holds a dominant position and where one can (at least sometimes) encounter its leading officials. The Zenithian Hegemony reigns on the planet Kua, where its leader Abarren Quassar can be found. Similarly, the Iron Pact and its Prince are based in the Halls of a Thousand Tears, and the Witches with the Huldra and her helpers on Karvosti. This gives these places a distinct character, which is also linked to the game's theme.

POPULATION

Finally, a few words on the members of the aforementioned cultures, the game world's individual inhabitants. Even if they are, formally or informally, allied to one or several of the groups, these people can be very different from each other in a number of ways – they can be more or less orthodox, loyal to and invested in the group or faction's cause. And, of course, things happen in life that have short or long-term effects on their motivations. A person whose family member becomes seriously ill, who is threatened, blackmailed, indebted, or addicted, can quickly turn from loyalist to traitor. The same thing can happen if they are mistreated by their superiors, or if their side in a vital conflict appears to be losing.

When creating an individual non-player character, we usually consider four main questions: a) what does the individual want to achieve?, b) what resources/means do they have at their disposal?, c) what compromises are they willing to make?, d) what risks are they prepared to take? Group affiliation is central to answering these questions, but it is far from everything – the faction/culture at large fights for a common cause; the individual fights mostly for themselves and their loved ones, and if the group's cause becomes a threat to the individual, their convictions and loyalties can quickly start to fall apart. Note that the same logic (albeit in a simpler form) can be applied to the game world's more bestial inhabitants, with the exception of the

raging abominations who essentially lack any sense of self-preservation or herd instinct.

Since *Ruins of Symbaroum* is meant to be played as a campaign, over a long period of time, we should also point out how important it is for non-player characters to change. Allowing individuals to develop over time makes the world come alive, which is important enough. It is also a great way to mirror the world's development in general, to give face and voice to the changed relations within and between the major factions. The Templars seceding from the Curia and establishing the Church of Dead Prios can for example be reflected in a knight choosing to join the vengeful quest of the First Revenger, or leaving the group to join the Black Cloaks or the Reformists instead, or even hanging up her sword once and for all. A group of player characters who encounters the knight in question, before and after the Templars' break from the Curia, will then gain a clear insight into the overall development of the game world and how it is affecting individual people.

The Process

WE READILY ADMIT that we who work on *Ruins of Symbaroum* have never formulated any clear strategy for how to develop new game worlds – perhaps because we have known each other and roleplayed together for more than three decades and thereby developed some form of instinctive work process. Consequently, this section will be something of an afterthought, but we hope the reasoning below will still offer some concrete advice and tips, whether you wish to create your own world or a limited adventure landscape in Ambria or Davokar.

CONCEPT

It is not easy to understand or explain where the idea for a game comes from, nor why some ideas take root and others do not. One of our primary starting points is always to create games we would like to play ourselves, which is why we often build on past roleplaying experiences we have shared together. *Mutant: Heirs of Doom* was based on our way of playing previous versions of *Mutant*, and that was also the case with *Symbaroum* – we wanted to make a game that focused on our way of playing older versions of the Swedish fantasy RPG *Drakar och Demoner* ("Dragons and Daemons").

But what should the game be about, and what should it look like – in other words: how should we turn the idea into a concept? After many long and sprawling discussions, we devoted a full day to gathering inspiration in the form of images – images that were discussed, discarded, or saved for future reference. During this process, the game's graphic style started to take form, but not only that; the theme was defined, the main conflict was clarified, different types of stories came up in our conversations, and both the style and the theme suggested what tone we wanted to adopt. The secondary building blocks were addressed as well, and what would eventually become the Ambrians, the Iron Pact, and the barbarian witches started to take form.

If memory serves, we had probably started writing and painting a bit before then, but the inspiration from that day gave a clear direction to our work. We kept bouncing drafts off each other, discussing and critiquing each other's work, and our initial ideas changed and developed. But in many ways that day of inspiration marked the birth of *Symbaroum* – the moment when the presentation started to take form.

PRESENTATION

The process of creating a game (or other cultural artifacts) is as painful as it is pleasurable. Every act of creation is as much about chastening as it is about generating – about prioritizing, limiting and choosing what to leave out. Leaving aside the rules for a bit and focusing on the game world, we had to decide how much of its history, culture, geography and population should be described, and what should be given priority. And in this decision-making process, the theme – the conflict between civilization and nature – was an invaluable pillar to lean on.

For every event, faction, location and individual we asked (more or less consciously) the question: are you necessary in establishing the game's theme, main conflict, narrative style, and tone? Some elements may have gotten off lightly in the elimination process, because they were particularly close to our hearts. To be fair, one should probably not be completely rigid or unforgiving when picking and choosing;

Representation

Regarding the game world's population, we strongly recommend that the worldbuilder is ever vigilant about differences and power relations from our own world spilling over into their creation. A common example has to do with gender power structures, such as those that exist in our own world, slipping into that of the game. The game's theme may of course justify such a world order, especially if it is specifically about shedding light on problems inherent with that kind of power structure (like in the tv-series/book *The Handmaid's Tale*). But we fundamentally believe that game worlds should challenge stereotypes rather than reinforce them – they should feel open and welcoming to as many people as possible!

at the end of the day, it is about creating a solid base that we as game designers, as well as future Gamemasters, can manage and build on in order to create engaging roleplaying experiences for all involved.

Before moving on to the issue of management and expansion, we would like to pause for a moment to consider the importance of always thinking in terms of differences – to, in line with the reasoning regarding theme and main conflict, design (and describe) different phenomena in relation to one another. The social playing field consists of contrasts; what may seem like an individual element always gains its characteristics in relation to everything else. This may sound vague, but it simply means that a person who is tall in one social group can be short in another, or that what is a fancy tavern in one town can be a mediocre old kitchen in another.

In practice, it is of course impossible to describe every detail in relation to "everything else." It is more about a mindset and approach that can only have a modest impact on the presentation. One example of how we try to apply this focus on contrasts in writing is the descriptions of different people and establishments in the episodes that make up the *Chronicle of the Throne of Thorns*. When deciding which eating and drinking establishments to describe, we always create four or five that are distinctly different from each other. When writing about these places we then try to set them in relation to other, similar establishments, as exemplified by the first sentence in the description of the tavern called The Croft: "If the Town Hall's Loft and the Davokar Feastery are described as upscale taverns, the Croft must be placed at the other end of the scale." This hopefully conveys a feeling that people and places are connected, that they are what they are in relation to one another. Such comparative descriptions also add some depth to the world they are in.

On a related note, we must mention the importance of thinking in nuances. Viewed from the outside, the inhabitants of one of Davokar's troll communities may seem very similar, but if asked about it, one of them could immediately point out a large number of groups whose collective memberships differ greatly from each other. Take a closer look at one of these groups and the same thing happens again, and so on, down to individual level. And it does not stop there, as the individual's characteristics (as mentioned earlier) change over time, depending on the environment she is in.

In addition to making the individuals more interesting and less predictable, such nuances also make the game world as a whole feel more alive, perhaps even more "real." It becomes a world populated by people rather than stereotypes, with unique and changing locations rather than stage sets. While this may be desirable in itself, it also fits nicely with the tone we think should characterize *Ruins of Symbaroum*.

MANAGEMENT

The following truth will be repeated many times in this book: the world of *Ruins of Symbaroum* does not belong to us, but to you, to everyone! The same is true for other games we have worked on. The great thing about roleplaying games is that, unlike video games, novels, and movies, they are characterized by collective storytelling and creation. The fact that we have designed a world based on certain building blocks does not mean the whole world will collapse just because the blocks in question are replaced, reshaped or rearranged.

Our ambition is to keep discovering and presenting the world of Symbaroum little by little, as new adventure modules and supplements are published. We are building one region at a time and developing their secondary building blocks when we get there, tailoring the presentation to the needs of that particular place and its stories. And it is important to achieve variation between the regions, within the framework laid down by the game's primary building blocks. The theme can be more or less prominent, the power balance between the parties involved in the main conflict can vary, and the environments can be suited for different kinds of stories – urban adventures, forest expeditions, mysteries, action, rescue operations, stories focused on revenge and violent confrontations... the options are limitless.

And you are free to do the same. You can even go one step further and create regions that follow an entirely different theme, characterized by a main conflict you personally are passionate about exploring. As soon as our adventure modules and other supplements leave the presses and begin their journey to stores and retailers, they cease to describe our worldbuilding and become toolboxes for you to use in any way you like – some choose to follow our instructions, while others ignore them completely. This is the way it is, and the way it should be. This is what makes roleplaying the greatest leisure activity in the world!

Contrasts

We humans perceive the world around us in the form of differences. We see items because they stand out from other indistinguishable objects in the environment; we hear a specific sound because it differs from the rest of the soundscape; the same goes for our other senses – smell, taste and touch. A game world that is completely dark and gloomy risks being perceived as gray; in a world where everyone is cruel, no one is in fact cruel – we need light to perceive the dark, happiness to perceive misery, and mercy to perceive cruelty. As far as the presentation is concerned, contrast is the game designer's best friend.



It is said that dozens of abominations are kept and studied in well-guarded cells beneath the Black Cloak's monastery on the northern slopes of the Titans.

Adventures & Landscapes

ADVENTURES ARE A foundation or basis for roleplaying sessions, and this chapter offers guidelines and tips that Gamemasters can use as a starting point to either create their own adventures or to adapt published adventures to their gaming groups. Adventures can be viewed and described in many different ways – we have chosen to present two of them: the Classic Adventure and the Adventure Landscape. These are discussed in the first part of the chapter, entitled Adventure Analysis.

Then comes what can be described as a kind of template for designing and writing adventure landscapes, our preferred format for *Ruins of Symbaroum*. According to the template, the landscape consists of an overview (referred to below as Plot) that broadly introduces the adventure, followed by a setting (Location), a few individuals with their own personal ambitions (Non-Player Characters), and a dramatic event (Inciting Incident) that sets the plot in motion. After that it is up to the players to act based on their characters' goals and values.

As support for future gaming, we would also urge the Gamemaster to outline a number of ideas for what happens after the adventure (Developments), but whether this is necessary or even desirable is for the Gamemaster to decide – some probably prefer to let go of the reigns once the basic framework has been introduced to the players. The same goes for the recommendation to add "that little extra" in the form of a new rule, artifact, ritual, elixir, etcetera; something unique for the player characters to take with them from the adventure.

Before addressing the design components, we should mention that adventure landscapes in general (and this template in particular) can be especially suitable for one-shot adventures, which is why we have chosen the scenario *Blight Night* as a recurring example (see page 187). However, this is a guideline worth challenging or at least discussing, as adventure landscapes may just as well function as parts in huge chronicles – as, for instance, the vast adventure landscape that opens up to the player characters in *Symbar – Mother of Darkness*.

Adventure Analysis

LET'S TAKE A look first at the classical adventure and then compare and contrast it to the adventure landscape

THE CLASSIC ADVENTURE

Classic adventures are characterized by having a well-defined beginning and an equally well-defined end, and are often divided into chapters in a way resembling the flow of a movie, from the start through rising tension and several turning points to the climax.

In a classic adventure, the Gamemaster has a vital role to play since the story is often set in motion by forces beyond the player characters, usually by some kind of quest giver. For a classic adventure to feel relevant to the players, it is important that the goals of their characters coincide with that of the adventure, or that the group gets closer to achieving its goals through the promised rewards of the quest.

The great advantage of the classic adventure is its simplicity: it is easy for both the players and the Gamemaster to be drawn into the game. The downside is that the players may experience that the more-or-less predetermined progress forces them to act in ways that can seem unwarranted to them. The latter can be avoided, or at least toned down, by wisely chosen incentives and if the adventure provides clear goals but leaves it to the players to determine how to reach them.

Here follows a recipe for creating a classic adventure, spiced with comments, variants and constructive suggestions.

The Intrigue

For adventures in Symbaroum it is recommended that the GM uses a simple intrigue that leads to exciting and diverse stories depending on how the player characters handle its challenges. Advanced or complicated intrigues are discouraged; they can be very interesting for the Gamemaster to create, but difficult to convey to the players while playing.

The easiest way to start is, of course, by examining what the player characters hope to accomplish (the group's common goal) and then toss in enemies that want the exact opposite. If, for example, the player characters try to establish an outpost in Davokar, then the Gamemaster can build an adventure around a civilization-hating witch that tries to stop them by using a vengeful nature spirit, or around a war band of fiery spring elves that has allied themselves with the beasts to drive the player characters away.

The Mission

An easy start to an adventure is to have the player characters be contacted by someone who gives them a mission to accomplish. One or more clear rewards should be tied to this mission, rewards that can help the characters get closer to achieving their own goals. It is possible to strengthen the incentive (the motives of the characters) even more by having the adventure start "in medias res" (see page 11) or making sure that the characters have some quarrel with the adventure's main antagonist right from the start. No matter how you do it, the important thing is that the mission is engaging for both the players and their characters.

The Antagonists

The enemies, or the antagonists, are usually known from the beginning, or at least clearly defined; the player characters wish to accomplish something that either another person or another group does not want to happen. Or maybe the opposite: an organization or group tries to accomplish something that the characters (maybe in the name of their employer) want to prevent from happening.

The Gamemaster can start with an enemy faction and then stick with them through the adventure: weak enemies commanded by a more competent leader in the beginning of the adventure, and then posing increasingly bigger threats as the adventure moves forward.

Other Agents

Maybe there are potential allies that the player characters can seek out? Allies are often made by the principle of "my enemy's enemy is my friend"; maybe the antagonist has an enemy that the characters can try to reach and recruit to help them, even if the characters and said enemy's enemy normally would not work together.

Environments

In classic adventures, antagonists and environment are closely connected. You find the enemy in a specific location; very traditionally – but in no way wrongly – the final battle takes place at the enemy's stronghold. Typical adventure environments within the game world of Symbaroum are the alleys and sewers of the city, the gloomy dark of Davokar and the ruins of the forest.

ADVENTURE LANDSCAPES

A landscape constitutes a location or a region with a large number of agents and intrigues, where the player characters end up and are forced into action, guided by their goals and principles. The landscape does not have a predestined story or plot associated with it; instead, scenes arise when the players act or react to challenges presented by the game environment.

This model is sometimes called a "sandbox", to emphasize that the players, through their characters, may try to build what they want and solve any problems that might emerge, by using whatever tools are available at that location.

It is the goal of the group that creates missions and incentive. The Gamemaster can place smaller problems or missions between the characters and their long-term goals, as long as the rewards of these missions point towards the goals of the characters. Such complications can turn a relatively straightforward goal into an entire campaign.

The benefits of a landscape are that it is the goals of the player characters that drive them forward, and that the story becomes their own unique one.

The disadvantage (if considered as such) is that this model demands a higher level of commitment, both from the players and the Gamemaster – for the players, because the characters' goal needs to be more developed and have relevance to the landscape; for the Gamemaster, since all local groups have to be managed and understood when the progress of events completely depends on the actions of the player characters.

Friends and Foes

In an adventure landscape, it is less obvious who will become the enemy and antagonist of the player characters, since it is often the characters decisions that dictates who they will gain as an ally and who will be their enemy. The local power struggle can be crucial to what happens when the characters arrive and start to stir things up.

The Gamemaster would do well to decide (or in the case of published adventures, read up on) the local power factions: what they seek to accomplish, both in the short and long run, as well as what resources they have at hand. Knowing such details is absolutely vital when managing the landscape.

KEY SCENES

Each adventure – classical or landscape – usually contains the following Key Scenes in order to guide the story from beginning to end. The course of the classical adventure is more predictable, while scenes in a landscape are created by the initiative and ideas of the player characters. However, when the dust finally settles over the landscape, these scenes have usually been played out, which is why a wise Gamemaster always makes sure to prepare for that eventuality.

The Beginning

The beginning of an adventure can be the offering of a quest/mission or some other event that sets things in motion and makes the players start acting towards their goals. The goal can be connected to the mission's promised reward, or have been expressed by the group long before. One safe bet is to make short-term survival the goal of the player characters, by throwing an unexpected challenge at them, a technique called "in medias res". If done right, the players will give themselves a mission as a result of the challenge.

The Gamemaster should consider whether the main mission of the adventure is positively motivated (the characters gain something they want by doing it) or negatively motivated (the characters avoid something they do not want by accomplishing the mission). Positive incentives tend to be most appreciated by gamers, followed by a combination of carrot (reward) and stick (something that the characters want to avoid at all costs).

Positive incentives include:

- Reward connected to the goal of a character – knowledge, an object or other resources that the character needs.
- Reward connected to the goal of the group – knowledge, an object or other resources that the group needs.
- A call for help from an ally, with a promise of a favor in return at a later date.

It is possible to create fun and effective survival adventures, despite that they are by nature driven by negative incentives ("survive, if you can..."). The key is that the player characters are forced by the environment, not by a specific person or group. It is even better if the characters can continue to strive toward their goals, but the negative incentive makes it more complicated by introducing time pressure, difficult moral choices or something like that ("we can return home, but we must first get past the quarantine around this plague-stricken city: how do we get out with these twenty-two crates of supplies?")

Examples of negative incentives can be:

- **Caught in a siege.** The characters are stuck in a city under siege and have to complete their missions in the city before the walls fall and enemy forces come pouring in.
- **Marked for death by an organization.** The characters realize (maybe through an attack) that they are marked for death by an organization. Maybe it is obvious to the characters why this is happening, or maybe the reason behind the attacks is a mystery on its own? Either way, the mark of death must be lifted in order for the characters to accomplish their goals in their current location.
- **Falsely accused.** The characters are falsely accused of a crime in a location where they need to be able to act in the open. "Who has accused us/fabricated the evidence and why?" become questions that have to be answered; at the same time as the characters have to move in the shadowy side of society, constantly afraid to be sold out by its less trustworthy elements.
- **The threat of war.** A war is about to break out and it will most probably destroy something that the characters hold dear. The characters must do anything they can to prevent the war, in one way or another. Perhaps by forming an alliance strong enough to deter any attacks, or perhaps they can take out the enemy's leadership.

Campaign, Adventure and Session

In this book we refer to things called campaign, adventure and game session. The latter simply refers to a single game meeting where you and your friends get together for a shorter or a longer period of gaming. An *adventure* is a separate story on its own, with a clear beginning and end, that can last from one to several game sessions. Finally, the word *campaign* refers to a long series of adventures that are either connected or more or less independent from one another. To make the distinction between adventure and campaign even more evident, you can compare an adventure to a single book or an episode in a series, while the campaign represents the series as a whole.

- **Quarantine after plague outbreak.** The characters find themselves stuck on the wrong side of a quarantine zone and have to escape or cure the disease, while they also have another task to perform at the same location.
- **Demand for help.** The characters are more or less forced to help their mother organization or another group that they depend on, something that proves to be problematic and also contradictory to their own local goals. The question is how – or even if – they can solve their own tasks while at the same time making the group/organization satisfied?

Confrontation

Before the adventure's Turning Point, the characters usually confront the antagonists twice. A proven model is to start with a simple meeting, to establish the antagonism, and then a second, more serious one to emphasize that the enemy poses a significant threat. An often used dramatic method is making the enemy superior the second time, forcing the characters to flee a battle in which winning is the same as getting away.

Turning Point

The characters discover a way to break the dominance of the enemy or at least find a way to strike at its heart, against their leaders or stronghold. Perhaps they defeat an enemy that carries secret documents or they manage to find a lost ritual in a crumbling library that can temporarily weaken the enemy's forces so that their leadership can be attacked.

The Turning Point is the moment when the player characters reclaim the initiative and are given an ace to play. From the Turning Point on, the characters know what to do, although it may neither be easy nor safe to do it.

Climax

The insight of the Turning Point is tested against a cruel world in the final stage of the adventure. The Climax usually occurs when the main antagonist is confronted and forced against the wall in a tremendous final battle.

Designing a Landscape

SO, TO THE promised template for designing adventure landscapes – not to be regarded as a detailed, step-by-step instruction manual, but rather a set of components to work with.

The adventure *Blight Night*, which is used as an example in this passage, can be found at the back of the book (page 187). Hopefully it will also serve the purpose of being something of a tutorial for those Gamemasters (and players) who have not run this type of scenario before.

PLOTS

When working up an adventure landscape, the first question is, of course, what the landscape should be about. Should it be directly linked to *Ruins of Symbaroum*'s main theme, perhaps involving a ruin abundant with treasures and darkness, under the protection of the Iron Pact – a ruin the player characters can seek out as treasure hunters or to stop another expedition from awakening its darkness? Perhaps a more indirect link is preferable, for example a village or outpost terrorized by an elusive predator that has been attracted to the place by returning fortune hunters?

Either way, we recommend that you write a broad overview of the plot – its conflict and involved parties. Also, make a few notes about how the player characters could become involved and engaged in the scenario. Perhaps a friend or relative is in urgent need of their help; perhaps they are formally hired by someone to investigate the place; or maybe they end up there by coincidence and are drawn into the plot more or less against their will.

EXAMPLE: BLIGHT NIGHT

The plot of the adventure Blight Night is indirectly linked to the struggle between Civilization and Nature. It is about a person (the robber baron Nightblade) who has plundered ruins in Davokar and become increasingly tainted by corruption, so much so that she is close to turning into a howling abomination: her blood red eyes already glow unnaturally in the dark, and she is constantly surrounded by a stench of brimstone and doom. In her desperation, Nightblade hopes to find some Water of the Dusk (see page 141) to cleanse her body of corruption, and she is prepared to go very far to reach her goal!

The player characters are drawn into the story when they happen to come between the blight-stricken knight and the Water of the Dusk – they must decide whether to stand and fight or to flee and thereby leave a large number of innocent people to a slow and painful death.

Secondary Themes

Adventure designers seeking to add further depth to their creation may well incorporate a secondary theme into the plot. It could be jealousy, greed, oppression, or other forces that players can easily recognize and relate to. Or why not positive phenomena such as love, generosity, and justice, in contrast to the game's fateful main theme?

The secondary theme may connect to the primary one or serve to spice up the adventure by making the place or some of the non-player characters more interesting.

LOCATION

An adventure landscape takes place in a single location. It can span a whole town or it can be a limited forest area; but it can just as well be a solitary castle or a cluster of palisaded buildings, like Jakad's Heart in our example adventure (see below).

Besides being a suitable setting for the story that will unfold there, the location should also be given unique features in terms of structure and history – things that make it a more interesting and memorable place. Perhaps it was the scene of a great battle, or the place where the battle was planned, and maybe there are still items around (authentic or counterfeit) to prove it? Perhaps legends say the landscape was an important outpost, market or meeting place hundreds of years ago, with remnants (real or otherwise) that give life and nourishment to the stories?

Although the location should almost be a character in itself, its features do not necessarily have to be linked to the theme/plot. Adventure landscapes work best when they are relatively simple in design, and if the plot is becoming too complicated, the Gamemaster should consider leaving the location's features and history as an atmospheric backdrop.

Finally: it might go without saying, but just to be on the safe side we will take the risk of stating the obvious – the designer should draw a map of the landscape; maybe even multiple ones, if the area is vast and contains elements such as ruins or buildings that need to be mapped in detail.

EXAMPLE: BLIGHT NIGHT

The adventure Blight Night takes place at the fortified inn called Jakad's Heart, and consists of three buildings, a pond and a garden. The choice of location was based on a desire for the player characters to be drawn into the plot by accident, and then find it difficult to escape as the robber baron and her minions come to claim the Water of the Dusk.

What makes this setting unique is a legend directly related to the adventure's plot – the legend of the Black Cloak Jakad who was lured to the place by visions and inner voices, and on arriving found a natural spring of holy Water of the Dusk. The spring is still there, in the form of a stone-lined pond that has made the inn a famous pilgrimage site for the Sun God's followers.



The Inciting Incident: the event that stirs the conflict and agents into motion, forcing the PCs to act.

NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS

The way we see it, the adventure landscape's cast of non-player characters can be divided into three categories: lifegivers, potential allies and adversaries. But before creating any characters we would first suggest that the designer return to the four questions mentioned under Population in the chapter titled Building Game Worlds (page 96).

As for the categories, the adversary is usually the most important, followed by potential allies and, finally, lifegivers. In a world like *Ruins of Symbaroum*, where the game designer rarely knows in advance which side the player characters will be on, one must often create two (if not more) mutually hostile groups who are presented to the players as potential allies or adversaries – which group becomes what is ultimately decided by the player characters' choices. But in their purest form, the categories can be defined as follows:

Adversaries are characters who in all likelihood will end up in conflict with the player characters. The most interesting adversaries have motives they themselves consider rational and that the players/player characters can understand, even if their methods are reprehensible. Like the location, they should be given specific features that make them memorable, particularly if the designer plans on having the same enemy appear in future adventures.

Potential allies are people or creatures who may be persuaded to help out if the player characters share their goals. The difference between a Potential Ally and a Lifegiver is that the former has some sort of ability, knowledge or resource of value to the player characters. Successfully persuading such individuals should make a difference; it might enable new approaches to a problem, or simply tilt the odds in the player characters' favor.

Lifegivers are characters who, simply put, give life to the setting, and who give the players a connection to the place in question; people to care about, who will probably suffer unless the player characters handle the situation. Lifegivers can be described very briefly and normally require no stats or features.

EXAMPLE: BLIGHT NIGHT

Blight Night is a simple landscape with a clear conflict and an equally clear-cut antagonist in the form of the blight-stricken robber baron Nightblade – she is close to being thoroughly corrupted, and her desperate wish to avoid this fate is what drives her to violence. She is not a likable person, and her methods are bloody, but most players can probably sympathize (to some extent) with her goal – to avoid the cruel fate of blight birth.

The house-ogre Leaf is a potential ally, but mostly interested in protecting the innkeeper Koldra and her family, rather than participating in attacks on the enemy – unless the player characters put forward convincing arguments! Another potential ally is the rebellious goblin Shuggludd, who wants nothing more than to free his people from the drug addiction that is causing them to follow Nightblade.

Most of the other non-player characters are lifegivers. Innkeeper Koldra and her family are only mentioned in passing, and their sole function is as victims if the player characters should fail to repel the attack. The drunken minstrel Blackhawk is primarily a lifegiver as well, although he also serves to provide information about the legendary Water of the Dusk. Otherwise he is of little use to anyone.

INCITING INCIDENTS

No matter the landscape's design, and no matter how the player characters end up there, it can be a good idea to come up with a clear inciting incident that sets the plot in motion, introduces the conflict, and forces everyone involved to take action. This is almost always some substantial change in circumstances – the death of an ally, the arrival or awakening of a powerful monster, a sudden attack against the party or their companions or a new demand from a leader or opposition figure. The inciting incident can occur shortly after the player characters' arrival to the landscape, or later on when the conflict has become clear and alliances have already been formed.

Although the plot of an adventure landscape is largely shaped by the player characters' actions, the inciting incident is an event that cannot be avoided and inevitably forces a reaction. It is what brings the conflict to a head. When used correctly, it means the players and their characters are confronted with a situation with at least two options to choose from – taking sides in the conflict, getting involved or trying to stay out of it, attacking or focusing on defense, and so on.

EXAMPLE: BLIGHT NIGHT

An arrow hitting the shutters of the inn, followed by a hysterically ringing alarm bell, marks the beginning of Blight Night. The player characters find the palisade surrounded by frenzied goblins on the warpath. A bit further away, in the field south of the inn, a larger group of goblins are performing a rousing war dance; in the middle of them rises a single robed figure (Nightblade) who directs the goblins toward the inn with her black sword raised to the night sky.

The player characters are faced with a difficult choice: to stay and organize the resistance or try to run away. Either way, the event forces them to act.

DEVELOPMENTS

Coming up with and writing down possible developments is not strictly speaking necessary, but it is often wise to consider what might happen once the adventure landscape's conflict has been resolved. This is mostly about making educated guesses, based on the conflict's background and the parties involved. If the landscape is designed for a specific group of players/player characters, the designer's knowledge regarding these people should of course be taken into account as well.

Developments can pick up where the main conflict of the landscape left off – the enemy could turn out to have employers or allies who do not want the player characters to get away, or who want to see their lackey's mission completed. Other options are to build on some potential ally who has other problems to deal with, or turns out to have been lying about his/her intentions.

EXAMPLE: BLIGHT NIGHT

The Blight Night landscape provides a couple of suggested developments centered around the goblin tribe Varraguldru whose members have been enslaved by Nightblade and her alchemist Ashfaru.

One of these developments involves a way for the player characters to fend off the goblins' attack – if they can be freed from their extensive drug addiction, Nightblade will lose her robber band and be easier to defeat.

That Little Extra

It does not hurt if the adventure landscape adds something extra. It could be a new artifact, ritual, rule, etcetera – something that makes the adventure more memorable, not least by being recalled every time the new item or rule is used. More traditional rewards such as gold coins or other valuables are also an option, but they rarely contribute much to the feeling of a living and engaging game world. In Blight Night, that little extra consists of three artifacts and as many new elixirs.

Chronicles

A WHOLE BOOK, if not two, could be written about the creation of adventure chronicles. In this chapter we will nevertheless attempt to summarize what we believe are important lessons we have learned from working on a variety of chronicles for *Ruins of Symbaroum* and other lines. We will also make references to the The Copper Crown (an introductory campaign included in the *Ruins of Symbaroum* Adventure Compendium), as an example of how chronicles do not always have to span hundreds of pages and hundreds of thousands of words.

What is a Chronicle?

NONE OF US are particularly interested in discussing semantics, trying to clear up what this or that term "actually" means – it can go on for days without leading to a common understanding, as the words used in the discussion are themselves subject to interpretation. For this reason we will simply try to explain what we mean by "adventure chronicle."

A SERIES OF ADVENTURES

A chronicle consists of a series of thematically linked adventures, which all foreshadow the chronicle's finale. The adventures must be at least three in number, but do not have to be played back-to-back. On the contrary, we recommend that each of the chronicle's episodes be designed with an open ending that points the way to the next episode, but leaves room for the player characters to pursue other interests in between. Sure, if you create the chronicle for personal use and have the whole thing finished before the game begins, it is perfectly possible to create a more direct link between the episodes. But if your episodes (like ours) are written or published some time apart, it may be wise not to leave the player characters hanging until the next book comes out.

A NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

Chronicles follow a structure similar to that of classic adventures (page 105), but on a larger scale. In the build-up to the turning point, the story is largely about getting to know the chronicle's cast of characters, understanding their relationships and conflicts, and realizing what is at stake. After the turning point, the player characters know what must be done, and so the journey toward the more or less bombastic conclusion begins, and turns out to be lined with many difficult challenges. For more on this, see The Course of the Chronicle below.

A FATEFUL THEME

On this point there may of course be certain variations, but the outcome of a chronicle should have serious consequences for a large number of humanoids – the stakes are high, in terms of life or death, suffering or relief, starvation or abundance. It could affect the fate of the whole world, or the future of a specific nation, region or people. Whatever the scale, the players should feel that their characters have a considerable responsibility, and that their actions have a real impact on the world / region / people's living conditions.

A CHANGING WORLD

During the chronicle, the player characters cannot be everywhere at the same time, but that does not mean the rest of the world is standing still. Think about how different groups are acting, internally and toward each other, and compile a list of important events and changes in the balance of power or the groups' internal composition. How you later convey this to the players and their characters may vary: some things can be told in an introductory narrative before a game session, other things can be learned from non-player characters they encounter, and in other cases they may see the effects of what happened directly – streams of refugees, burnt-down villages or thoroughly corrupted woods.

RECURRING ROLES

Who does not love to hate an archenemy? Who is not happy to be reunited with the person who once saved one's life or helped solve an impossible problem? Any chronicle of merit needs recurring characters to help tie the episodes together and add depth to the story.

Or should we say "recurring individuals"? That these individuals, and their roles in the chronicle, are allowed to change is something we strongly recommend. It could be everything from a cheerful innkeeper whose spirit has been darkened by a personal tragedy, to a sworn enemy who sees the error of her ways and suddenly offers to join the player characters' cause. Or vice versa. Few things stir up more emotion than a dear friend and confidant suddenly being revealed as an enemy agent...

Make the World Your Own

Before we move on, we would like to reiterate the importance of making the game world your own. Whether you create your own *Ruins of Symbaroum* chronicle or use the episodes of *The Throne of Thorns* or *The Copper Crown*, you should always assume the right to change, add and remove as you see fit. In the latter case, this could cause information in future episodes of the chronicle to deviate from how things have developed in your particular game world. But such problems are easily remedied by changing, adding and removing.

The First Adventure

THE FIRST EPISODE of the chronicle must introduce the players to the story in a way that makes them hungry for more – more to know, more to do. If you are writing your own chronicle for personal use, you probably know your players well enough to understand what they find entertaining and engaging, and if you are Gamemastering a predesigned adventure series it is important to adjust it with that knowledge in mind.

ESTABLISH THE PLOT

Besides the fact that the first episode must have a plot that is interesting and engaging in and of itself, it should also establish what the chronicle as a whole is about. It should not reveal exactly how and/or where the climax of the final episode will take place; it is important to maintain the suspense that comes from suspecting but not knowing, to have an idea but not fully understand. A guideline could be that, after completing the first adventure, the players and their characters should have a clear picture of the chronicle's main conflict and know the story's most important operators well enough to imagine how the story might end.

In *Wrath of the Warden*, the first episode of *The Throne of Thorns*, we will attempt to accomplish precisely this. The adventure's plot is directly linked to the game's theme: an Ambrian who in search of power uses violence against a nature spirit, which causes the forces of nature to retaliate and rouses the Iron Pact's agents to action. But in order to identify and neutralize this threat, the player characters must interact with several of the factions involved in the chronicle's main conflict: the struggle for dominance over the Davokar region and its inhabitants.

This becomes particularly clear when the Queen's representatives hire the player characters to steal a politically sensitive copper plate from the agents of the Sun Church, but it shines through in other places as well – in meetings with victims of Ambria's conquests (the Beast Clan); in conversations with the living Lightbringer Deseba the Old, which hints at the schism within the Church of Prios; during the visit to the Halls of a Thousand Tears, where the player characters get a glimpse of what dark forces the power struggle might awaken.

ANTAGONISTS

The first adventure should introduce all groups who will come to play important roles in the chronicle. If there are many different factions, some may be less prominent in the story than others, but it should still be possible to encounter all of them, if only in passing. Furthermore, we recommend that the player characters are initially introduced to the groups' less prominent representatives, but learn the names of their leaders and top agents. Some exceptions can be made, so the players feel early on that their characters have a role to play in the forthcoming struggle.

It is essential that these encounters give the player characters an idea of what the factions want to achieve, how they relate to each other, and what their internal power balance is like. The information obtained does not have to be true –the minions could lie, express hopes rather than facts, or simply be uninformed about the political game being played above their heads. The important thing is to make it clear that the factions have very different ambitions and that the future might therefore look very different depending on who emerges victorious from the power struggle.

Wrath of the Warden involves all factions featured in *The Throne of Thorns*. The Witches can even serve as the player characters' quest givers, while House Kohinoor, the Priesthood, the Sun Knights, and the Iron Pact appear in different missions. The Sacred of the Old Blood are behind the adventure's plot, without revealing themselves to the players other than in rumors and speculations, and the Sovereign's Oath plays an even smaller part – they only appear in the adventure seed *The Blood Daughter*, and it is up to the Gamemaster to decide whether the representatives of the Sovereign's Oath should be introduced to the players before they take center stage in the chronicle's second adventure, *The Witch Hammer*.

In *Wrath of the Warden* the player characters are only able to encounter underlings of the factions' most prominent leaders, with two shining exceptions. When dealing with the Witches they will not meet the Huldra herself, but a pair of her closest advisors, Gadramon and Eferneya. The second exception is Deseba the Old and Father Sarvola – two characters who at the time of the meeting have a toned-down role within the Sun Church, but who will grow in power and esteem over the course of the chronicle.

And speaking of recurring roles, we have also taken the opportunity to plant a couple of future antagonists in *Wrath of the Warden*: Kullinan Furia who is the main antagonist in *Yndaros – The Darkest Star*, and Agramai Kalfas (a.k.a. the Prince) who steps out of the shadows in *Symbar – Mother of Darkness*. The player characters have a chance to encounter both of them during their adventure in Thistle Hold, and in the former case carry out a mission alongside their future foe.

FORESHADOW THE GRAND

We think it may be unwise to roll out the big guns straight away and let the player characters experience the game world's grand events and phenomena in the very first adventure. Sure, the beginning should also evoke feelings of wonder and grandeur, but we still recommend holding back a bit – otherwise the epic elements may not affect the players as strongly the second time around.

Our guiding principle is usually to put the player characters in situations that foreshadow the mysterious and the wondrous. They could hear about it, read eyewitness accounts from the place or from encounters with the person/creature,

Design Premise: Incentives

When designing adventures and chronicles to be played by others, the challenge is to make them flexible enough to be playable in many different ways. This is especially true in a game world such as Symbaroum's, where it is difficult to know in advance what goals and alliances the player characters will have – they may just as well be aligned with the Queen of Ambria as with the Iron Pact. Our solution is to have our adventures provide the gaming group with a number of different incentives/motivations to choose from, but as a Gamemaster with a given group of player characters you are always free to tailor the adventure to their specific goals and ambitions.

From a Gamemaster's perspective it can sometimes, despite our best efforts, be a challenge to provide all characters (and players) with solid incentives for engaging in premade scenarios. Our primary suggestion on this issue is to make the incentives into the concern of the entire gaming group, not only the Gamemaster.

Once you have familiarized yourself with the adventure or chronicle, bring up the topic with the players. If the discussion takes place before player characters have been created, the incentives can provide a point of departure in the creation process and be reflected in their goals, individually and as a group. And should you already have a party of characters, the respective players will surely have some thoughts on what will motivate them to take on a certain problem or solve a specific mystery.

Note that the incentives do not always have to be personally and directly grounded; the important thing is that taking part in the adventure moves the character closer to his or her goal. A character whose aim is to seek revenge on a particular faction, family or person, may not be given an opportunity for this in every scenario – instead the adventure may offer information, contacts and other resources that indirectly contribute to the main goal.

maybe find maps or mosaics depicting the phenomenon in question, without actually facing it themselves. Presented correctly, this gives the players something to look forward to, to long and strive for – or something to fear and try to avoid.

A large sinkhole opening in central Thistle Hold, with twisted Beast Clan warriors storming up from the deep, may of course be considered a grand event, as could the sight of the Huldra's closest associates approaching the town on their enormous colossi. Perhaps the visit to the cells underneath Thistle Hold's sun temple will also fill the player characters with a sense of wonder, but these situations are still relatively modest compared to what happens in later episodes.

The clearest examples of situations in *Wrath of the Warden* that foreshadow the grander events are of course the visits to the Halls of a Thousand Tears and the limited part of the Underworld that can be reached through the sinkhole. In the former case, the player characters find a sketch map with cryptic notes, and later get to visit what is best described as the halls' antechamber. As for the Underworld, they are introduced to its existence, its blight, and its nature with both water and vegetation. Naturally, the player characters will have reason to return to both of these places later in the chronicle and experience them in all their splendor.

The Course of the Chronicle

ASIDE FROM THE rising grandeur and deepened understanding that have already been mentioned, there are a number of points we usually bear in mind when it comes to the chronicle's middle section, whether it consists of one or multiple episodes.

The first and most important thing is of course to progress toward the chronicle's conclusion, step-by-step, as the player characters learn more and more about the main conflict, the parties involved, and what is at stake. Here it may be a good idea to outline a rough course of events at an early stage, laying out when and how the characters can obtain information that allows them to approach the situation in a new way, from a different perspective, or that leads to a new place or trail.

Each such point can mark the end of an adventure, or (if they are numerous enough) be divided into groups of two or three when creating scenarios with multiple turning points. In *Ruins of Symbaroum's* great chronicle, the middle adventures' points are directly related to *the Throne of Thorns* and its (assumed) location, the ruined city of Symbar. *The Witch Hammer* ends with the trails leading to the ruins of the city state Lindaros underneath Yndaros; at the end of *The Darkest Star*, the player characters (and others) obtain directions to Symbar, and so on.

Aside from all this, we believe that the following is important to keep in mind.

DYNAMICS

Some gaming groups may always want lots of action and a fast pace, and others might want every scenario to be a whodunit-style mystery, but we would still suggest that you try to make the story dynamic in several senses. We always opt to alternate fast-paced scenes with periods of rest, discussion, and reflection; action with less stressful problem solving or information gathering; linear stories with open, player-driven landscapes.

As mentioned earlier, regarding contrasts, there is a significant risk that your gaming sessions will feel like a big gray mass unless the dynamics change from time to time. Perhaps it would be best if all adventures contain a bit of everything, but have a different focus. *Mark of the Beast* is mostly a linear, slow-burning murder mystery focused on problem solving, but also has elements of action and room for the player characters to take their own initiatives. *Tomb of Dying Dreams* can be described as its opposite: an adventure landscape with lots of potential for action and combat, but with possibilities to slow down during negotiations and investigations.

Also remember to leave some room for recovery between adventures, so both the players and their characters get a chance to reflect on and learn from what has happened.

This adds further weight to our suggestion that the player characters should not be forced to go directly from one adventure to the next. Sure, so-called "cliffhangers" have their dramatic uses, but are perhaps best employed within the framework of an adventure, between one encounter and another.

THEMATIC VARIATION

It is also good if the designer tries to achieve variation with regard to antagonists and theme. Try to find different angles on the chronicle's main conflict, where each of the game world's factions has a more or less prominent role. This gives the player characters a chance to learn more about the parties involved – their resources, methods, willingness to compromise, etc. – but also means that, because of the differences inherent to each faction, they will probably have to learn how to handle different types of tactical challenges.

In *the Throne of Thorns* we have mainly tried to give all factions their share of the spotlight within the framework of the chronicle's episodes, but also left things relatively open in terms of who could be standing in the player characters' way. The reason for this is, again, that we cannot assume that the characters will have certain friends and enemies, or that their alliances will stay the same throughout the chronicle.

For example, in *Karvosti – The Witch Hammer* it is up to the Gamemaster to decide (randomly or strategically) which factions appear in the various adventure landscapes, while *Symbar – Mother of Darkness* leaves it to the players to form alliances or try to make it on their own. In cases where the adventure involves a clearly defined enemy, *The Throne of Thorns* introduces people that are independent from the factions, such as Erlaber Ambreagos in *Wrath of the Warden* and Kullinan Furia in *The Darkest Star*.

TURNING POINT

For chronicles spanning more than three normal length adventures we recommend that the story reaches at least one crescendo (or climax) on the way to the conclusion – an epic turning point when the player characters think they have achieved an important objective, only to realize that their problems are far from over; a great victory or terrible defeat that only turns out to give them a new chance to prove their mettle.

The Throne of Thorns' turning point occurs in its fourth episode, when the player characters finally reach the legendary city of Symbar. What they learn in the ruined capital of the fallen empire is probably best not to reveal in this book, but it is safe to say that the story does not end there.

The trail leads back to Lindaros and onward to the former nemesis of Ambria: the Dark Lord's native land of Lyastra – there are still many adventures to be had!

WORLD DEVELOPMENTS

One thing you must never forget over the course of the chronicle is what happens in various parts of the game world while the player characters are absent. The events that occur during their adventures will likely cause ripples, at least in places where the factions have some degree of influence. Furthermore, it is likely that rumors and news will reach common folk in villages, settlements and outposts. If a faction should suffer a crushing defeat or achieve a glorious triumph, the news would undoubtedly spread to many parts of the world, and if the player characters had a hand in what happened, they might very well gain a reputation.

Our suggestion, whether you are game mastering *The Throne of Thorns* or some other campaign, is that after every major world event you take some time to consider what short- and long-term consequences it will have. Perhaps a leading figure is fired from her position; perhaps that person decides to take revenge on those responsible? Perhaps there is a shift in a specific faction's internal relations, so the success/defeat in question leaves it more divided or united than before? And how will the general public react to what is happening? Under the right circumstances even losers can become winners, if the defeat results in greater support from the public.

On Downtime

When designing (or leading) an adventure chronicle, it is always important to leave room for downtime, that is, time for the characters to engage in other activities besides adventuring. This gives the players a chance to develop their characters, rules-wise and in other respects.

Concerning the rules, there are for starters some features that are meant to be used during downtime, in the form of Alchemy, Blacksmith and Artifact Crafting. Moreover, often it is not until the character has time to relax (during or between adventures) that accumulated Experience Points can be exchanged for a higher level and improved abilities, features and feats – something which in all likelihood requires time spent with a teacher or in a dusty old archive. It is also possible for a player character to be employed by a person or organization, own an establishment of their own (see the boon Enterprise on page 148 in the *Ruins of Symbaroum Player's Guide*) or have a family that requires attention and effort. And within this book, you will find guidelines on the management of a Domain (page 163), which can turn into a very time-consuming business.

These considerations should ideally include the player characters and their part in the drama. Even for gaming groups who would rather not immerse themselves in the social game, it can be good for the characters' actions to have consequences – perhaps something as simple as being banned from an inn because they oppose a faction represented by the innkeeper, or being offered a discount if the opposite is the case.

The Climax of the Chronicle

HOW DO YOU give your adventure chronicle a worthy climax? There are probably as many answers to that question as there are gaming groups in the world, or close to it.

When discussing this, we are often in complete agreement about certain things. The first and most important is that the player characters should bear significant responsibility for, and influence over, the outcome – they should be the ones who decide how the whole thing ends, or at least have a real chance of steering the outcome in a desirable direction. Secondly, no one questions how important it is for the climax to take place in a marvelous place and involve opponents and potential allies who are a) powerful in every sense of the word, and b) well known to the player characters, ideally sharing a more or less checkered past.

Additionally, we would like to give you the following pieces of advice.

KEEP IT SIMPLE

You would do best to make sure that the social playing field is not too complicated in the run-up to the final confrontation. The chronicle can feature a large number of groups, many of which want roughly the same thing but serve different leaders, with different methods and resources. But more and more of these should drop away the closer you get to the ending – they could simply be wiped out, band together, or decide to put their ambitions on hold.

This has the benefit of making the main conflict particularly clear; suddenly the battle is between two or three combatants with clear and distinct goals. The player characters could be one of these or act as a wild card, with the power to tip the scales one way or the other (or in a different direction altogether).

In the *Chronicle of The Throne of Thorns*, the Gamemaster will be given influence over which groups will participate in the ultimate struggle for power over the Davokar region, and the player characters' actions will likely have a certain impact as well. But no matter which factions are left standing to take part in the final showdown, each of them should represent a different side of the main conflict: one fighting for civilization's right to dominate nature, one striving to liberate nature from the yoke of civilization, and one who believes that a balance can be struck and maintained – three mutually exclusive positions that leave no room for compromise!

EPIC SCENERY

Perhaps it goes without saying, but it is too important not to highlight: the chronicle's conclusion deserves an epic scene, or maybe a whole series of them.

We are not saying they have to be a certain way, but that the setting should be significant – it should symbolize the main conflict of the chronicle, be historically linked to the conflict, and feel impressive. The latter is of course a matter of taste, but you have to admit that *The Lord of the Rings'* climax would not be the same if the Ring of Power had been forged in a small smithy in the idyllic countryside of the Shire.

At the time of writing, it is not entirely clear where *The Throne of Thorns* will reach its epic finale. We have a fairly good idea, but want to keep it to ourselves for now. Instead we can point to the chronicle's fourth episode *Symbar – Mother of Darkness*, where the showdown is staged in the hall of the actual Throne of Thorns. The epic finale of *Alberetor – The Haunted Waste* is also worth mentioning, as it takes place on a garden island covered by glittering perma-ice, located at the eye of a black, tornado-like opal storm.

CONSIDERABLE RISK

The chronicle's climax should involve a life-or-death struggle where both outcomes are just as likely, or where the risk of dying is even greater than the chance of survival. There are two points to this – first, few things will ruin the experience and memory of a chronicle more than a final battle that is too easy to win; second, the players will feel a greater sense of triumph if they succeed in the face of tremendous adversity.

The latter is not only a matter of providing the opponents with high stats and powerful artifacts. Rather, it is about staging a series of simple, strategic challenges combined with appropriate resistance. It is a difficult balancing act – too easy and there is a considerable risk of an anticlimax (as above); too complicated, and immersion may be broken by prolonged discussions about tactics and how to interpret the rules.

This all takes a great deal of mental effort, but also a good understanding of the players and their specific characters – what features, items and stats they have; which tactics they normally use. It is therefore hard to offer blanket advice on this matter, other than by referring to the guidelines on page 18 for constructing combats and using challenge ratings.

Rewards & Magical Treasures

THE PLAYERS' PARTICIPATION in and enthusiasm for the game depends largely on what rewards they gain from the sessions – things their characters acquire over the course of the game, but also the social boost from their friends around the gaming table. Here we delve into the former type of reward and offer tips on how you as a Gamemaster can balance the players' experiences of scarcity and abundance. Showering the player characters with rewards is just as unfulfilling (possibly even boring) as not giving them enough.

Enhanced Rewards

A FUNDAMENTAL IDEA for the guidelines in this chapter is that rewards in play must be adapted to the individual player – what one person likes may not appeal to another, and vice versa. As acting Gamemaster, you have to really know your gaming group well, and make sure to use that knowledge to tailor the rewards to the players and their characters.

PLAYER TYPES AND REWARDS

It is worth the time to contemplate why the members of your gaming group play roleplaying games. Each player needs to get some of his or her "medicine" at each session, or else interest in the game will fade. Of course, the same goes for the Gamemaster, and many player motivations echo within a Gamemaster. Here is a list of common types of players.

The Action Hero

The Action Hero plays for the excitement, which is usually found in combat. The player seeks power and possibilities to affect the game world and enjoys seeing his or her actions have effect in the world – or on the character sheet. Appreciated rewards: Action scenes; equipment that makes the character tougher in battle.

The Problem Solver

This player wants to feel smart and to solve problems, like tactical problems in challenging battles or riddles and tricky intrigues in the game world. The Problem Solver often becomes restless if no problem is presented, or if the problems are too easily solved. Appreciated rewards: Problems to solve; rituals and artifacts that makes them better at solving problems.

The Social Player

For the Social Player, the camaraderie and the shared story are the most central aspects of the game, and a good atmosphere is often considered more important than being successful in the actual game. Appreciated rewards: Social challenges and scenes where the player's character can talk and interact to succeed; pure roleplaying scenes, where characters and non-player characters are having discussions; interludes where the player characters can socialize without any pressure or rules; social time before, in between and after the game session.

The Explorer

The player wants to explore the game world and understand it, with their character merely acting as a mirror for the player as it is traveling in Ambria and Davokar. Appreciated rewards: New places, new persons and new mysteries.

The Dramaturge

The player seeks opportunities to experience or act out emotions not usually found in everyday life or otherwise unacceptable to act out/play within a context where consequences become real. Players with a dramatic inclination can often act as instigators in the game, especially if they feel that the current session is boring or slow. Handled right, this player can be a good energy boost for the group. Appreciated rewards: Scenes where the character can act as a leader – or an anti-leader, as a rebel in the group; situations where the characters are the balance of power and can control the turn of events.

THE RELATIVE VALUE OF REWARDS

One might say that *Ruins of Symbaroum* has a floating exchange rate between thaler and Experience points, and this is a deliberate design premise. It is up to the Gamemaster to appraise and balance rewards, with the help of the gaming group who, through their reactions, will provide feedback to the Gamemaster. Together you must try to figure out what is a reasonable level of rewards to keep the game interesting.

Here we will try to explain how Experience and other rewards are interconnected, on the basis of an adventuring career as the rewards interact a bit differently over time. The system is not strictly mathematical, but should provide



Blissfully unaware, Master Iokum and his friend Aneas wander towards certain death.

Gamemasters who want it with a tool for comparing different types of rewards. Just remember that it is ultimately the players who decide what something is really worth. "The price is what you pay, the value is what you get," as the saying goes.

Starting Point

It goes without saying that the game will provide more money than Experience, and that the first improvements to the player characters will likely come from equipment rather than enhanced stats. For inexperienced characters, monetary rewards are particularly effective in quickly increasing the group's combat capability – thaler to invest in equipment, elixirs, and what is referred to in the *Ruins of Symbaroum Player's Guide* as Lesser Artifacts.

More powerful mystical artifacts are obviously attractive, but it is by no means certain that newly created characters will find any that are worth investing in (i.e. the cost of attunement and the additional permanent Corruption) – mystical artifacts are often good if they match a player character's specialty, but less so if they do not.

Mid-Career

Player characters who have been adventuring for a while have usually purchased the ordinary equipment they want, and started to obtain weapons, armor, and items with Properties that match their features. The players have also started to discover another aspect of *Ruins of Symbaroum*'s rules: there are clear limits on how much they can improve their stats through equipment, and doing so quickly becomes very expensive. Consequently, the urge to spend thaler usually passes after a while; the value of additional equipment is outweighed by the cost in coin or simply not available.

Now Experience comes into play, in the form of new (or higher levels of old) features. The gaming group has no doubt gotten their hands on a number of artifacts as well, some of which are well-suited to certain characters; in that case the group's capability is increased.

Old Heroes

Experienced player characters are expected to have weapons, armor, and other equipment (Lesser Artifacts, etcetera) that synergize with their features and make them strong in their specialties. They have probably amassed plenty of thaler as well, since money has a clear but limited ability to improve player characters after a certain point. Elixirs are still viable, but they are so cheap anyway that they will not ruin successful adventurers financially.

So, money will be piling up unless the player characters find other uses for it, for example investing in businesses, estates, fiefs, and so on. Artifacts (Lesser and Greater) are hard currency – they become particularly interesting as the gaming group has likely picked up a bunch of them by now, and every player character should find at least one worth attunement.

Story-wise there is also an opening for social rewards at this point. The player characters are individually competent and have undoubtedly made their mark on the world in a way that has caught the eye of the world's leading figures. Offering the player characters high-ranking positions or some land to rule is a natural development that facilitates interesting gameplay, as described under the header Princes of the Land below.

ENRICHING OPTIONAL RULES

Ruins of Symbaroum contains several modular options, allowing a gaming group to adjust the rules as they see fit, and many of the new mechanics presented here in the *Gamemaster's Guide* and in the *Player's Guide* are formulated as optional, or alternative, rules.

Several of these mechanics can, if the gaming group decides to apply them, be used to reward the characters and their players with other things than XP and valuables.

Boons as Rewards

Boons and burdens are introduced in the *Ruins of Symbaroum Player's Guide*, partly as an extension of traits for player characters, partly as optional feats. Many boons work well as rewards, and affect both the story and a character's stats.

But the Gamemaster needs to be careful, as giving a character a boon is almost the same as giving them another level. If you decide to do it, make sure that either the entire group receives the reward at one time or the other players know that they will have an equal chance to receive such an award later. Also, you'll want to make sure that the boon is perceived as a reward by the player. Instead of offering a specific boon, the Gamemaster can talk to the player about which boon might suit the character best.

Burdens as Rewards

Offering burdens as rewards may seem counterintuitive, but done correctly it is not a bad idea at all. Handing out burdens after an adventure can be a good way of acknowledging that the player characters have been through a tough experience that left its mark on them.

Once again it is a matter of offering, not imposing, at least if the burden is meant as a reward. The Gamemaster can ask the gaming group which burden(s) they want, with reference to the fact that they just went through a series of traumatic events, and then let the players explain which burdens they have gained and why.

Tables below contain suggested boons and burdens to use for this purpose.

BOONS AS REWARDS
Beast Tongue
Blood Ties
Dark Blood
Enterprise
Forbidden Knowledge
Hideouts
Pet
Servant
Soulmate

BURDENS AS REWARDS
Addiction
Arch Enemy
Bestial
Dark Secret
Elderly
Nightmares
Protégé
Sickly
Wanted

Pact Making

If a player-character has chosen to make a pact (see page 170), it can be a goldmine of rewards that can add depth to the story and be valuable to the player character. It is difficult to say what the pact is worth in itself, since it provides the character with access to power but also corruption, and forces them to pursue one of the power's goals.

Monstrous Traits for Player Characters

The ability to gain monstrous traits has already been implemented in the form of the boon Blood Ties and the burden Dark Blood (see the *Ruins of Symbaroum Player's Guide*, page 148 and 151, respectively). There are deep and dark stories to be found here, but also a couple of mechanical pitfalls: certain combinations of monstrous traits and character features can make player characters very powerful indeed. This does not have to be a problem, but can be difficult to manage for Gamemasters who have not already thought it through.

When handled correctly, this type of reward can greatly enrich the game, as it relates in a concrete way to the conflict between civilization and nature, which is the central theme of Symbaroum – in a way, the player character's body and mind is caught in the middle of this conflict, which is an excellent basis for drama and intrigue. That said, playing a character with exceptional powers while allowing the other players to still contribute to the game can be challenging and we recommend it only for experienced players who are interested in the narrative effects of the reward.

Princes of the Land

A potentially game changing reward is to give the player characters their own domain to manage. Suddenly the characters have acquired something that gives them status and also serves as an adventure generator – the adventures come to the player characters, instead of them having to run around in search of danger and rewards. Domains also tend to eat into the player characters' unused wealth, when they can no longer find any interesting equipment to spend it on.

A domain's value can be calculated in thaler, since a well-managed one generates income. But this kind of reward is so unique that it is best seen as a way of changing the overall style of the game to present experienced characters with new challenges. It is technically possible to provide player characters with a domain and keep going as usual, only with a fancy title and an additional stream of income that is handled in between gaming sessions. This removes one of the most interesting dimensions of the reward – the adventure generator – but is certainly doable, and for some gaming groups or players, the title and the thought of being a ruler is more rewarding than actually having to deal with the hassle of ruling.

How to mechanically handle the ownership of a domain is described in detail on pages 163–169 and, depending on how the gaming group wants the game to develop, in the section on Troupe Play starting on page 176.

Creating Greater Artifacts as Rewards

Creating their own greater artifact is probably a dream for many players, and the Gamemaster can give them that opportunity in the form of a reward – perhaps the gaming group finds a creation ceremony carved into a set of heavy stone tablets? Working out the artifact's powers is a fun challenge in itself, and its worth in thaler, time, or whatever else, is set by the Gamemaster. This is also a potential adventure generator – perhaps the player characters have to acquire specific ingredients or gain access to a dangerous and remote location in order to perform the ceremony?

The value of this reward depends entirely on the players and how powerful the Gamemaster allows the artifact to be. See the section on Creating Greater Artifacts for principles and guidelines on designing the artifact in questions. You can draw inspiration from (or simply copy) the artifacts described in the Greater Artifacts section on page 124, or from artifacts presented in previously published adventures.

TRADITIONAL TREASURES

In a game like *Ruins of Symbaroum*, where much of the fun comes from exploring ancient ruins in search of valuables and knowledge, there is every reason to think carefully about what items the player characters might find. Coins and gems are all well and good, but even the discovery of such traditional finds can make one's heart beat a bit faster if provided with a little twist or a quaint detail.

For example, the coins could have a unique motif depicting something unexpected like a daemon's face or a bull's head, or be made of colored or otherwise unusual material – metal, crystal, (gem) stone, or reptilian hide. The same goes for the jewels, which should preferably be uncommon in terms of their cut and color, or carved in the shape of figures like animals, plants, or even humans.

Then coins and gems can of course be switched for other types of objects of equivalent value. In the section Expeditions in Davokar (page 59) we introduce the categories Debris, Curiosities, and Mystical Treasures. The first category is a kind of substitute for traditional treasures – instead of a cache of 1d10 silver coins the player character finds shards of a painted vase or similar, which can be sold at the equivalent price.

The idea is to make the digging, rummaging, and hacking in the ruins of Davokar more interesting; although the value of all Curiosities is the same (10 + 1d10 thaler), the treasure hunter can never know exactly what she is going to find. Below are some simple tips for Gamemasters wishing to create their own Curiosities and Mystical Treasures, preferably designed to be unearthed in a specific location.

Curiosities

Start by considering who once inhabited the location. What did they live off? What level of development characterized their culture? What did they worship? Who was their ruler(s)? All such questions can provide inspiration for designing so-called Curiosities.

Simply put, a Curiosity is an item that is still undamaged/functional and whose design has a story to tell. It could be an ornament, tool, article of clothing, toy, or some other everyday object; what matters is that the Curiosity is special, ideally in a way that says something about how the cultural beings of old lived, thought, and acted.

The story the item tells is best left vague, subject to interpretation and fantasies rather than too on the nose. Hints are usually enough to stoke a listener's, reader's, or (in this case) player's imagination. And as we always say: "pre-written descriptions will never feel as interesting as the receiver's own ideas or mental images." Mention a few noteworthy features and let the players' imaginations do the rest!

Mystical Treasures

One step above Curiosities on every treasure hunter's wish-list are Mystical Treasures. When creating these, the same general rule applies as for Curiosities: the history they tell should say something about the people who created and used them, but this information should be expressed through symbols and hints rather than actual descriptions.

Mechanically, a Mystical Treasure should be roughly as powerful as a Lesser Artifact (see the *Ruins of Symbaroum Player's Guide*, page 184); they are also comparable

to Boons and Elixirs, without necessarily having the same mechanical effect – they have magical properties of a more abstract nature that are rarely useful in traditional combat or problem solving. One example is a flower vase in which plants never age (neither withering, blossoming, nor producing fruit), another is a notebook whose notes are only visible to the writer.

In cases where a Mystical Treasure's effect is useful during tough challenges, we recommend that you provide it with a defect or an element of risk – it presents a clear advantage, but if misfortune strikes, the item's effect results in a negative modifier for one type of activity and a bonus for another. An example could be a bell that rings when an abomination is nearby but risks attracting the blight beast's attention, or a monocle that when used provides advantage to Wisdom (Survival) checks for tracking in the wilderness, but disadvantage on passive Perception (a –5 penalty).

SOCIAL REWARDS

Social rewards consist of everything that the players give each other around the gaming table, and what the Gamemaster gives the players either at the table or within the game world. The importance of social rewards is not to be underestimated; the reason why many people play roleplaying games at all, in an age with well-developed online games, can be found in social interaction and the ancient pleasure of telling stories together.

Favors

A favor that solves a challenge gives the characters Experience as if they solved the problem themselves. Exactly what a favor can solve is, of course, decided by who owes the characters a favor. Appropriate favors can be access to a location or to a person of high standing and influence, as well as the casting of rituals or the use of features that the characters need, but do not have themselves.

Dark Secrets

A dark secret consists of sensitive information that the characters can use against someone in order to accomplish something. The person will not appreciate the blackmailing, but will help the characters within reasonable limits.



This transcript, collected from one of the columns of Haganor, is indisputably the most widely debated among Ambrian scholars. Does it really identify the location of Symbar, and if that is the case: to which location does it point, exactly?

Secrets are a double-edged weapon in the hands of greedy player characters; most persons who are blackmailed will attempt to have the characters removed rather than letting the blackmail continue. But if handled correctly, a dark secret can be a potent weapon in the characters' hands.

Titles

In feudal societies titles are desirable because they provide status; for players, recognition in the form of titles is often appreciated even if the title itself does not mean anything more than that people respond to the player's character differently. See the section on Factions (*Ruins of Symbaroum Player's Guide*, starting on page 13) for titles in different organizations and groups.

Reputation, Songs and Statues

Social reinforcement from the game world in the form of improved reputation for the characters, songs about their heroic deeds or perhaps statues raised in their honor, are appreciated acknowledgments that bring flavor to the game world in more ways than one. The players get to feel as if their actions actually had an impact on the game world, and it becomes even clearer when future generations of characters come to a village where the local sun temple houses a statue of the village hero, or when the bard in the tavern sings a celebratory song about the hardships and adventures of a previous player character.

Magical Treasure

THIS SECTION DESCRIBES principles and guidelines for Gamemasters wishing to use existing OGL magic items in *Ruins of Symbaroum* or create their own greater artifacts; greater in the sense that they were made by ancient artifact crafters, an art long lost to modern day mystics who have to settle for lesser artifacts. The chapter also includes a section with new mystical artifacts, to be used as rewards or as a basis for homebrew adventures.

ATTUNEMENT

Some magic items (including all Greater Artifacts) require a creature to form a bond with them before their magical properties can be used. This bond is called attunement, and certain items have a prerequisite for it. If the prerequisite is a class, a creature must be a member of that class to attune to the item. If the prerequisite is to be a spellcaster, a creature qualifies if it can cast at least

one spell using its traits or features, not using a magic item or the like.

Without becoming attuned to an item that requires attunement, a creature gains only its nonmagical benefits, unless its description states otherwise. For example, a magic shield that requires attunement provides the benefits of a normal shield to a creature not attuned to it, but none of its magical properties.

Attuning to an item requires a creature to spend a short rest focused on only that item while being in physical contact with it (this can't be the same short rest used to learn the item's properties). This focus can take the form of weapon practice (for a weapon), meditation (for a wondrous item), or some other appropriate activity. If the short rest is interrupted, the attunement attempt fails. Otherwise, at the end of the short rest, the creature gains an intuitive understanding of how to activate any magical properties of the item, including any necessary command words.

An item can be attuned to only one creature at a time, and a creature can be attuned to no more than three magic items at a time. Any attempt to attune to a fourth item fails; the creature must end its attunement to an item first. Additionally, a creature can't attune to more than one copy of an item. For example, a creature can't attune to more than one ring of protection at a time.

A creature's attunement to an item ends if the creature no longer satisfies the prerequisites for attunement, if the item has been more than 100 feet away for at least 24 hours, if the creature dies, or if another creature attunes to the item. A creature can also voluntarily end attunement by spending another short rest focused on the item, unless the item is cursed.

OGL MAGIC ITEMS

Not all magic items provided in the core rules fit within the setting of *Ruins of Symbaroum*. We have included a master list of suggestions, however you are free to add additional items if you believe it will enhance your game. See page 124 for recommended Corruption costs.

The Cost of Magic Items

Magic items are almost never available for sale. Instead, they must either be wrested from an enemy's dead hands, recovered from the deadly overgrown ruins of Davokar, or received from a mighty lord or lady as a reward for service beyond the call of duty.

However, there is still a price to pay. Almost every magic item causes some amount of permanent Corruption as its magic continuously strains at the boundaries of the world. When activating a magic item that has a spell-like effect, you might also gain temporary Corruption.

Consumable magic items do not cause permanent Corruption as their magic is not permanent and usually used nearly as soon as the consumable is acquired.

Look and Feel for Symbaroum

When describing a magic item for *Ruins of Symbaroum*, spend a little time considering the item's origin. It is probably ancient, made originally for the Empire of Symbaroum, or by the elves or trolls that first took guardianship over Davokar after Symbaroum's fall, or by wizened scholars of Ordo Magica. Feel free to describe it as ornate, old-fashioned and bearing marks of its age.

OGL MAGIC ITEMS

Magic Item	Type	Rarity	Corruption
Ammunition, +1, +2, +3	Weapon	Varies	—
Amulet of Health	Wondrous Item	Rare (attunement)	1 PC
Amulet of Proof against Detection	Wondrous Item	Uncommon (attunement)	—
Animated Shield	Armor	Very Rare (attunement)	2 PC, 1d4 TC per use
Armor, +1, +2, +3	Armor	Varies	1/2/3 PC
Armor of Resistance	Armor	Rare	1 PC
Arrow-catching Shield	Armor	Rare	1 PC
Arrow of Slaying	Weapon	Very Rare	—
Bag of Beans	Wondrous Item	Rare	1 PC (until empty)
Bag of Tricks	Wondrous Item	Uncommon	—
Bead of Force	Wondrous Item	Rare	1 PC (until used)
Boots of Elvenkind	Wondrous Item	Uncommon	—
Boots of Levitation	Wondrous Item	Rare	1 PC, 1d4 TC per use
Boots of Striding and Springing	Wondrous Item	Uncommon (attunement)	1 PC
Boots of the Winterlands	Wondrous Item	Uncommon (attunement)	1 PC
Bracers of Archery	Wondrous Item	Uncommon (attunement)	1 PC

OGL MAGIC ITEMS

Magic Item	Type	Rarity	Corruption
Bracers of Defense	Wondrous Item	Rare (attunement)	1 PC
Brooch of Shielding	Wondrous Item	Uncommon (attunement)	1 PC
Cape of the Mountebank	Wondrous Item	Rare	1 PC, 1d4 TC per use
Chime of Opening	Wondrous Item	Rare	1 PC, 1d4 TC per use
Circlet of Blasting	Wondrous Item	Uncommon	0 PC, 1d4 TC per use
Cloak of Arachnida	Wondrous Item	Very Rare	2 PC, 1d4 TC per use
Cloak of Displacement	Wondrous Item	Rare	1 PC
Dagger of Venom	Wondrous Item	Rare	1 PC, 1d4 TC per use
Dancing Sword	Weapon (sword)	Very Rare	2 PC, 1d4 TC per use
Decanter of Endless Water	Wondrous Item	Uncommon	0 PC, 1d4 TC per use
Defender +3	Weapon (sword)	Legendary	3 PC, none
Dimensional Shackles	Wondrous Item	Rare	1 PC
Dust of Disappearance	Wondrous Item	Uncommon	0 PC, 1 TC per use
Dust of Dryness	Wondrous Item	Uncommon	0 PC, 1 TC per use
Eversmoking Bottle	Wondrous Item	Uncommon	0 PC, 1 TC per use
Flame Tongue +1	Weapon (sword)	Rare	1 PC, 1d4 TC per use
Frost Brand +2	Weapon (sword)	Very Rare	2 PC, none
Gauntlets of Ogre Power	Wondrous Item	Uncommon (attunement)	1 PC
Glamoured Studded Leather	Armor	Rare	1 PC, 1 TC per use
Gloves of Missile Snaring	Wondrous Item	Uncommon (attunement)	1 PC, 1 TC per use
Gloves of Swimming and Climbing	Wondrous Item	Uncommon (attunement)	1 PC, 1 TC per use
Hat of Disguise	Wondrous Item	Uncommon (attunement)	1 PC, 1d4 TC per use
Helm of Brilliance	Wondrous Item	Very Rare (attunement)	2 PC, 1d4 TC per use
Helm of Comprehending Languages	Wondrous Item	Uncommon	0 PC, 1 TC per use
Iron Bands of Binding	Wondrous Item	Rare	1 PC, 1 TC per use
Javelin of Lightning	Weapon (javelin)	Uncommon	0 PC, 1d6 TC per use
Necklace of Adaptation	Wondrous Item	Uncommon (attunement)	1 PC
Necklace of Fireballs	Wondrous Item	Rare	1 PC, 1d6 TC per use
Nine Lives Stealer +2	Weapon (sword)	Very Rare	2 PC, 1d8 TC per use
Periapt of Health	Wondrous Item	Uncommon	0 PC
Periapt of Wound Closure	Wondrous Item	Uncommon (attunement)	1 PC, 1 TC per use
Pipes of Haunting	Wondrous Item	Uncommon	0 PC, 1d4 TC per use
Potion of Animal Friendship	Potion	Uncommon	0 PC, 1 TC per use
Potion of Climbing	Potion	Common	0 PC, 1 TC per use
Potion of Diminution	Potion	Rare	0 PC, 1d4 TC per use
Potion of Growth	Potion	Rare	0 PC, 1d4 TC per use
Potion of Healing	Potion	Varies	1/1d4/1d6/1d8 TC
Potion of Heroism	Potion	Rare	0 PC, 1d4 TC per use
Potion of Invisibility	Potion	Very Rare	0 PC, 1d6 TC per use
Potion of Resistance	Potion	Uncommon	0 PC, 1 TC per use
Potion of Speed	Potion	Very Rare	0 PC, 1d6 TC per use
Potion of Water Breathing	Potion	Uncommon	0 PC, 1d4 TC per use

OGL MAGIC ITEMS

Magic Item	Type	Rarity	Corruption
Ring of Evasion	Ring	Rare (attunement)	1 PC, 1d4 TC per use
Ring of Feather Falling	Ring	Rare (attunement)	1 PC, 1 TC per use
Ring of Free Action	Ring	Rare (attunement)	1 PC
Ring of Invisibility	Ring	Legendary (attunement)	3 PC, 1d4 TC per use
Ring of Protection +1	Ring	Rare (attunement)	1 PC
Ring of Spell Storing	Ring	Rare (attunement)	1 PC, special*
Ring of Spell Turning	Ring	Legendary (attunement)	3 PC, 1d8 TC per use
Ring of the Ram	Ring	Rare (attunement)	1 PC, 1d6 per use
Ring of Warmth	Ring	Uncommon (attunement)	1 PC
Rod of Absorption	Rod	Very Rare (attunement)	2 PC
Rod of Alertness	Rod	Very Rare (attunement)	2 PC, 1d4 per use
Shield +1, +2, +3	Armor (shield)	Varies	PC equal to bonus
Sun Blade +2	Weapon (sword)	Legendary (attunement)	3 PC
Sword of Life Stealing	Weapon (sword)	Rare (attunement)	1 PC, 1d6 per use
Vicious Weapon	Weapon (any)	Rare	1 PC
Weapon +1, +2, +3	Weapon (any)	Varies	PC equal to bonus

CREATING GREATER ARTIFACTS

For a greater artifact to fit in mechanically it is important that it does not duplicate already existing features or spells, and that it is useful to everyone but particularly to those who have a certain feature. Furthermore, the artifact should be given a backstory that deepens the game world in an interesting way, so that conquering the artifact provides a way to explore the history of the world.

As always, the following should be seen as guidelines, not strict laws. A certain artifact may not comply with all three principles, but it is recommended that you try to fulfill at least two of them.

Do Not Duplicate

Artifacts should endow the user with a unique power, an ability that cannot be acquired any other way; they should not be obvious copies of features, spells, or trait. Mechanically speaking the difference may be subtle, but it should still be there, and if nothing else it should have a distinct aesthetic and feel.

That said, it is definitely worth looking at features or spells when it comes to deciding what the artifact can do, finding a balanced mechanic, and in conjunction with this, setting a price in temporary corruption for using the decided upon power or powers.

If an artifact's property resembles an existing feature or spell, it may be a good idea to make it extra potent for those with a related feature. That way the artifact is not a direct substitute for an existing feature, but rather an enhancer of it.

Good for Everyone, Better for Those with the Right Features

The artifact should ideally be useful to everyone, but particularly powerful for player characters with certain features. There are different ways of doing this: the artifact can have one power that is useful to everybody and a second one that cannot be used at all without a certain feature; or maybe it is the same power, but it is boosted if the user has the feature in question.

A more subtle version is that the power can be used by anyone, but reaches its full potential when combined with a certain feature. That way the artifact is not tied to a certain feature, but it is wise of the gaming group to put it in the hands of a character who has the feature.

Deepen the Game World

Artifacts dug up in ruins or torn from the dead hands of necromages are links to a more powerful past, when mystics were able to routinely create such things. In other words, the artifact is a great window to the game world's history.

When you as Gamemaster create an artifact, ask yourself what you want to say or highlight about the game world. How can this be tied to the artifact in question – its creation, a previous owner, or its most recently known fate? Since you know your gaming group, the artifact can answer specific questions they may have. You can also take the opportunity to emphasize a theme or phenomenon you want to focus on, for example the main conflict of the adventure or campaign you are playing.

The Price of the Artifact

Binding the artifact to oneself requires attunement and accepting a certain amount of permanent Corruption. Also, each of the artifact's powers has a price in the form of temporary Corruption.

The cost of the artifact in permanent Corruption is based on its relative scarcity, i.e. the more unique and powerful the artifact, the greater the cost.

The cost of activating a power depends on its effect, and here it is perfectly reasonable to compare it to other features such as spells that cost temporary Corruption. The "price levels" are 1, 1d4, 1d6, or 1d8 temporary Corruption, except in rare cases where powers do not generate Corruption. See the table on the right:

CORRUPTION FOR MAGIC ITEMS AND GREATER ARTIFACTS

Rarity	Permanent Corruption	Temporary Corruption	Comparison
Common	+0	+0	Non-damaging cantrip
Uncommon	+1*	+1	Damage cantrips
Rare	+1	+1d4	1st–2nd level spells
Very rare, weak unique	+2	+1d6	3rd–4th level spells
Legendary or unique	+3	+1d8	5th level or higher

* Only if the item requires attunement.

Greater Artifacts

SINCE TIME IMMEMORIAL, mystics have bound spirits and power to objects, and thus created what today are known as artifacts. Each artifact is an expression of the will of the bound power, and trying to wield such power is never without consequence. In other words, all artifacts are associated with risk – especially for users who are unaccustomed to wielding items charged with mystical energies.

The crafting of artifacts is very rare these days, partly because so many rituals for making them have been lost over the centuries, but also because the price of creating them is high. Binding powerful spirits is dangerous, especially now that The Eternal Night draws ever closer.

Finding an artifact can be the climax of an adventure and often the start of a new one. Each of the artifacts described in this section comes with one or multiple adventure setups, ranging from simple and small to utterly epic. Whether or not any of these plot hooks is used is entirely up to the Gamemaster; sometimes an artifact is an excellent starting point for a new chronicle, and sometimes you simply want to reward your players with a powerful item.

Here are twenty-six artifacts the Gamemaster may use or draw inspiration from. Each is given a rarity value, representing how common items of this kind are overall, although each of the sample artifacts are unique. This also represents the cost in permanent Corruption of becoming attuned to the artifact. An additional bonus is given for weapons that are magical, this bonus applies to both the weapon's to hit value and its damage.

THE MAP OF ARGOND THE WANDERER (RARE)

It is said that Argond the Wanderer was a learned explorer, but very little is known about him other than the fact that he created two artifacts: a tome of almost infinite – and highly unorganized – knowledge, and this pathfinding map.

The map is beautifully drawn but lends no clues about its creator, nor does it specify the year of its creation. It is very old, which is obvious even to uneducated observers: the forest of Davokar is missing. Sure, there are woods, mountains, and rivers, but none of the unbroken forest cover that today awaits those who wander north from Ambria. Ambria, by the way, does not exist either; the state of Lindaros (where Yndaros is currently located) is no more than a large village on the banks of the river Doudram, and northern Alberetor looks overgrown and virtually unpopulated. Karvosti is there, as are many of the more prominent structures found in the southern part of the great forest – many of them are not depicted as ruins, however, but presented in their original splendor. Scholars have therefore assumed that the map shows the world as it was in the century following the fall of Symbaroum, before the elves had planted all of Davokar, long before the High Chieftain established himself on Karvosti and Lindaros emerged as a major center of power.

The city of Symbar, or rather its ruins, is also absent on the map, which has led some to believe that the map's creator respected the taboo that the witches inherited from the elves: Symbar's location must be forgotten, as it is the cradle of corruption itself. But this may not be the case, as the map only shows the general area around its reader (the Gamemaster decides). Every night the map changes as the master moves around. In other words, you cannot study northern Alberetor unless you are already in the Titans, nor see far north into Davokar unless you are already deep in the forest. So perhaps one just might see the city of Symbar if one goes far enough north with the map in hand.

No one knows how much of the world the map can actually show, and it would take very long expeditions to answer that question.

Right Path
If you are attuned to the artifact, you can point to any location on the map and get an idea of how best to get there. But the map takes no account of anything that has happened in the 900 years since it was created, which might cause problems as a lot has changed in the Davokar region since then.

Also, anyone bound to the map can use it to avoid getting lost. But it takes someone with the Loremaster feature to understand when the map is showing a sector or path that has changed significantly. The loremaster makes a DC 10 Intelligence (History) check to identify an alternative route to the destination and thus avoid obstacles in the terrain: corrupted nature, lindworm lairs, and similar stationary problems. However, the loremaster's wisdom does not protect against wandering creatures encountered along the way, or dangerous moving terrain such as blight mist.

Requires: Action
Corruption: None

Treasure Map
In the hands of someone with the Loremaster feature, the map can be used to locate an untouched ruin. The power requires one hour's intense study of the map as well as a DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check to locate a ruin site. To find a good route, one must use the power Right Path. It is up to the Gamemaster to decide which ruin it is, what creatures are there, and what treasures it hides. What is clear is that the ruin has not yet been plundered by treasure hunters.

Requires: 1 hour study
Corruption: None

Argond's Map and the Location of Symbar

The Gamemaster must decide whether the map can really show the way to the Symbarian capital of Symbar. Finding the city, and more importantly getting there, is one of the main challenges in the *Chronicle of The Throne of Thorns*, where the search for accurate directions is a central part of the various adventures. As already mentioned, there are good reasons why Argond's map may not show the way there, or worse still – show the way to a completely different place, as he did not want anyone to ever find the ruined heart of the empire.

If the Gamemaster so wishes, the map could instead explain how another group has made it to Symbar, and the player characters might find the map in the hands of some competitor or adversary they encounter among Symbar's ruins.

Adventure Set-up
Nightpitch's annual treasure hunting contest is right around the corner, and the player characters are contacted by a former treasure hunter who claims to know where to find the pathfinding map of Argond the Wanderer. The veteran wants the characters to retrieve it and then use it to (hopefully) win the contest! Naturally, the retired treasure hunter wants a share of the prize money, but the player characters may keep the map – until a competitor finds out about their secret treasure hunting weapon.



ASHIKI'S TWIN BLADES (RARE)
Ashiki was a famous changeling who grew up in the slums of Lindaros and took over one of its gangs through a mixture of cunning and violence. After being betrayed by one of her confidants, Ashiki took it upon herself to punish Lindaros' criminals and swept through the city in a veritable wave of murder. The wave came crashing to a halt when Ashiki took on the city's elite in pursuit of robbers and thieves. She was ferociously hunted down, caught, and publicly executed. Her two daggers were lost and remain so to this day.

Gift of Shadows
When one of the daggers is used with the Backstab feature, the weapon damage die is rolled twice and the best result stands.

Requires: Reaction
Corruption: 1 temporary Corruption per use

A Dance of Two
While holding both blades at the same time, if you have the Twin Attack feature you can trigger a veritable shower of strikes, one dagger striking after the other like two siblings trying to outdo one another. The user can keep attacking a single target until a strike misses or the victim dies from its many wounds. Those who listen carefully can hear the daggers hiss with delight and competitiveness while the sibling rivalry is underway.

Requires: Bonus Action (to begin the effect, allowing you to use the off-hand weapon)

Corruption: 1d4 temporary Corruption per activation

Adventure Set-up
The player characters get their hands on one of Ashiki's daggers, which immediately attempts to send them on a search for its twin – through dreams, subtle suggestions, or similar means. Meanwhile the other dagger is doing the same, and their respective masters are inexorably drawn to each other.

The twins' goal is to incite a duel between the player character with the dagger and whoever has the other one. Both knives will giggle gleefully during the fight. It could be an epic clash if the main enemy of the adventure bears the other dagger, and a very tragic one if the person is a potential friend or someone the player characters sympathize with for philosophical reasons. A possible solution is for the player character to give their dagger to the opponent, but the master of the other dagger will not surrender willingly, consumed by the dagger's desire to fight in order to be reunited with its twin.

BUNEFER'S DEATH MASK (UNCOMMON)

Bunefer was a warrior princess in the twilight years of Symbaroum. She died under elvish swords during the final battle of Symbar, but her servants managed to save her body and cast a traditional death mask of her lifeless face. The princess' sarcophagus was hidden in a pyramid of stacked enemy corpses, all slain by Bunefer's lance, and at the top of this macabre structure they left the death mask.

In the chaos that followed the downfall of Symbar, the mask was stolen from the pyramid. For a while it was worn by a robber chieftain named Iaresta, known for having conquered an area in western Davokar after a battle against the first High Chieftain of Karvosti, Serembar. Iaresta was caught and executed, after which the artifact was inherited by a witch who used it as a weapon against Davokar's growing darkness. When the witch disappeared in the depths of the forest, so did the death mask.

The death mask gives you Bunefer's ability to find gaps in an enemy's armor, as well as her famed ability to paralyze enemies with her war cry.

Eye of the Needle
The death mask helps you find gaps in the enemy's armor. Activating the power provides you advantage on melee attacks for the duration of the combat scene.

Requires: Bonus action

Corruption: 1 temporary Corruption per round

A Thousand Needles
If you have the Polearm Fighting feature, you can use the mask to paralyze enemies with piercing screams. All enemies hit by the master's weapon must pass a Constitution saving throw with a DC equal to either 10 or the weapon's damage, whichever is greater, or be stunned until the end of their next turn.

Requires: Bonus Action

Corruption: 1d4 temporary Corruption per scream from the mask

Adventure Set-up
Retrieving the death mask is a suitable challenge for a new or would-be witch, or a barbarian warrior of chieftain lineage. The player character's superior orders her to bring back the mask from its probable location, a ruin area. This is meant to test the player character, and is a way of rewarding a promising protégé.

DESDEMORGOS' ICOSAHEDRON (VERY RARE)

The demonologist Desdemorgos was a hunted man; both witch hunters and other demon worshipers wanted his head. To escape them he used a magic icosahedron he had obtained through unknown means – with his mystical powers he could step into the Yonderworld, and the icosahedron allowed him to stay there without becoming blight born.

This fist-sized icosahedron of black steel binds and protects against corruption. Its most obvious use is for traveling through blighted lands or combating creatures using corruption as a weapon.

Corruption Barrier
The bearer of the icosahedron gains complete protection against corruption that afflicts those who move through a certain area, for example in corrupted nature or the Yonderworld. For corruption used as a weapon (e.g. the monster trait Corrupting Attack or the spell black breath) the master must roll over the damaging corruption on 1d20 – if the outcome is higher the corruption has no effect; if the outcome is equal or less, you are affected as usual.

The protection does not apply to sources of corruption the bearer chooses to use, such as attuning to / using artifacts or casting spells.

Requires: Reaction

Corruption: None

Corruption Gatherer
A bearer with the Sorcerer approach can absorb weaponized corruption and turn it against their enemies. For this to work the sorcerer must first protect themself against the attack, see Corruption Barrier – in which case the corruption is stored in the artifact.

The sorcerer can then spend this gathered corruption to lower the enemy's resistance to her own powers: each point spent increases the DC of their saving throw by 1 against the sorcerer's next spell. All points may be spent on the same power, but half of the amount spent (rounded up) also afflicts the sorcerer in the form of temporary Corruption. Corruption generated by the master (through the use of powers etc.) cannot be gathered this way, nor can corruption coming from the environment in general, like in corrupted nature or the Yonderworld.

Requires: Bonus Action

Corruption: None when gathering corruption; on use the sorcerer is afflicted by half of the Corruption spent.

> EXAMPLE: *The sorcerer Jagada has bound Desdemorgos' Icosahedron to herself and is hit by a monster with the trait Corrupting Attack. The attack deals 5 corruption. Jagada's player rolls 1d20 and needs a result higher than 5 to avoid the effect. She rolls 11 – the corruption barrier holds and Jagada suffers no corruption. This also means that the corruption is stored in the icosahedron, since Jagada has the Sorcery feature. She then uses the enemy's weapon against it: Jagada casts suggestion on the monster. She spends all 5 points to increase the DC on the Wisdom spell to 18 (from 13). She herself suffers 3 (5/2) temporary Corruption, which her artifact cannot protect against.*

Adventure Set-up
The icosahedron is most appropriate for adventures where the player characters realize they must pass through a stretch of corrupted terrain and need the icosahedron to do so. Perhaps they must get their hands on both Desdemorgos' Icosahedron and Terrasma's Yondermirror (page 138) to reach a certain place in the Yonderworld? Suggestions on creating adventures and scenes set in the Yonderworld are found starting on page 52.

THE QUEEN MOTHER'S BANNER (UNCOMMON)

This famous banner bears the coat of arms of House Kohinoor, the Flaming Pine. It was carried in the name of the queen mother by the greatest heroes in the fight against the Dark Lords and is heavily stained by their dried blood. It is said that her courage and strength rubbed off on others, which is revealed by the power of the banner when it is planted in the ground: the surrounding area is filled with an uplifting and protecting aura.

Skeptics believe the banner dates back much further than the Great War, all the way to Lindaros, or further still – which, if true, gives legitimacy to Queen Korinthia's claim on Ambria and parts of Davokar. Since the banner was lost during the final stages of the war, few scholars now living have had the privilege of studying it to determine its age.

Rally the Troops
When the person bound to the banner thrusts it into the ground, all allies within sight receive advantage on one saving throw against any effect. Allies moving out of sight of the banner lose the effect, but those coming within sight of the banner gain it.

Allies who used the reroll cannot get another one during the same battle, regardless of whether the banner is replanted. Allies with Steadfast automatically succeed with activities covered by the feature. The master of the banner does not have to stay within sight of the banner once it has been planted in the ground, but follows the same rules as everyone else regarding the reroll.

Requires: Bonus Action

Corruption: 1 temporary Corruption for 1 minute effect

Restoration
A Captain can make the banner radiate healing energies once it has been planted in the ground. All allies within sight recover 1d4 hit points.

Requires: Reaction

Corruption: 1 temporary Corruption when activated

Adventure Set-up
The most exciting adventure opportunity might be the banner's connection to House Kohinoor and the family's claim on Ambria, Davokar, and by extension, Symbar's Throne of Thorns. There are many stakeholders in that conflict, not least as part of the *Chronicle of The Throne of Thorns*; House Kohinoor in particular, wants the banner to strengthen its claims of legitimacy. Rivals of the crown – the Church of Dead Prios, the Black Cloaks, the Sovereign's Oath, and others – also want the banner, to discredit Korinthia's claim, or failing that, hide the artifact to keep it from her.

If the banner falls into the player characters' hands they will have great leverage to assert their own importance against nearly all other factions. The banner is also a potential ticket to face-to-face meetings with the most powerful people in Ambria: Commander Iakobo Vearra, the Grandmaster of Ordo Magica, and maybe even Queen Korinthia herself.

The latter would probably be interested in trading a piece of land (see Princes of the Land on page 119), or perhaps an artifact or two, for the banner...



ELI'S TROLL FLUTE (UNCOMMON)

This troll flute is named after its current owner, a homeless child named Eli who wandered (and perhaps still wanders) the streets of Thistle Hold. The girl and her flute are famous because she plays the most breathtaking tunes on it, and she also serves as the most effective ratcatcher in town.

Sweet Music

The flute is accommodating and instructive, and even the least qualified musicians can play beautifully on it. A skilled musician can produce spellbinding tunes and be showered with both applause and jingling thaler.

Once per adventure, the master of the flute can, with a successful DC 10 Charisma (Performance) check, captivate an audience and receive 1d10 thaler (mostly in the form of shillings and ortegs) as payment for the experience. If the character succeeds by 5 or more, they roll twice to determine the money earned – the highest result stands.

Requires: Action

Corruption: None

King of Beasts

Troll Singers can use their flutes to lead and command beasts. All beasts of a certain type within earshot (if more than one type is present, the musician decides which to target) become neutral towards the musician and allow them and their friends to pass without interference.

Furthermore, a group of beasts of the selected type can be made to follow and assist the musician for the duration of the effect. The Troll Singer makes a Charisma (Persuasion) check with a DC of 10 plus the number of beasts controlled. The musician must keep playing the whole time, which requires two hands as well as concentration (as dominate beast). The effect cannot last more than 1 minute.

Requires: Action

Corruption: 1 temporary Corruption to calm beasts; 1d4 temporary Corruption per effort to control beasts.

Adventure Set-up

Many different adventures can be built around Eli and her flute. Perhaps she is a human child raised by trolls who taught her the mystical tradition Troll Singing; perhaps she ran away, or maybe the trolls were slain by treasure hunters who "rescued" Eli? Or maybe the trolls sent her to Thistle Hold on some kind of mission, perhaps to keep an eye out for troll artifacts?

One possibility is that Eli shared blood with her adoptive parents and gained the Blood Ties boon (Long Lived), which in her case has slowed down her aging even as a child. She can therefore be much older than she looks and have the wisdom of a far older person.

Whoever Eli is, the player characters need her – or more specifically her flute's – help to pass through a place in Davokar or in/beneath the town that is teeming with beasts. Eli probably demands something in return for coming with them; perhaps she needs help taking back a troll artifact from some suitably dangerous person or group.

THE WRAITH MARK OF THE ETERNITY LEGION (VERY RARE)

A prominent unit in the Symbarian army was the Eternity Legion which, faithful to the emperor of Symbar, was sent to quell uprisings all around the empire. Their commander, Malakanu, gave his greatest warriors a unit emblem of rusty iron, worn on a simple chain. The emblem allowed its master to fight on even after being struck down.

This, as well as the rumor of the unit's outstanding ferocity, made them an effective tool in the hand of the emperor. But they were not entirely immortal, nor did they serve for eternity; the unit was thoroughly crushed by the Iron Pact during the final battle of Symbar, and the elves gathered their wraith marks and had them hidden away or destroyed. But a few marks escaped destruction, around the necks of fleeing legionaries or in the pockets of grave robbers.

Loyal in Death

The Wraith Mark of the Eternity Legion contains a defending spirit who rises over an unconscious, but not yet dead, master. The master rolls death saving throws as usual while the wraith fights on, under that player's control. A non-player character wearing the mark rolls death saving throws as if it was a player character, except that the Gamemaster controls the wraith and makes the death saving throws.

The wraith must be defeated before the master can be attacked and it has the same stats as the master, with the addition of Incorporeal Movement (see *Ruins of Symbaroum Bestiary*, page 217). It does not move more than a step from the fallen body, and attacks anyone within range who is not a friend of the mark's master.

Once defeated, the wraith disappears back into the wraith mark and will not return until the master wakes up and is struck down again. If the fallen warrior dies as a result of a failed death saving throw, the wraith ceases to exist.

Requires: Attunement only

Corruption: 1d6 temporary Corruption

Adventure Set-up

The wraith mark is well suited as a trap on the road or a complication during another adventure. The player characters move through a tight passage with a fresh "corpse" inside, and as they examine or step over the dead body, the wraith rises and starts to fight. Alternatively, an important enemy could be in possession of a wraith mark, and when the player characters triumphantly fell their opponent, a wraith rises in its stead!

FEUD CRYSTAL (VERY RARE)

The paranoid High Chieftain Boherg convinced his Huldra Kthelba to imbue this crystal with power, so the chieftain would be able to keep track of his many (real and imaginary) enemies. The feud crystal was later passed down from High Chieftain to High Chieftain, and eventually went missing under chieftain Sotorek's reign. It is said that the Huldra at the time, Eaba, took it because the High Chieftain had become so obsessed with the stone that no decisions were being made and everything else was being neglected. Its current whereabouts are unknown.

Enemies in the Walls

A person who attunes themself to the feud crystal can list a number of enemies equal to their Wisdom modifier and use the crystal to get an idea of how far away they are. The master may add or remove enemies from the list, but the number of names can never exceed their Wisdom modifier. Furthermore, the enemies must be known by appearance, designations like "the gray woman" or "the one-eyed troll" will suffice.

The feud crystal shows the listed enemies in different degrees of focus, depending on their physical proximity; a crystal clear enemy is potentially close enough to see, but hidden, disguised, or otherwise unnoticeable. The user has advantage on any checks aimed at finding such a nearby enemy, whether it be Wisdom (Perception) checks or to activate finding magics or features.

A master struck by Sotorek's curse (see the power's corruption) must add another person as a named enemy, and strongly believes that everyone on the list is equally threatening. This new enemy is in addition to the Wisdom modifier number of names. The Gamemaster and the player must together come up with an interesting false enemy. The Gamemaster might also decide that it is in fact a hidden enemy, or let it turn into one over time, just to keep the player in a state of uncertainty... In any case, the player character is utterly convinced of the additional person's treacherous disposition.

Requires: Action

Corruption: 1d4 temporary Corruption, and 1/20 chance of suffering Sotorek's curse on each use.

Look of Vengeance

A master with the feature Sixth Sense can attack crystal clear enemies (see Enemies in the Walls) as if they were standing right in front of them, with weapons, features, or traits. The user does not need to find or see the enemy to make the attack, which is performed and defended against as usual.

Requires: Action

Corruption: 1 temporary Corruption, and 1/10 chance of suffering Sotorek's curse.

Adventure Set-up

A player character ends up on the feud crystal's current list of enemies, rightly or wrongly – there are probably many possibilities of it being right, but it will likely be more interesting if the player character is wrongly placed on the list of a potential ally.

How the gaming group navigates this situation will be exciting, as they need the ally's help, but he or she (for unclear reasons) sees one of the characters as a deadly threat.

FUGLOMARU'S LIAR FIRE (VERY RARE)

Not all was darkness and sin in Symbaroum, at least according to the legend of Fuglomaru – a mystic who sought the light, and some say she found it. Her rune, a stylized sun with eight rays, has been found in several contexts (often mistaken for a spider or sun symbol), not least on the sun temple secured by the Templars east of Karvosti.

There has been speculation as to whether this really was Fuglomaru's own sign, or whether the sun even symbolizes an early and possibly persecuted order of sun worshipers in Symbar, where Fuglomaru was a prominent figure. That would explain the symbol's presence in other places, and that people seem to have worshiped or prayed to the symbol, before being hunted down and slaughtered by knights in black armor. Perhaps this forgotten sun order was composed of heretics (in the eyes of the Symbarians), and executed for their transgressions?

Mosaics also show the truth-thirsting fire bowl that bears Fuglomaru's name. Interpretations of the signs suggest that the fire bowl's flames burn those who lie, and cool or heal those who tell the truth. Such a fire bowl would certainly be coveted by some, and abhorred by others; the presence of such an artifact could hypothetically alter the political game at any court in the world.

Power of the Truth
Those who willingly put their hand in the flames will be burned if they are lying while the hand is in the fire; 1d6 fire damage per lie. Lying means saying something the speaker themself does not believe, which may of course be an honest misunderstanding. A person telling the truth will find the flames cooling, even healing (cleanses the body of temporary Corruption and heals 1d4 hit points).

The master of the artifact is not affected by the power, and can lie freely with their hand in the flames.

Requires: Action to activate the flames
Corruption: 1d4 temporary Corruption per use

Inquisition
Masters with the Theurgy approach can use the flames to make someone tell the truth. The theurg points at someone within sight of the fire bowl and demands that the person tell the truth. Flames flare up around the person, and the effect is then the same as Power of the Truth.

Requires: Action to call the flames
Corruption: 1d6 temporary Corruption per use

Adventure Set-up
The player characters find themselves before a prince who possesses the fire bowl and whom they must negotiate with to accomplish their mission.

The Gamemaster is free to introduce a potentially dark twist. The truth may be that the bowl contains a mind-reading power or daemon – maybe even the spirit of Fuglomaru – and that it is this entity who decides who is or is not burnt, rather than the truthfulness of what is said. What the power wants, or does not want, is up to the Gamemaster. It could be an early sun worshiper, a predecessor to the priests of Prios, contained in the bowl, and the question is what this power thinks of the various branches of the modern Sun Church. It could be a dark power from the deepest pools of corruption, seeking to conquer or simply divide, and perverting the truth to get there.

GIRAKOSH'S STEEL CIRCLE (UNCOMMON, +1)

According to legend, Girakosh was a troll-taken barbarian whose adoptive parents gave him a powerful throwing weapon: a rune-carved circle of razor-sharp steel. With this in hand he slew many of the trolls' enemies before he finally died of old age, weak as the human he was. The weapon was buried with its master, and stolen much later by grave robbers from Thistle Hold. These soon met a sudden and unexpected death as they were tracked down by trolls on their next expedition into the depths of the forest. But the steel circle had already been sold or gambled away, and is currently somewhere in the northern borderlands of Ambria.

Anyone intending to use the steel circle must cope with the risk that the trolls will come looking for it, and the master may have to consider striking a deal with the forgers of the weapon; surely there are common enemies who the artifact's master can fight with the trolls' blessing?

If you are attuned to it you can also use the throwing steel as a melee weapon, with stats as a +1 magical dagger. For everyone else it is a throwing weapon only, with the range and damage of a +1 magical dagger.

Return
The thrown steel circle returns to your hand, whether or not it hits its intended target. If you are capable of throwing multiple weapons per turn, the throwing steel can be used as many times as necessary.

Requires: Bonus Action
Corruption: None

Steel Rain
A master with the Steel Throw feature can send the steel circle whirling across the battlefield, zigzagging between allies in search of enemy flesh. If you succeed at an attack roll against a target and do not have disadvantage on the attack, you can make another attack roll at a new target that is within range of the first target. You can continue this chain of attacks until you miss an attack roll or every valid target that you can see has been struck. The throwing steel then returns to your hand.

Requires: Action
Corruption: 1d4 temporary Corruption

Adventure Set-up
The steel circle introduces the player characters to the trolls' mission: to retrieve troll artifacts that have fallen into the wrong hands. Sooner or later whoever carries Girakosh's steel circle will attract the attention of the trolls and be tracked down.

The first encounter will likely be more about probing and investigation than violence, but the trolls are not averse to taking back their treasures by force. Player character who are grossly exploiting Davokar and its riches will be considered an enemy of the trolls, and encounters with trolls will mean combat. Character who are clearly acting in accordance with the taboos of the witches or the Iron Pact will likely be allowed to keep the weapon, maybe even offered blood ties with the trolls to bring the parties together (see the *Player's Guide*, page 148).

Player characters balancing between respecting and exploiting Davokar must be tested before being considered worthy. The trolls start by examining them and go on to test the master and her allies by force of arms; the weak and foolish are struck down, but not killed. In that case the artifact is taken from the player character. If the master of the steel does well in combat, the trolls back down and return with an offer of blood ties, both as a gift and as a way of controlling the master.



HAFMUUL'S TRANSFORMATION GARMENTS (RARE)

Hafmuul the Transformer was a particularly productive artifact crafter, probably active shortly before or after the fall of Symbaroum. The artifacts made by his hand show signs of an already diminished understanding of greater artifacts – defects and risks that previous generations of artifacts do not exhibit to the same degree. Hafmuul's main focus was transformations, and his life's goal was to create an artifact that would allow him to transform into anything he wanted. Whether he succeeded is unclear, but he did leave behind several artifacts focused around the theme of transformation, including the Baiagorn Coat, the Violing Cloak, and the Mare Tunic. There are more of these garments, at least if the myth is to be believed, but these three are the only ones whose existence is certain.

Scholars claim to have found evidence that a person wearing all three of the aforementioned garments can assume the form of an even more powerful beast – combining them allows the master to transform into a massive aboar. What a master who wears even more of these transformation garments can turn into is a thought both frightening and exhilarating.

Some pundits also maintain that people using the transformation garments risk being trapped in the borrowed form – a symptom of degenerated artifact crafting. It is clear that the witches have a special affinity for these artifacts and can use them more effectively than others.

Frequent use of these garments comes with a risk. Anyone who transforms more frequently than once per day must roll 1d20. If the result is equal to or less than the number of transformations performed that day, the user is trapped in beast form. Over time (days, weeks) the user's mind will become more bestial. A person wishing to free a trapped user must cast dispel magic to separate the transformation garb from the user. The user's mind returns to normal after the same amount of time as they were trapped in the borrowed form. Reducing the animal form to 0 hit points returns the user to their original form.

Flight of Violings

Many a violing lost its life to create this feather cloak, black and glistening green. The user can transform into a flock of violings (see the *Ruins of Symbaroum Bestiary*, page 163) for one hour. Mystics with the Witch approach gain the Flyby monster feature (see the *Bestiary*, page 217) as well.

Requires: Object Interaction

Corruption: 1d4 temporary Corruption when you activate the cloak

Bear Walk

Whoever wears this heavy baiagorn fur can assume the form of a mighty baiagorn for one hour (*Bestiary*, page 137) when attacked. A Witch gains the Multiattack monster feature with one bite attack and one paws attack.

Requires: The character's reaction after taking 1 or more points of damage.

Corruption: 1d4 temporary Corruption when you activate the fur

Path of the Mare Cat

A person wearing this beautiful mare cat tunic can transform into a mare cat (see the *Ruins of Symbaroum Bestiary*, page 143). The transformation lasts for 1 hour. Mystics with the Witch approach also gain the monstrous feature Poisonous.

Requires: Object Interaction

Corruption: 1d4 temporary Corruption when you activate the tunic

Way of the Hog

Anyone wearing all three transformation garments – the Baiagorn Coat, the Violing Cloak, and the Mare Tunic – can choose to turn into a fearsome aboar (see the *Bestiary*, page 136). The transformation lasts for 1 hour. Users that have the Witch approach also gain the feature Regeneration (*Bestiary*, page 218, necrotic damage prevents the regeneration).

Requires: Action

Corruption: 1d6 temporary Corruption when you activate the garments

Adventure Set-up

The player characters encounter and kill a pack of mare cats, swarms of violings, or a baiagorn, and are surprised to find that one of them is a human wearing a transformation garment. And so, the hunt for the other garments begins.

Alternatively, a person they like or need to get hold of could disappear, and a monster shows up instead – most likely a baiagorn, but mare cats and violings are possible if the player characters are fresh on the adventuring path. The monster has something that belongs to the person they seek, like a piece of jewelry or clothing. At first the players may think that the monster has killed the person in question, or come from a place where the person is located; but more and more evidence suggests that the monster IS the person they seek – witness accounts, journal entries, or other clues point to that conclusion.

The characters must then find a way to capture the creature without killing it, and use dispel magic or similar magic on the victim to separate her from the transformation garment that keeps her in beast form.

HAGMANDARA'S BOW OF VENGEANCE (VERY RARE, +3)

One of the Iron Pact's more famous darkness hunters was Hagmandara. He was best known for his corruption hating bow that, according to legend, never missed and always brought down its target; the former was an effect of the hunter's skill and the latter something of an exaggeration. But it is clear that the glowing shots of the bow lit up Davokar and burned many dark creatures to ashes. When Hagmandara finally met his end against a dozen primal abominations, the bow passed to the Iron Pact where it has served many Ironsworn over the centuries.

Blight-marked (at half your Corruption Threshold or higher) people cannot attune themselves to Hagmandara's bow; for such individuals it is nothing more than an ordinary longbow.

Spark in the Dark

The master of the weapon can channel their hatred of corruption into the projectiles and send them blazing at corrupted creatures. A creature hit by the arrow must roll over its corruption with 1d8; on failure the creature immediately takes the amount of radiant damage indicated by the die.

Requires: Reaction

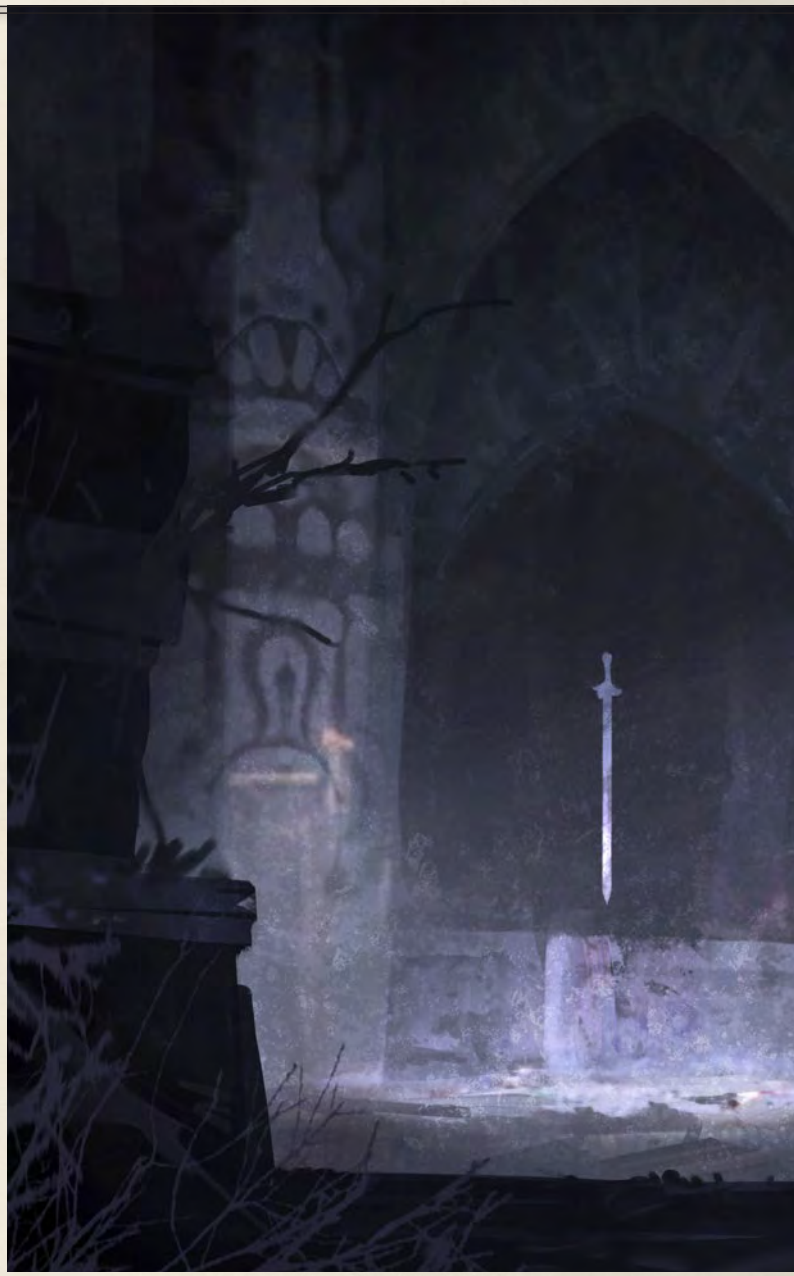
Corruption: 1 temporary Corruption per arrow

Glowing Fetters

In the hands of a master with the Marksman feature the arrows not only deal extra damage (see Spark in the Dark), but can also bind thoroughly corrupt creatures. A thoroughly corrupt creature hit by the arrow must pass a DC 10 Strength saving throw or be trapped in chains of fire and paralyzed until the beginning of your next turn.

Requires: Reaction

Corruption: 1d4 temporary Corruption per arrow, includes the effect of Spark in the Dark



Adventure Set-up

The Iron Pact may very well introduce a new or potential member and her allies to the mission of finding the bow; they know roughly where it is, but nothing more. Getting to the place and retrieving the bow is a test of endurance and skill; attuning it to oneself is a test of purity and worthiness.

THE LIVING CHAIN OF HOGARZ (UNCOMMON, +1)

It seems that Hogarz was an oddity – a troll living in Symbar. He fit in well with the local culture, as he was capturing beasts and monstrosities with his living chain. These were then paraded through Symbar to the great arena where they were pitted against other monsters or the city's heroes. Hogarz was also a great collector of trophies, and his symbol



Everyone cheers when an artifact is found. But before long, the quarrel about who will become its master begins...

has been found carved into everything from aboar tusks to lindworm skulls and tattooed into the skins of arch trolls. An Ambrian expedition even claims to have found a stuffed dragon (albeit in terrible condition) with Hogarz's symbol etched into every tooth in its wide-open maw.

Chain Trap

If you have attuned the chain to yourself, you can place it on the ground and trigger it as a fettering trap when someone passes over it. You decide whether the trap is triggered and, if there are multiple creatures passing it, which creature is trapped. The victim must succeed at a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw with disadvantage or be caught and restrained. The victim must use an action and succeed at a DC 15 Strength check to free themselves from the chains. The chain covers up to a 10-feet (3 meter) wide passage and can reach an equal height, catching a Large or smaller creature. If you have the Trapper feature, the chain can catch two Medium-sized or smaller enemies who pass it, one after the other or both at once.

Requires: Reaction, when someone passes the chain

Corruption: 1d4 temporary Corruption for each activation

Melee Chains

A master with the Snare Fighting Style feature can choose to carry the chain around (it counts as a +1 whip) and have it catch an enemy attacking the master in melee; the effect is the same as if the chain was lying on the ground.

Requires: Reaction, when someone attacks the master in melee and the chain is not restraining a creature

Corruption: 1d4 temporary Corruption when activated

Adventure Set-up
The magic chain is much sought after by both monster hunters and the gladiators of Yndaros who, in order to entertain the crowd, like to capture their opponents before killing them. Player characters with monster hunting ambitions could do worse than to start out with the Living Chain of Hogarz in their hands, and clues to the artifact's resting place will then be very enticing.

Otherwise the chain could serve as reinforcement in the hands of an enemy, and as a reward once that enemy has been slain. And since the artifact was made by trolls, its owner risks becoming the focus of the artifact-retrieving trolls, with interesting complications as a result.

ILOONA'S MIRROR SHIELD (RARE, +2)

The Witch Iloona forged this shield, according to legend with the help of a troll she saved from the maw of a king toad. She later used the shield to great success in battle against a powerful necromage who threatened her people. Iloona's fate is unknown, as is that of her shield; a boastful treasure hunter in Thistle Hold claimed to have discovered Iloona's tomb and found the shield inside, but lost the artifact playing dice shortly thereafter.

Block Magic
If you are attuned to the shield, you can use it to defend against magical attacks, in which case you either impose disadvantage on the spell attack roll or gain advantage on the spell saving throw.

Requires: Reaction
Corruption: 1d4 temporary Corruption per use

Shield Throw
If you have the Shield Fighting Style, you can throw the shield as a reaction, to block magic aimed at an ally within 30 feet, as the shield's Block Magic power. The shield always returns to its master's hand after the throw.

Requires: Reaction
Corruption: 1d6 temporary Corruption per use

Adventure Set-up
The existence of the shield and clues to its resting place are best introduced before the gaming group sets out to defeat an enemy mystic. The treasure hunter who bragged about the shield is a logical starting point for finding the artifact, and when the player characters get hold of this person (which is as easy or hard as the Gamemaster wants it to be) there are two variants of what happens next. One is that she tells them who won the shield from her, and that this gang leader/agitator/priest/witch hunter is still nearby. The other is that she admits that she knows the location of the tomb, but did not gamble away the shield; the treasure hunters did take the shield, but its owner came after her and suddenly the shield was in the hands of the dead witch instead! In other words, the artifact is back in the tomb, along with its undead owner.

THE CLOAK OF THE SEWER QUEEN (VERY RARE)

Legend has it that the tunnels and sewers under Lindaros were ruled by a woman called the Sewer Queen, a tramp with a unique cloak that made her very hard to catch or hurt. She was also known for abducting children and disappearing without a trace with them in her arms. Where she got the cloak and what happened to it after the Sewer Queen disappeared is unknown. Maybe it is true, as some people say, that the Sewer Queen was not human and that her presence beneath the city was a leftover from another age. In any event, the Sewer Queen is still being used to threaten naughty children in the eastern quarters of Yndaros.

Defensive Teleportation
If you are attuned to the cloak and attacked, you can choose to teleport yourself before the blow lands. You pick a location that you can see that is within 500 feet and make a DC 10 Intelligence check to teleport there. On a failure you remain where you are and are hit by the attack.

Requires: Reaction
Corruption: 1d8 temporary Corruption

Rescue Teleportation
If you have the Bodyguard feature you can take another creature along when teleporting. If the creature resists, you must make a DC 15 Intelligence check to teleport, otherwise it remains DC 10. On failure you both remain where you are.

Requires: Reaction, to an attack against you or the other creature
Corruption: 1d8 temporary Corruption

Adventure Set-up
The adventure could begin with the player characters needing help from someone whose child or protégé is missing. The person's condition for helping them is to get the child back, or at least discover information about the lost youngster's fate. Perhaps the person the characters seek is actually a missing child? The Sewer Queen could be many things, depending on what the Gamemaster needs:

- An undead sorcerer who is stealing children for the darkest purposes possible and must be stopped before more children are lost.
- An act of kindness passed down among homeless changelings; whoever wears the cloak is duty-bound to save other changelings and take them to a safe house where they receive help and training.
- The Sewer Queen might be an elf who is stealing children and leaving changelings in their stead, and the children she steals become abductees among the elves of Davokar.

- Perhaps the Sewer Queen is saving children from sorcerers; the "parents" or "guardians" who send the player characters on the rescue mission want the child (who is somehow special) for dark purposes. The player characters have a chance to realize that whoever took the child was trying to save it, and that their own quest givers are the true evil-doers.
- Can be combined with the changelings' act of kindness, otherwise the Sewer Queen is some other kind-hearted person.

THE WHISPERING NECKLACE OF LAPI-ESHA (LEGENDARY)

Murals in Davokar's ruins tell of an early Symbarian princess named Lapi-Esha, who was exceptionally good with snakes and secrets. She wore a necklace in the shape of a serpent, which whispered secrets in her ear and allowed her to dominate those around her with this knowledge. The murals depict the necklace as a golden snake with a single bright blue eye, the same color as the princess' own eyes.

Lapi-Esha conquered more and more land, particularly in the region previously ruled by the cruel King Hurian-Lo Apak, and she referred to herself as High Queen over the kings of Symbaroum. But she was never crowned empress, according to legend because she was bitten by her own serpentine necklace and died from its venom. Whether this is true or not is hard to say, but that others became emperor while she did not has been clearly established by historians.

The necklace can likely be found in the mausoleum where Lapi-Esha was laid to rest, or at the bottom of the deep pit into which a thief fell after having robbed it from her mummified body. It is clear that the necklace has not yet been found; otherwise its master would have made herself known through her plots and schemes.

Revealing Whisper

If you are attuned to the necklace, it whispers secrets about whoever the master is looking at. The serpent lets its master know which ability score is the target's weakest (without mentioning its exact value), and what burdens (see the *Ruins of Symbaroum Player's Guide*, page 151) the person has. With a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Insight) check you also learn the value of its weakest ability score and, if the target has the burden Dark Secret, what that secret is.

Requires: Bonus Action
Corruption: 1d4 temporary Corruption per use

Venomous Bite

The necklace can be made to attack in melee with its venomous bite. The snake attacks once per turn at the same time as you make your first attack, against the same target. If you hit your target, so does the snake. The snake does 1d8 poison damage and the creature must make a DC 10 Constitution saving throw. On a failure the snake's venom does 1d4 poison damage for 1d4 turns after the initial strike. If you have the Poisoner feature then the DC is 15 and the venom causes 1d6 poison damage for 1d6 subsequent turns.

Requires: Reaction, when the master attacks in melee
Corruption: 1d4 temporary Corruption per attack

Adventure Set-up

Adventures featuring the whispering necklace are best centered around intrigue and secrets. Perhaps the necklace first appears around the neck of a rival (not a mortal enemy) of the player characters, at the same time as the gaming group really needs such help to extract an important secret from another prominent person (whom they cannot kidnap or easily extort). Attempting to steal, borrow, buy, or otherwise obtain the necklace makes up the first act of the adventure; them using it to access other people's secrets becomes act two; and what they do after realizing what the secret is becomes act three.

NAGMIRA'S THUNDER HAMMER (RARE, +2)

The dwarf Nagmira has a mixed reputation as both oppressor and freedom fighter; to the dwarves of Yndaros she is practically a saint, while the dwarven clans in the Ravens consider her a tyrant and an outlaw. What Nagmira herself thinks no one knows, as she has not been seen in a decade. She left behind her beloved long hammer, driven into the stone gate of Küam Zamok. As far as anyone knows it is still stuck there to this day, since no one is able to wield it. Maybe it has something to do with Nagmira's last words: "My hunt is over, may the next mutt find more joy in the work!" What she had been hunting is unclear. Perhaps the runes on the hilt and head of the hammer could explain her mission, if someone was able to read them. Scholars from far and wide have tried to make sense of them, but so far no one has succeeded.

Crack of Thunder

If you are attuned to the hammer, you can slam the weapon into the ground and unleash a mighty peal of thunder. It shoots out from the hammer and spreads like a circle in all directions. Enemies within 15 feet take 2d6 thunder damage and must make a DC 10 Strength saving throw or fall prone.

Requires: Action
Corruption: 1d4 temporary Corruption per use

Flash of Lightning

If you have the Two-handed Force feature, you can make bolts of lightning shoot out from the hammer. The lightning strikes when you hit a target in melee. The target of the lightning bolt can be the same as for the hammer blow, or another one within sight. The strike deals 1d12 lightning damage.

Requires: Reaction, in conjunction with a hammer blow
Corruption: 1d4 temporary Corruption per use

Adventure Set-up

An intriguing possibility with the hammer is that a player character turns out to be destined to "take the next watch" – whether the character is a dwarf or not. Careful interpreters of Nagmira's words are surprised by the word "mutt". It is not a word a dwarf would use about another dwarf; the Dwarvish language has far juicier terms of abuse for that. It is a word more fitting for a human or some other cultural being, one that is worth no more than a filthy dog.

The question is also what the rightful owner of the hammer should be hunting – the Gamemaster must come up with a clearly defined target. Retrieving the hammer from Küam Zamok's heavily guarded gate is likely the first step (combat or negotiation), but then what? Is there a hidden source of corruption in the forests or mountains that must be found and neutralized?

Or maybe the mission leads to the alchemical laboratories where the dwarven race was born (guarded by Prios knows what); perhaps the fourteen birth vessels of the original clans must be destroyed for the dwarves to take their place in the world and regain their souls (and thereby lose the Earth Bound trait)?

NEMA'S ORBIT STATUE (RARE)

The wonder-maker Nema's orbit statue consists of a snake locked in deadly struggle with a dragonfly, chiseled from the same block of stone. Nema is said to be its creator, an artifact crafter in Lindaros who constructed many wondrous monuments in the city – mechanical birds singing melancholy songs, fountains with water of black and gold, and (if the myth is true) a floating island that housed an execution site and a temple to the stars. The orbit statue is small and unremarkable in comparison, though very useful.

Dragon Dance

As long as the sun is up and you are attuned to the statue, you can activate the upper part of the statue and summon a dragon fly, which serves you faithfully for 1 hour (see the *Ruins of Symbaroum Bestiary*, page 161), after which you can safely dismiss it.

Requires: Action

Corruption: 1d6 temporary Corruption per activation

Snake Dance

As long as the sun is below the horizon, the master can activate the lower part of the statue and summon a kanaran, which serves you faithfully for 1 hour (see the *Ruins of Symbaroum Bestiary*, page 142), after which you can safely dismiss it.

Requires: Action

Corruption: 1d6 temporary Corruption per activation

Adventure Set-up

The player characters, or someone else, come across some old texts suggesting that the orbit statue was hewn from the same rock as Nema's floating island; perhaps it is possible to use clues from the statue to find the rock and with it the fallen star temple of Lindaros?

With the statue in hand they can go searching for shards of similar stone in and around Yndaros and thus find remnants of the crashed sky island. Of course there are others who seek this legendary place, perhaps because of the star temple, perhaps to find the execution site with its graves for notorious murderers and sorcerers so vile not even Lindaros wanted them around. Exactly what awaits them in the ruined star temple is for the Gamemaster to decide, but it might very well be a meeting place for practitioners of the mystical tradition known as Astromancy.

THE EYE STONE OF PALAMUKK (VERY RARE)

Few illgoblins have made a name for themselves, but Palamukk is one of them. This crafty sibling-killer and wily corrupter of young goblins had an unlikely talent for reshaping the world the way he wanted it to be. This translated into his masterful artifact crafting and considerable skills as a blacksmith.

This was no doubt rooted in Palamukk's open disgust for the world as it was; "it is all bad and must be changed – or destroyed" is one of his more famous quotes. Palamukk's crowning achievement was a greater artifact in the form of an eye stone, which he inserted into his left eye socket. His plans to replace the right eye as well were interrupted by Palamukk's death at the hands of greedy relatives. The eye was auctioned in Thistle Hold and his body was sold by the kilo as pig fodder.

For the artifact to work, the master must permanently replace an eye with the stone, which grants access to its powers. The process of removing your eye and replacing it with a stone causes 1d12 piercing damage. The eye stone works

Astromancers

There are very few Astromancers in Ambria, but more are apparently based in the western city states and the doomed Freetown on the west coast of Alberetor. The Astromancers deal with weather, thunder, and lightning, as well as divination; they share many rituals with other traditions. Several of Ordo Magica's powers can be converted to thunder and lightning damage (from fire damage), if so desired. Perhaps it is their skill with divination that the player characters seek, and more powerful versions of divination spells are possibilities (ritual casting might allow rerolls on failure).

as a regular eye that can also see in the dark (darkvision to 60 ft.). It is emerald green and emits a faint inner light that can always be seen but is particularly noticeable in darkness.

Winds of Change
Once per turn, if you are attuned to the eye stone you can provide advantage or disadvantage on an ability check, saving throw or attack roll for an action being performed within sight.

Requires: Reaction
Corruption: 1d4 temporary Corruption per use

Flash of Creation
If you have the feature Alchemy or Blacksmith, or the Artifact Crafter approach, you can use the eye to create a non-magical object no larger than 2 feet (50 centimeters) on a side. The object appears instantly, out of thin air. If you have the Blacksmith feature, you can add a property to the object, such as a weapon or armor property.

The created item can be worn, used, or consumed with the same effect as the real thing. But it only exists for 1 hour, before withering into ashes. If you are willing to accept one point of permanent corruption, the object becomes permanent.

Requires: Action
Corruption: 1d6 temporary Corruption, plus 1 permanent Corruption if you choose to make the object permanent

Adventure Set-up
For a goblin player character, retrieving the eye stone could be a suitable mission to prove her worth to the tribe. Perhaps it is even said that whoever finds the eye shall become the tribe's leader? Or maybe the player character is a goblin who dreams of the illgoblin's role in the world, and what better way to begin their journey than to follow in the great Palamukk's footsteps?

THE WAR HORN OF THE STORMHOWLER (RARE)

This powerful war horn is large and robust enough to be wielded as a two-handed club, but the true power lies in its horn blasts, which range from loud to downright thunderous.

The horn must have come from a huge bull. According to legend it was carried by a giant who roamed around Vajvod in eastern Davokar. It took the combined efforts of several chieftains to slay the man-eating behemoth. The horn was carved with mystical runes by powerful symbolists and given to the first Clan Chieftain of Karohar as a symbol of office. It disappeared under mysterious circumstances more than a century ago, during internal conflicts between the local chieftains. Where it is now is anybody's guess, but whoever acquires the horn would certainly find a powerful ally in clan Karohar's current chieftain – or some other chieftain wishing to take his place!

Allies to the Rescue
The horn blast booms through the region and all allies within a day's march immediately become aware that you are in danger. They also know where to find you. Ultimately the Gamemaster decides which allies are nearby (if any), who they are, and how far away they are from you.

The Gamemaster might require that you pass a DC 10 Charisma (Persuasion) check for each group and that the allies are 1d10 hours away – on 0 you roll 1d10 again, which this time indicates a number of minutes rather than hours. The allies that come to the rescue are a number of creatures equal to the number of player characters and have a challenge rating equal to or lower than the group's average level divided by 4 (for example, if most of the group is 8th level, the creatures will be challenge rating 2 or lower), lead by a single individual with a challenge rating equal to half of the group's average level (in the above example, a single challenge rating 4 creature will lead them).

Requires: Action
Corruption: 1d6 temporary Corruption

Storm Fright
If you have the Aura of Aggression feature the horn can produce a blast so powerful that enemies might flee in fear. Make a Charisma (Performance) check, each creature within 120 feet of the horn must make a Wisdom saving throw against the result. On a failure, the creature is frightened of you. On a failure by 5 or more, while frightened the creature must use its movement to get away from you in the most efficient and safest way possible. The creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on a success. A successful save makes the creature immune to this effect for 24 hours.

Requires: Action
Corruption: 1d6 temporary Corruption



Adventure Set-up
The thunderous power of the war horn could also be the key to a mighty gate somewhere in the Ravens. Either the horn is all it takes or more keys are required – perhaps a magic pearl or two, which can naturally be found in the hands of other creatures who are either hostile to the player characters or want something in return for their treasure. What hides behind the gate is up to the Gamemaster, but why not a mythical dwarven kingdom that was abandoned long ago and has now been taken over by dark forces?

TERRASMA'S YONDERMIRROR (LEGENDARY)

Terrasma was an ancient explorer of worldly and mortal boundaries (fancier words for being a Sorcerer). Through ceremonies found in the deepest crypts of Davokar she created a magic mirror to peer further beyond the veil of the world.

The mirror was briefly described by the renowned sorcerer Arao, a contemporary of Terrasma, as made of volcanic glass, deep black, and rather substandard as a mirror. But apparently its power is revealed to those who draw unholy symbols in their own blood on its cold surface. The mirror is a window to the Yonderworld; it was created based on the theories on Katrandama's Triptych (see page 71 in the *Ruins of Symbaroum Player's Guide*), and believed by Arao to be strong evidence for the correctness of this ghastly world view.

They say that through the mirror Terrasma gained insights so dark that she broke away from the black path she was on, and is currently living out her days at a Black Cloak convent in the eastern Titans. This may of course be a cautionary lie spread by the Black Cloaks to lure sorcerers back into the light. Whatever the case may be, the location of the Yondermirror is unknown; it is possible that Terrasma herself knows where it is.

See Beyond
A person bound to the mirror can use it to peer into the Yonderworld. What information is gained from this depends entirely on the situation in the Yonderworld – that is, what daemons or ruins there are. The other side can also look back. Roll 1d20 each turn, if the outcome is equal to or lower than the number of turns spent watching, you are noticed by something on the other side; the Gamemaster decides what it is.

A dreadful version of this power is to look into the regular world from the Yonderworld; it is done the same way and with the same risks as described above. Those capable of plane shift can take the mirror with them to the Yonderworld. You cannot step into the mirror and take it with you.

Requires: Action

Corruption: 1d4 temporary Corruption for the person activating the mirror, 1 temporary Corruption for anyone else who looks in it

Reach Beyond
A master with the Sorcery ability can use the mirror to influence the Yonderworld. It is possible to reach out from the world and grab something there, and of course use powers and features on targets in the Yonderworld. This can be useful when fighting creatures who are teleporting, which takes place as movements through the Yonderworld.

While the power is active one can actually step through the mirror entirely and leave the regular world behind. This is possible for anyone, not just the sorcerer who activated it. To return to the world of the living one must be pulled back by people on the right side of the mirror, or use plane shift or similar magic; one can then jump back into the regular world and stay there. A person can realize this with the Loremaster feature and a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check.

The other side can also influence the regular world: roll 1d20 every turn, if the result is equal to or lower than the number of turns the user spent on the other side, corrupted nature is created in the location of the mirror (see the *Ruins of Symbaroum Bestiary*, page 20).

Another heinous possibility is to step out from the Yonderworld into the regular world; it is done the same way and with the same risks as described above. Any corrupted nature created emerges in the world of the living. In order to do this one must either plane shift or be transported (via banishment or exorcism) and bring the mirror along to the Yonderworld; you cannot step into the mirror and take it with you.

Requires: Action

Corruption: 1d6 temporary Corruption for the person activating the power, plus 1 temporary Corruption per round interacting with the Yonderworld. The latter also afflicts anyone else who uses the power while it is active.

Adventure Set-up
There are several variants of adventures that might include the mirror. One is that Terrasma actually escaped to the Yonderworld when she was surrounded by Black Cloaks. She possesses Desdemorgos' Icosahedron (see page 126), which means she has not yet become thoroughly corrupt. But she regrets going there and will do anything to get back to the regular world. The player characters get an opportunity to help a sorcerer who truly wishes to do penance and mend her ways.

Alternatively, she does not have Desdemorgos' artifact and is now thoroughly corrupt. She still says the same thing, of course: that she wants to go back and will do anything the player characters ask for a second chance. But when she returns, she is neither compliant nor obedient and has stats as a Necromage.

A third variant is that Terrasma – or some other sorcerer, necromage, etc. – possesses the mirror and uses it to

influence the part of the world where the player characters are located. The creature on the other side might want to get its hands on a person or artifact, or simply kill everyone in a certain place to avenge some offense. This could develop into a terrifying cat-and-mouse game where the player characters are attacked through the mirror, or even have to step through the mirror to fight the enemy in the Yonderworld.

RASTHUUL'S SPIRIT VESSEL (LEGENDARY)

The descriptions of the ancient mystic Rasthuul differ, except the parts about him creating this vessel and being burned at the stake in the infancy of Symbaroum for crimes against the laws of the world – a testimony suggesting that necromancers and corruption worshipers were not always celebrated in the early Symbarian Empire. Rasthuul survived the flames, thanks to his spirit vessel, and it was not until the emperor's bodyguards found and emptied the urn that the necromancer Rasthuul was finally destroyed. The spirit vessel was locked away in Symbar's artifact cabinet, along with a series of other particularly evil objects. How it got out of there and back into the world is unknown, but the vessel has turned up, first in Lindaros and later in the witches' stories. The existence of the spirit vessel is well-known and it is much coveted among sorcerers, who claim that Rasthuul's spirit still watches over the urn.

The master of the vessel can place their soul in it to avoid both corruption and physical death. A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check with the Shadow-sight feat reveals whether the vessel is empty or contains a spirit; in the latter case the shadow of the spirit is also revealed.

It is possible to attack and destroy the urn; it has AC 10 and 10 hit points. Another way of expelling a protected spirit is to attune the artifact to oneself; it takes a successful opposed Wisdom check to expel the current master.

The only way to attune the spirit vessel to oneself is to accept 1d4 points of permanent Corruption. But this permanent Corruption is handled as if the person was already bound to the spirit vessel, and is therefore a problem for the future, due to the power Soul Shield.

Soul Shield

The spirit vessel protects your soul against corruption and the death of your physical body. Any corruption gained by you is instead bound in the runes that cover the urn and never reaches the master's spirit. The same goes for the cold fingers of death, which will never touch the master – Death saving throws are rolled as usual, but death-bringing results are ignored. If your spirit leaves the vessel (if it is broken or bound to someone else), the unprotected spirit is afflicted by all corruption that is bound by its runes. Furthermore, any postponed death immediately catches up with you.

Requires: Attunement only

Corruption: None

Rasthuul's Echo

The spirit of Rasthuul rests to some extent in the vessel he created, and the master of the artifact can always sense if someone is about to grab or attack the spirit vessel. You can then activate this power as a reaction, before anyone has time to affect the vessel in any way. The power does two things. First the spirit vessel emits a wave of hatred that inflicts necrotic damage to each creature within 30 ft. of the vessel. The damage is a number of d20s equal to your proficiency bonus (e.g. if your proficiency bonus is +4, the vessel does 4d20 necrotic damage to each creature within 30 feet of it.) Everyone present must also pass a DC 10 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone. In addition, you are immediately teleported to its location and manifest 1d12 feet from the vessel.

Requires: Reaction

Corruption: 1d8 temporary Corruption, which is bound in the urn's runes and does not affect the master until their spirit leaves the vessel

Adventure Set-up

On their adventures the player characters find themselves an arch enemy, and no matter how many times they kill, maim or burn this arch enemy the person keeps coming back. This is because the arch enemy's soul is resting safely in Rasthuul's spirit vessel. To defeat the enemy once and for all they must find and empty the vessel. If they succeed the player characters will have a chance to claim the artifact for themselves. Where the enemy has hidden the vessel depends on who it is – for example in its own tomb (undead), a treasure chamber in a castle (prince or chieftain), or a ruin in the Yonderworld (demonologist).

THE LANTERN OF SALAMANDRA (RARE)

The infamous master spy Salamandra was thrust into the public consciousness in the final stages of The Great War, when she infiltrated the Dark Lords' strongholds to analyze their weaknesses and returned with suitable points of attack. She later became an important actor in establishing Ambria, particularly in the case of Clan Jezora – the attack on Chieftain Haloban's fortress was based on intelligence from her. These cloak-and-dagger operations would not have been possible without Salamandra's most prized possession: her dark lantern.

They say the artifact swallows light and spreads absolute darkness in which only its master is able to see. When Salamandra retired, under the weight of her experiences and Ambria's most prestigious decorations, the dark lantern passed to other spies. As far as anyone knows it is still in their hands, in the service of the Queen.

Spread Darkness

While its hatch is open the dark lantern spreads darkness with the same radius as an ordinary lantern spreads light.

The darkness is dense, but your vision is not affected; the same goes for traits that allow creatures to see in total darkness. The darkness follows the lantern, and the power is canceled if you drop the lantern. In the hands of someone with the Backstab feature the lantern's darkness is so deep that only its master can see through it.

Requires: Action to start, lasts for 1 minute
Corruption: 1d4 temporary Corruption

Dark Steps
In the hands of someone with the Feint feature, the lantern can teleport you between areas of total darkness within 500 feet. For this to work you must be able to see your next destination and Spread Darkness must be active.

Requires: 5 ft of Movement
Corruption: 1d4 temporary Corruption

Adventure Set-up
It is tempting to link the lantern to Ambrian intrigues and the Queen's spies, but by no means is it necessary. A player character who is a former Queen's Spy knows for certain that the lantern exists, and other contacts can provide the same information. The lantern can then become an intermediate goal on the way to infiltrating some particularly well-guarded place – such as the restricted sections of Ordo Magica's library, the Royal Sekretorium's archives, or the artifact collections in Templewall. A severely haunted ruin will also suffice; there the player characters need all the advantages they can get.

WORLDCLEAVER (LEGENDARY, +3)

Worldcleaver is a two-handed sword with a wavy blade, supposedly forged in black flames deep beneath Symbar to crush the empire's enemies. It was wielded by the greatest warrior in Symbaroum, appointed through duels with captured monsters. The person who wields Worldcleaver must be Blight-marked (see page 38 in the *Ruins of Symbaroum Player's Guide*), otherwise the weapon simply works as a regular two-handed sword.

It is possible to trick the weapon with the ritual Exchange Shadow, as long as one borrows the shadow of someone with enough permanent Corruption to have developed some kind of blight mark.

Demon Birth
As master of the weapon you can cleave reality instead of an enemy, and birth a daemon through the wound. The daemon obeys you for 1 hour and is then sucked back into the world wound.

The daemon has stats as a Vindictive Daemon under your control (see the *Ruins of Symbaroum Player's Guide*, page 206).

Requires: Action
Corruption: 1d6 temporary Corruption



Bloody Banishment
If you have the Two-handed Force feature, you can strike an enemy and cleave reality with the same attack. An enemy damaged by this attack must roll over the damage total on 1d20 or be sucked into the Yonderworld.

Out in the howling madness the victim takes 1d6 – 3 (minimum 0) temporary Corruption per turn. At the end of its turn, the creature can make a DC 15 Charisma saving throw, returning to the world of the living on a success. A creature made thoroughly corrupt returns to the regular world in the form of a dragoul and you control it.

Requires: Reaction
Corruption: 1d6 temporary Corruption

Adventure Set-up
One way to build an adventure around Worldcleaver is to give the weapon an additional function, specific to the adventure. For example, in one of Dark Davokar's many ruins there could be a guardian who will only step aside for the master of this artifact. The monstrosity's challenge rating must be high enough to make frontal attacks very difficult; it must be obvious to the players that this is not meant as a balanced fight. Legends, shown in mosaics on the ruin walls or available in the form of memories reserved in a memory stone, suggest that one needs a terrible weapon in order to pass. Finding the weapon (what slimy creature might have it now?) and figuring out a way to bind it to oneself are steps to solving the puzzle.

WATER OF THE DUSK (UNCOMMON)

Water of the Dusk is said to have been created for the first time on a battlefield during The Great War, just before the hordes of the Dark Lords were about to swarm into Alberetor.

Today, Water of the Dusk is crafted at the summer Solstice by the most powerful theurgs in the service of Prios. When the last rays of the dying sun shine through the atrium of Templewall's mighty cathedral, they are captured in the tears of the holy Weepers, to be dripped into a crystal vial blessed for the purpose. Only one such vial is made each year and its powers contain the blessing and judgment of Prios, distilled to a handful of drops.

This light-bringing elixir is said to cure diseases, scare off blight beasts and – if the vial is shattered – purge an accursed place of its unholy energies. Naturally, Water of the Dusk cannot be purchased. Instead, it is always given to the most faithful servants of the Church prior to an important mission. However, the occasional vial may have been lost as some champions of the sun have fallen in battle.

The holy Water of the Dusk cannot be bound by taking on new corruption; it must be paid for in pain. When this is done, a character that attunes the water to themselves immediately suffers 1d12 points of damage for each point of permanent Corruption they have. Characters whose hit points are brought down to 0 are immediately burned to a pile of ash – the rule for death saving throws does not apply!

Spontaneous Water of the Dusk

It is said that Water of the Dusk can appear spontaneously, but that it only happens during especially sacred conditions and that its effect in such cases remains active only for a short time. For instance, Prios is supposed to have blessed the water in a rippling brook by a rest stop in the Titans; a brook from which Queen Korinthia drank with cupped hands mere moments before she first laid eyes on Ambria bathing in evening mists lit by the last light of Prios. A small chapel has been built on that site.

Other rumors tell of a spring by the ruin of the sun temple east of Karvosti possessing the powers of the holy water – a clear sign that the Sun Knights were right to liberate the ruin from elves and witch worshipers – and about a frontier village on the shores of River Eanor where a well is said to have been blessed. A little boy jumped into the well to escape the blight beasts that attacked the colony; the blighted ones that jumped in after him were incinerated by the water and the boy was the only one to survive the slaughter. The ones who survive will find that all their permanent Corruption has been burnt away.

Characters with permanent Corruption may make a DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check to realize that the Water will judge them harshly.

Newly made Water of the Dusk has 1d4 + 2 charges. For each charge, the user can invoke one of the following powers. Once the charges are used up, the Water of the Dusk loses its power:

The Light of the Sun
In the hands of one who has submitted to the light and bound itself to it, the vial can flare up with the power of the sun, so that the surroundings are bathed in light equal to a cloudless day with the sun high in the sky. The wielder casts daylight at the cost of one charge.
Requires: Action
Corruption: None

Drop of the Sun
By spending a charge, you can produce a drop of the holy water, which has one of the following effects:
- Heal 2d10 hit points
- Remove one poison or disease
- Purges one point of permanent Corruption
- Forces a creature within 30 feet to take necrotic damage equal to its current Corruption total. If the creature has no Corruption, it takes no damage.

Requires: Bonus Action
Corruption: None

Holy Synergy
A Theurg can spend a charge as part of casting a spell; the wielder has advantage on any required spell attacks, other creatures have disadvantage on any required saving throws, no material components are consumed by the spell and any one effect from the spell is doubled (e.g. double dice, double area of effect, etc.).
Requires: Bonus Action
Corruption: None

Justice of the Lightbringer
The one bound to the Water of the Dusk can break the vial with just a thought and unleash its judging light. All present creatures that have at least one (1) point of Corruption suffer damage equal to their total Corruption, while all creatures that belong to the Abomination monster category suffer 1d10 × 10 radiant damage. Of course, this also affects the one who carries the vial.
Requires: Action
Corruption: None

Adventure Set-up
See the example adventure *Blight Night*, starting on page 187.



What the giant faces marking the western entrance to Serand's Pyramid represent is a topic of intense debate among the historians of Ordo Magica.

XTALA'S HOURGLASS (LEGENDARY)

Feared even by the Symbarians, the necromancer Xtala was said to be able to stop time and in the safety of timelessness act according to her horrific purposes. Legend has it that a great hero named Aktopo tricked Xtala into using all the sand in her hourglass, and as a result she was hit by a time wave that reduced her to ashes and dust. The hero picked up the hourglass, turned it over, and could stop time just as she once did; at least until all the sand ran into the other chamber of the hourglass. Aktopo was more careful than the hourglass' creator and met his end much later, at the hands of his enemies. And so the hourglass was lost to the world.

Sands of Time

You can let sand run through the glass and thus stop time for a number of turns. During these turns you may act alone, and the effect of all actions occurs when time starts moving again. Every turn you act outside of time, you become a year older. Furthermore, the master must roll 1d20 each turn; if the result is lower than the number of turns the master has acted outside of time during the current scene, the master falls dead to the ground. No reroll is allowed; time is relentless in its vengeance.

Requires: Bonus action

Corruption: 1d4 temporary Corruption per turn outside of time

Adventure Set-up

The hourglass is best placed in the hands of a fearsome enemy, and becomes a mighty reward for player characters who survive the encounter with its owner. A variant is that the player characters are not really after the owner of the hourglass, but the hourglass itself. The Gamemaster can introduce a problem that is almost impossible to solve without stopping time; the characters must fetch something from a highly corruptive place (possibly in the Yonderworld) or a lake of lava or acid, or why not the treasure heap of a dragon? If this unpleasant problem is introduced just before the player characters learn that the hourglass exists, they will probably see the latter as a solution to the former.

THE STONE OF RESURRECTION

(LEGENDARY, SPECIAL 0 PERMANENT CORRUPTION)

This roughly cut block of granite is said to have come from a sorcery temple in darkened Lyastra. The Templars stormed and razed the temple in the name of Prios, and someone brought home the stone that was pulsing with darkness. Whispered rumors suggest that it was a Templar who took the stone. The temptation was understandable; it is said that, if used correctly, the stone can bring the dead back to life, at the cost of another life untouched by Corruption. Some sources claim that the sacrifice must be voluntary, others that consent is not necessary. One version of the legend states that the holy knight who took the stone gave his life to bring back a loved one, while in other tales the knight sacrifices another person in a dark and desperate attempt to be reunited with his beloved.

No one knows where the stone is, but it is said that a sorcerer who was burned at the stake in Jakaar was later seen walking through Davokar with no trace of the flames that consumed him – it might be an empty rumor, or a clue.

Voluntary Sacrifice

A person attuned to the stone can sacrifice themself to bring another creature back from the dead. The person making the ultimate sacrifice must be free of Corruption, but the resurrected does not have to be. However, some part of the deceased – ashes, a finger bone, or a lock of hair – must be placed on the stone before the blood of the sacrifice flows over it. The resurrected individual rises there and then, just as they were before they died. The body is healed from all wounds, but retains the Corruption it had at the moment of death.

Requires: Ritual (10 minutes)

Corruption: None

Forced Sacrifice

If you have the Sorcery approach, you can sacrifice an unwilling living humanoid creature to bring back another creature from the dead. The resurrection is otherwise the same as for a voluntary sacrifice.

Requires: Ritual (10 minutes)

Corruption: 1d8 temporary Corruption, 1 permanent Corruption

Adventure Set-up

There are several possible set-ups where the player characters seek the stone in order to resurrect someone, and must either find a willing sacrifice (without Corruption) or embrace their deepest darkness to succeed. Or maybe some angelic creature (without Corruption) has gone missing and the player characters must try to stop a forced sacrifice before it is too late.

A traditionally evil sorcerer naturally wants to resurrect an even darker power and receive its blessing, but the story becomes more layered if the person to be resurrected is fundamentally good – a murdered lover, a lost child, or why not one of Prios' Lightbringers who is brought back to save the sorcerer (or a loved one?) from becoming thoroughly corrupt. Here the Gamemaster has every opportunity to twist the narrative knife a turn or two, unless a more straightforward quest to vanquish evil is desired.



SECTION 5

New & Optional Rules

My beloved Queen, we must end our collaboration with the barbarians in Vajvod at once! The "peaceful riverlands" is but the result of pacts made with otherworldly forces at the Azure temple!

I witnessed as old Clan Chieftain Zoltar accepted the oaths of several new vassals. The first oath-taker drew her sword and handed it to old Zoltar, saying: "I, Agarda of Gelderhem, swear by the blood in my veins and the water in the river to be true in word and deed, and to send no less than a dozen armed men to my chieftain's side when the beacon is lit. They will serve for the turn of the moon, in defense of the riverlands. This I swear, from today and until the day my chieftain releases me or death takes me." The last sentence was echoed by all assembled, witnesses and vassals.

The Clan chieftain replied in kind, ending with "until the gods release me and death takes me." Then prisoners were led into the temple, their bare feet shuffling over the blue stone. Zoltar used the oath-takers' blades to cut the throat of one prisoner each, and the blood washed over the vassals-to-be.

Unaccustomed to such savagery I flinched, which brought a smile to the lips of the chronicler standing beside me, his feather pen catching every name and word said at the oathing. As we left, I first felt – then heard – the rock tremble beneath our feet. I stopped to look but the chronicler grabbed my arm and led me after the others: "It's not for us to see, the feast of the gods," he said.

The chronicler saved me from the sight of these "gods", but not from the sounds of their feast; the gluttonous gargling, lustful chewing and insane kackling that accompanied the consumption of the sacrificed prisoners. My feeble prayers to Prios did nothing to ease the horror, and I am certain these sounds will follow me to my grave...

IN THIS SECTION we have collected chapters with rules and guidelines that cover a variety of areas – from large scale battles, through pacts between player characters and demonic powers, to fiendish traps and world-altering magical ceremonies. No matter if you choose to embrace it all or only pick the goodies out of the cake, the tips and rules presented below have the potential to make your adventures in Ambria and Davokar even more spicy, thrilling and memorable.

Advanced Traps

THE TREASURES HIDDEN in the ruins of Davokar are often guarded by advanced machinery; many tombs and treasure chambers of Ambrian nobles are also fitted with deadly traps. Passing them undetected and unharmed is a challenge worthy of even the most experienced treasure hunter. Constructing such advanced traps requires the combined effort of engineers and trappers, and plenty of time and money. There are magical traps as well, woven by patient ritualists or carved by diligent runemasters. Such traps are particularly devious and difficult to avoid, even for a master thief.

Traps as Challenges

ALL ADVANCED TRAPS reset after being triggered or passed; they are not disarmed, but ready to trap or maim whoever comes next. Encountering and dealing with an advanced trap counts as a challenging scene in its own right and thus grants Experience Points.

A trap's difficulty level determines how challenging it is to handle. The values listed in the Advanced Traps table are used when detecting and circumventing, as well as defending against, each respective mechanism. All mechanisms described in the next section can be of any level; the level of the specific trap encountered by the player characters is determined by the Gamemaster, either by rolling on or choosing from the table. All advanced traps have three features in common, which are described according to the following template:

- **Clue.** Characters with a high passive Perception or those actively investigating their surroundings might notice that something is wrong, and have a chance to detect the danger.
- **Mechanism.** What happens if someone fails to detect the trap and triggers its effect – i.e. the way it deals damage. Avoiding or reducing the damage usually requires a successful Dexterity or Constitution saving throw. Some traps make multiple attacks at the same target, all of which must be evaded separately, these use the attack modifier given. Standard damage per attack is given on the table below as well.
- **Solution.** The correct way of handling the trap in order to pass it safely. The players must try to figure it out based on the clue; a player character with the Trapper feature or proficient with a Trapper's Manual can disable a trap with a successful Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check.

ADVANCED TRAPS

1d6	Difficulty/Attack Roll	Damage	XP
1	Weak (DC 10)/+0	1d4	25
2	Ordinary (DC 13)/+2	1d6	50
3	Challenging (DC 16)/+4	1d8	200
4	Strong (DC 19)/+6	1d10	800
5	Mighty (DC 22)/+8	1d12	1,600
6	Extreme (DC 25)/+10	1d20	6,400

Magical Traps

THE TRAPS PRESENTED below may of course be used as-is, but hopefully they can also serve as inspiration for homemade creations. If you enjoy designing death-dealing mechanisms with (more or less) tricky solutions, you are perfectly welcome to share your inventions on any of the forums where Symbaroum is discussed, for instance at forum.frialigan.se.

ACID SHOWER

Clue: Odd, worrying holes are found here and there in the ceiling, and the floor looks badly corroded. Half a dozen glass spiders have been placed in cracks in the walls; they are dirty, except for at the middle of the back, where they are sparkling clean. Spider webs cover the path forward, half a dozen in total. It seems almost impossible to

cross the room without tearing down at least a couple of the webs.

Mechanism: The silk threads are pulled by mechanical spiders, and breaking more than one of them triggers a devastating acid shower. Everyone in the room takes acid damage for 6 rounds; make a Constitution saving throw to reduce the damage by half; make a Dexterity saving throw to reduce the time down to 3 rounds by exiting the area early.

Solution: One can safely pass the room by walking through a thread and rubbing the back of the nearest spider, which then starts spinning a new thread. When it is done, one simply walks through the next thread and then repeats the procedure so that no more than one of the six threads is broken at the same time.

LIGHTNING GATE

Clue: The air in the room or corridor buzzes with power and makes the hair on one's head and arms stand on end. The focus of this energy is the closed door at the far end of the room. There are two waist-high copper rods sticking out of narrow furrows in the floor just inside the entrance to the room/corridor; the furrows run straight across to the far wall.

Mechanism: Stepping inside without grabbing both rods with one's bare hands triggers a lightning bolt that hits everyone in the room/corridor, a successful Dexterity saving throw reduces the damage by half. The lightning bolt dances between the walls and hits a random target a second time with the same effect, before it disappears and the lightning gate recharges.

Solution: A person gripping the copper rods will not trigger the trap. The rods can be moved through the furrows in the floor, all the way to the door; that will deactivate the trap for one minute. Then the rods either return to their original position or stay where they are, depending on the trap's design (i.e. the Gamemaster decides).

SUMMONING TRAP

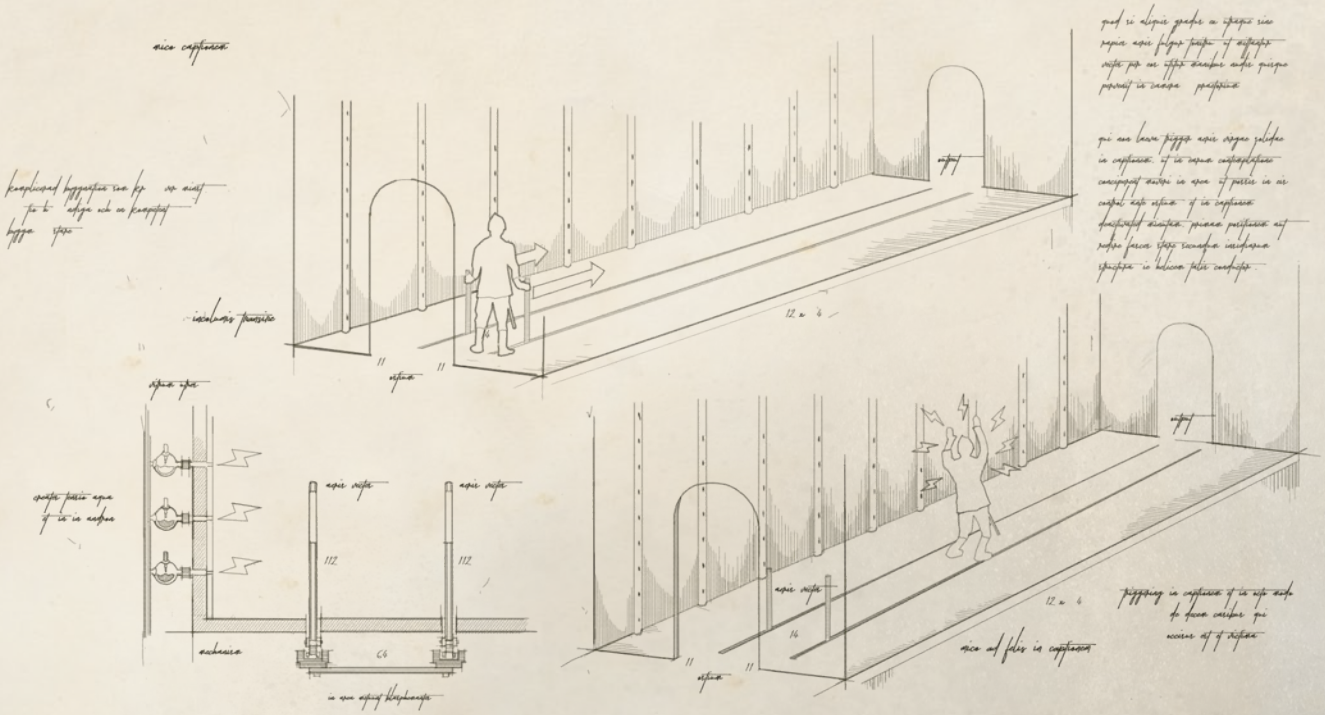
Clue: The walls of the room are covered with mystical symbols that seem to have withstood the ravages of time alarmingly well... Reading the runes requires either the Loremaster or Ritualist feature, or training in a mystical tradition; such a person can detect which one of the following mechanisms awaits those who enter the room.

Mechanism: Anyone entering the room must either be, do, or refrain from doing, something – otherwise a monster of appropriate challenge is summoned (choose a type of monster that fits the location). Only one monster is summoned, and it will not leave the room. It vanishes if defeated or after one minute. Then a new monster can be summoned by careless adventurers.

The criteria for triggering the trap can vary, but possible options are:

- A person entering the room with a drawn weapon triggers the trap.
- A person entering the room without paying homage to the specific higher power of the place (i.e. saying positive things about Wyrtha/nature, Wielda/civilization, Wratha/ corruption, etc.) triggers the trap.
- A creature with or without corruption entering the room (a holy or unholy place); the trap can be tricked by rituals and elixirs that affect corruption or the way it manifests itself.

Solution: Understanding exactly what it takes to trigger or avoid the trap requires the Loremaster feature, a mystical tradition, or the Ritualist feature, and a successful Intelligence (Arcana) check. Dispel magic disables the trap for one minute.



Mechanical Traps

THE FOLLOWING TRAPS are more mechanical in nature and cannot be disarmed or avoided by suppressing magical effects in their area of operation.

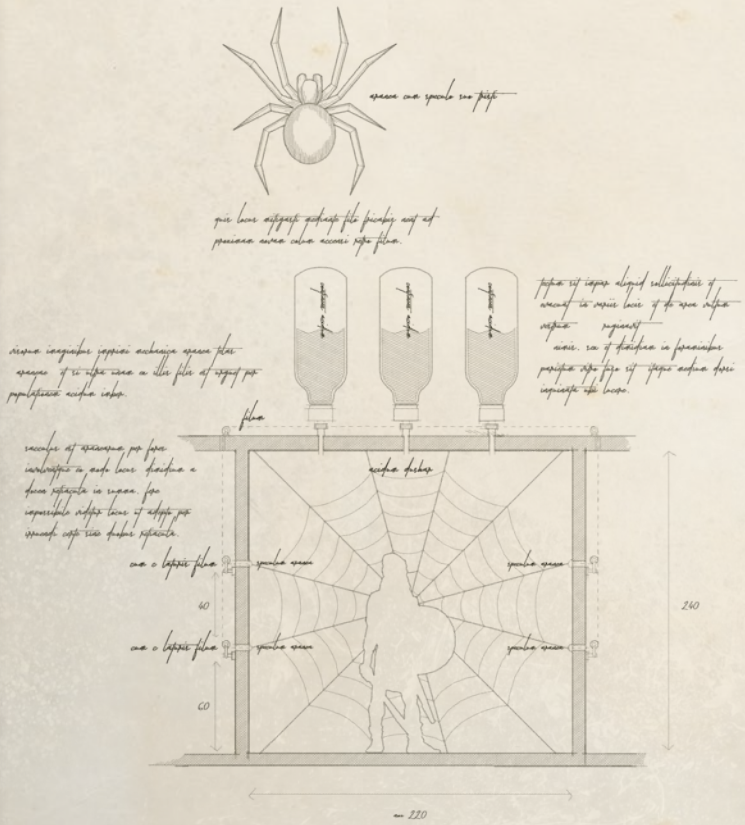
COLLAPSING CEILING

Clue: A faint bubbling sound comes from the walls, which seem to have some form of vertical trenches or rails built into them. There are stains on the floor and matching stains on the ceiling. Some of the stone floor tiles look more worn than others.

Mechanism: Stepping on one of the less worn floor tiles sends the ceiling crashing down, a successful Dexterity saving throw reduces the damage by half and allows the victim to get out of the room. Anyone who takes full damage is trapped under the crushing ceiling and takes additional damage each round.

A person outside the room can walk over the collapsed ceiling and pull a lever to reset the trap; it happens quickly so it takes a successful Dexterity saving throw to get away and not be crushed as the water pressure returns the ceiling to its original position. The character takes half damage on a failure and is able to exit the room.

Solution: Walk on the worn floor tiles when crossing the room – no ability check required. Running through the room requires a successful Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to avoid stepping on the wrong tile.





NET TRAP

Clue: The stone tiles of the floor (or the leaves on the ground) have ropes hidden between them, which seems rather strange.

Mechanism: Each creature who enters the room rolls 1d6, one after another; if the result is lower than or equal to the number of creatures already in the room, the trap is triggered – a large net is pulled up and traps everyone high in the air, 30 feet (10 meters) above the floor. At the same time alarm bells are rung to alert the guards, who arrive after 1d6 turns. Breaking free requires a sharp weapon and three successful attack rolls (AC 12); if anyone succeeds, everyone falls to the ground.

Solution: The trap can be triggered by throwing heavy objects into it (which sets off the alarm) or cutting threads so that people can walk through the net trap without triggering it, which requires a Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check. It takes three successful checks – a failure triggers the trap and the alarm.

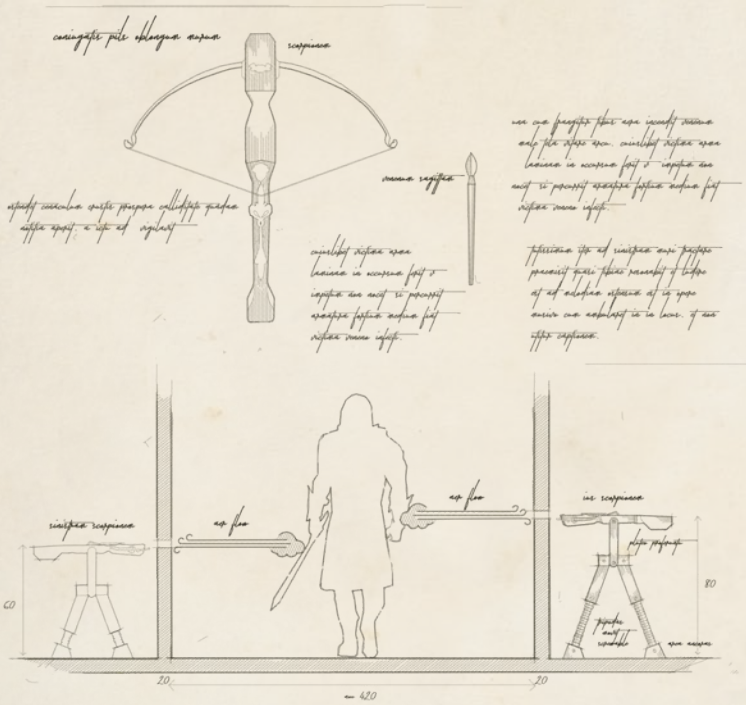
POISON PROJECTILE WALL

Clue: A successful Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals that the room's mosaics depict some form of musical notes. A Wisdom (Perception) check shows irregular holes here and there in the wall mosaics; they do not look like a random effect of aging. The room is full of blowing, whistling sounds, like what might come from a bunch of hoarse flutes.

Mechanism: When any of the air currents between the walls is broken in an incorrect fashion, a poisoned projectile is fired – it takes a successful Dexterity saving throw to avoid getting hit, taking poison damage on a failure.

The treasure hunter who has not survived the encounter with a spiked floor... well, she is probably dead.

Solution: The safest way forward is to treat the left wall like a flute and play the melody shown in the mosaics while walking through the room. That way the trap will not go off. The air currents can be avoided, at least by an agile person. It takes three successful Dexterity (Acrobatics) checks to get through the room that way; each failure releases a poisoned projectile.



SPIKE PIT

Clue: The floor looks uneven, and footprints in the dust suggest that those who walked through here followed a certain path across the floor.

Mechanism: Those who fall through the hatch in the floor plunge toward a set of spikes. Roll four attack rolls against each creature, doing the standard piercing damage each time. A creature can make a Dexterity (Acrobatics) check against a successful attack roll to avoid the spike. Climbing out of the hole requires a successful Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check, but failure sends the climber crashing down again, with the same result as the first time. Creature who receive help have advantage on the roll.

Solution: Follow the tracks in the dust. Walking slowly requires no check, but anyone who runs must pass an Intelligence check to stay on the right path – otherwise they will fall down a trapdoor.

SPIKE FLOOR

Clue: There are odd, worrying holes in the floor, between certain stone tiles that look less worn than the others.

Mechanism: Spikes burst up from the floor; everyone in the room is subject to four attack rolls, taking standard piercing damage on a hit.

Solution: Walk on the worn stones, which requires a successful Wisdom (Perception) check in order to cross the room safely.

Ceremonies

"CEREMONY" IS THE generic term for rituals which must be performed by a group of mystics, and which are powerful enough to permanently alter the local geography and the course of history. They can cause firestorms, earthquakes, insect swarms, diseased winds, volcanic eruptions, devastating tidal waves, and more.

But ceremonies are performed at great cost, in both Corruption and uncontrollable side effects. After a series of catastrophic incidents during The Great War, a prohibition was introduced against performing, and passing on knowledge about, ceremonial magic. In today's Ambria, all violations are considered acts of high treason.

Ceremonies are intended to be a dramatic tool to be used by *Ruins of Symbaroum* Gamemasters, not something the player characters can learn or use. Sure, it is theoretically possible for a group of characters to successfully perform a ceremony, either by themselves or with the help of allies. But the basic idea is that mystical ceremonies should be used by hostile factions or groups, and that the characters are tasked with preventing the devastation which will otherwise be afflicted on the world.

Rules for Ceremonies

SINCE CEREMONIES ARE merely intended as dramatic tools for creating exciting stories, they do not need to be regulated in detail.

The descriptions below should be viewed as suggestions and guidelines which the Gamemaster may follow, adjust or ignore, depending on what best suits his or her story. The most important thing is that the players feel that their characters' choices and actions have a chance to impact the effect of the ceremony – if it is interrupted in time, there is every reason to celebrate; if it takes full effect, it becomes a cause for guilt and soul-searching.

THE EXECUTION

To perform a mystical ceremony, one requires written instructions on the procedure and a group of loyal individuals with mystical schooling. One also needs to gather material for the ceremonial circle, establish a mystical link to the place where the ceremony will take effect, and possibly obtain an appropriate sacrifice. In other words, it is something that takes a lot of time and effort.

The ceremonial book: Ceremonies are much too complex for a mystic to memorize in detail; they must follow instructions recorded in a tome, on a series of stone tablets, parchment scrolls, or something of that nature. Despite the security regulations, one can expect there to be at least two copies of each ceremonial text, but all of them are most likely hidden and/or guarded. The stealing of a ceremonial book will not go unnoticed, and the victim of such a theft will do just about anything to get it back.

The participants: It takes at least four people to perform a mystical ceremony, but there should preferably be more, to mitigate the Corruption suffered by individual participants (see Corruption and Sacrifices below) and as a precaution in case someone should try to interrupt the ceremony (see Interrupting Ceremonies).

One participant is the ceremony's Officiant, meaning the mystic in charge of it all. The Officiant must have attained 20th level in a mystical tradition, while the requirements are lower for other participants – they only need novice training in a mystical approach.

Ceremonial focus: A ceremony takes place in two locations – one where the participants are gathered, and one where the ceremony takes effect. As long as the latter can be seen from the former, no mystical link needs to be established between the two, but if the distance is too great or the view is blocked, the Officiant must prepare a specific ceremonial focus which is placed in advance where the effect is to occur. What kind of object is needed is specified in the description of the respective ceremony.

Finding this hidden ceremonial focus is virtually impossible for an outsider, and is therefore not a viable way to interrupt the ceremony – the area that must be searched is too vast,

Terms of the Prohibition

In the kingdom of Ambria, only the monarch can grant the right to study the art of ceremonial magic and pass on such knowledge to someone else; in the latter case, the recipient of said knowledge also requires the monarch's approval. All ceremonial books must be registered and kept in such a way that only their owner can access them, and copying entire or large parts of any such text is a crime equivalent to performing a ceremony.

Only the monarch can issue exemptions to the prohibition against ceremonies, and requests for such exemptions are only accepted from the Field Marshal, the Grand Master of Ordo Magica, and the head of the Sun Church.



Ceremonies are immensely powerful, but also generate immense and unavoidable surges of corruption.

the object too small, and those who planted it (usually) too calculating. There can be exceptions, however, if the Gamemaster thinks that it is appropriate and will increase the suspense.

Procedure: Like other rituals, ceremonies are performed in a circle of symbols and mystically charged objects, making it easier to gather and focus the mystical energies of Creation. The Officiant and the participants position themselves along the outer edge of the circle, facing its center and the sacrifice which (if any) has been prepared.

When the preparations have been made and the ceremony begins, the Officiant and the participants drift into a trance and remain completely detached from the world until the ceremony is interrupted or completed. It may therefore be a good idea to hire a guard force to protect the defenseless mystics.

Timescale: Acquiring everything needed for the ceremony can take weeks or years, but when a ceremonial book, ceremonial focus, and other components are in place, it takes between twelve and twenty-four hours to complete the procedure.

The final stage, starting with the participants going into a trance, takes at least an hour, but its duration should mainly be determined according to what suits the story (that is: what makes it as dramatic as possible).

CORRUPTION AND SACRIFICES

As a basic rule, each participant of a ceremony suffers 2d4 points of temporary Corruption.

The Corruption comes into effect immediately after the ceremony is interrupted or completed. If it is not interrupted before reaching its conclusion, each participant also suffers 1 point of permanent Corruption.

One way to reduce the Corruption is to bind a sacrifice to the ceremony – either a living creature or a summoned daemon. In the former case, it could be a human or an animal of at least human size. If the creature has 1 or more total Corruption, the temporary Corruption for each participant is reduced by 1; if the creature is completely untainted, the temporary Corruption for each participant is reduced by 3. If the result is 0 or less, that participant gains no temporary Corruption. In any case, the victim dies when the ceremony concludes or is interrupted at stage 3 or 4 (see Interrupting Ceremonies).

If, in the process, the Officiant summons and successfully subdues a daemon, it can be used to channel part of the Corruption into the Yonderworld. It works the same as with living creatures, except that 1d10 is rolled and the daemon is banished instead of being killed.

SIDE EFFECTS FROM CEREMONIES

Ceremonies disrupt the natural order in many far-reaching ways, and have consequences not even the most powerful mystics can foresee. However, all who are powerful enough to use ceremonies know that the channeled power will have some kind of repercussions – something they must take into account when determining whether a ceremony is worth performing at all.

The side effects are divided into general and specific ones. The general effects can occur irrespective of what ceremony is performed, and are described below; the specific ones are unique to each ceremony and described in conjunction with them. Also, note that all side effects can occur in the area where the ceremony is performed, where it takes effect, or in both locations. The Gamemaster decides which side effects are activated (general and/or specific) depending on what offers the greatest dramatic potential.

Listed below are several examples of general side effects from ceremonial magic which the Gamemaster can use directly or as inspiration. The effects are usually permanent, unless the Gamemaster for one reason or another thinks it more suitable (or interesting) to make them temporary or reversible.

If the Gamemaster wishes for greater randomness, the Ceremony Side Effects table can be used to determine which side effects occur. If so, make as many rolls as is detailed in the column Effect in the Interrupted Ceremony Consequences table; should the dice land on the same effect twice at the same place, just re-roll the dice until a new effect comes into play.

CEREMONY SIDE EFFECTS

1d20	Side Effect
1–10	The ceremony's unique side effect
11	Life Runs Out
12	Increased Corruption
13	Mystical Curse
14	Wave of Corruption
15	Echo of Corruption
16	Corrupting Environment
17	Death Flees
18	Unsound Temptation
19	The Dead Awake
20	Corrupted Waters

Life Runs Out

No children are born alive in the location, harvests wither for no apparent reason, and the place soon becomes a miniature Alberetor, in all its lifeless desolation. Not even the wind seems to blow in the area; dust stirred by careless feet slowly floats to the ground.

Increased Corruption

The ceremony has woken the vengeful wrath of the area, and each time a creature gains Corruption they gain 1 more temporary Corruption than in a normal area.

Mystical Curse

The area's darkness makes it difficult to muster power for mystical work; spell attack rolls are made at disadvantage, spell saving throws are made with advantage. If the effect occurs where the ceremony is performed, this applies to the area outside the circle.

Wave of Corruption

A wave of corruptive energy emanates outward from the place where the ceremony is performed or takes effect. Everyone in the area immediately suffers 2d6 temporary Corruption; everyone within a 150 foot (50 meter) radius must make a DC 20 Constitution saving throw or become unconscious. Affected creatures can make another saving throw at the end of their turn, ending the effect on a success. If the effect occurs where the ceremony is performed, this applies to the area outside the circle.

Echo of Corruption

The area's infectious darkness echoes strongly, and all temporary Corruption suffered by creatures remains until they have left the affected area.

Corrupting Environment

The place reeks with corruption, and everyone in the area must pass a DC 15 Constitution saving throw every hour or suffer 1 temporary Corruption. Characters cannot recover from temporary Corruption until they leave the afflicted area. If the effect occurs where the ceremony is performed, this applies to the area outside the circle.

Death Flees

Undeath, as in the Undead origin, is spreading like the plague; the dead will not remain still, and rise with their minds intact.

Unsound Temptation

The area gains the properties of Dark Davokar. If it is in Ambria, creatures which are otherwise found in Bright Davokar may be encountered there; if it is in Bright Davokar, the area turns into an enclave of Dark Davokar in terms of what monsters inhabit the place (see Encounters on page 71).

The Dead Awake

The buried dead claw their way out of their tombs and haunt the place at night (stats like Dragouls, page 156 in the *Bestiary*). If any living person stays in the area, they will only survive the night behind reinforced walls and sealed gates.

Corrupted Waters
The area's groundwater becomes a source of corruption; those who drink from it suffer 1d4 temporary Corruption with each drink. It is possible to visit the area without being affected, as long as one brings water from somewhere else.

INTERRUPTING CEREMONIES

Now we arrive at the central question: how can the player characters interrupt an ongoing ceremony?

The struggle to interrupt a ceremony should be made into an exciting multistage challenge. The basis of this is that ceremonies have different effects depending on whether or not they are interrupted and, if so, when. Simply put: the faster the characters manage to overcome the obstacles between them and the participants of the ceremony, the weaker its effect becomes. The Interrupted Ceremony Consequences table can be used as a guideline, where Stage 1 begins as soon as the participants go into a trance and Stage 4 specifies what happens if the characters' efforts are entirely futile.

The Gamemaster should set up a series of obstacles for the player characters, and decide on how many turns or scenes they have to overcome them before the ceremony advances to the next stage. These obstacles could include:

- sneaking past or eliminating enemy sentries
- navigating through an underground maze or a giant ruin
- picking or breaking through a locked door
- figuring out the password to a door sealed by mystical powers
- getting past/through/across physical obstacles
- getting past or disarming traps
- neutralizing the ceremony's guard force (one or more waves/lines of defense)

In the end, there is really just one way to stop an ongoing ceremony: the player characters must kill the Officiant or break the concentration of enough participating mystics before the ceremony is completed. As mentioned earlier, it takes at least one Officiant and three participants to successfully perform a ceremony; fewer than that and it is immediately interrupted.

All members of the ceremony are concentrating on it, just like with other spells. If an ordinary participant loses concentration they no longer count as a participant. The Officiant, however, is in such a deep trance that damage cannot break their concentration; the person must be killed. This interrupts the ceremony regardless of how many participants are left standing.

INTERRUPTED CEREMONY CONSEQUENCES

Stage	Effect
1	The ceremony is interrupted, but the place where it is performed suffers one side effect.
2	The ceremony is interrupted, but the place where it is performed and where it was to take effect each suffer one side effect (the same or different ones).
3	The ceremony yields what in the description is called Half Effect; the place where it is performed and where it takes effect each suffer one or two side effects.
4	The ceremony yields what in the description is called Full Effect; the place where it is performed and where it takes effect each suffer one to three side effects.

Mystical Ceremonies

ALTHOUGH NOT ALL stories of ceremonial magic are true, this type of powerful ritual exists within several of the established traditions. It is well known among mystics that ceremonies were used by both sides in The Great War; the Dark Lords used them frequently, and wizards and theurgs retaliated in kind. In Ambria the knowledge is kept alive by a select few theurgs and Masters of the Order, who also serve as guardians of the ceremonial books that still remain. The knowledge is shared by their apprentices as well, but other than that, very few people know the secrets of ceremonial magic.

The only real exception is a handful of centuries-old wizards, such as Grand Master Seldonio, Elionara Yellowcat, and Kullinan Furia. These have retained their knowledge from before the prohibition, but their books were confiscated and probably destroyed, or registered and put under the protection of a guardian. The foremost of these guardians are Variol the Stormweaver and Farvano Kaldel in Agrella, and Leona Galaldo in Yndaros.

Ceremonies and Mystical Traditions

The power wielded when performing ceremonies is far too overwhelming for the practices and patterns of mystical traditions to contain their corrupting effect. The tradition specified under each ceremony is mainly supposed to indicate their origin and what type of mystics might possess a ceremonial tome on the subject.

Note that some traditions never developed any ceremonies at all, for fear of their terrible effects and side effects. The vast majority were created by wizards and sorcerers, while symbolists and troll-singers have refrained from inflicting such violence on Creation.

Described below are sixteen ceremonies for the Gamemaster to use, either directly or as inspiration for his/her own creations. Note that these descriptions have deliberately been left somewhat vague, so the Gamemaster will be free to portray the effect in as dramatic a fashion as possible.

FIRESTORM

Tradition: Wizardry

Anything combustible immediately catches fire, partially or entirely. Strong, whirling gusts of wind start feeding the flames, causing the fire to spread in all directions.

Ceremonial Focus: A piece of charred hardwood, the length of a human forearm.

Half Effect: All organic material within the area of effect is bathed in scorching heat, but only that which is dry or almost dry catches fire – such as timber, dead grass, textiles and the bark of living trees. One tenth of everyone in the area dies immediately from their burns, and there is a strong likelihood that all buildings will burn to the ground. Player characters (and important non-player characters) immediately take 5d8 points of fire damage and must pass a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw to extinguish their burning clothes/armor. Then they must escape the fire with another DC 15 Dexterity saving throw – failure inflicts another 3d8 points of fire damage each round until they succeed.

Full Effect: All organic material within the area of effect immediately catches fire, including the skin of living creatures. Anything combustible and all living creatures except the player characters and important non-player characters are destroyed in the inferno. The latter take 10d8 fire damage at the start of their turn until they extinguish their burning bodies with a successful DC 20 Dexterity saving throw. While fleeing the area, each creature takes 6d8 fire damage at the beginning of their turn. Another successful DC 20 Dexterity saving throw ends the effect.

Unique Side Effect: The fiery energies linger in the area and might blaze up when one least expects it. Anyone traveling through the area of effect must roll 1d10; on 1 they are hit by a burning gust that deals 2d8 fire damage and sets fire to any flammable objects that aren't being worn or carried. Anyone who remains in the area rolls 1d10 every day with the same effect.

Adventures at Ceremonial Sites

An alternate way of using ceremonies is to have adventures take place at former ceremonial sites. That way the unique side effect becomes an exciting complication for the player characters, and the world's history will seem more tangible and alive.

TIDAL WAVE

Tradition: Witchcraft

The water of a river or lake pulls away from the shoreline and forms a crushing wave that sweeps far inland, devastating buildings and creatures alike.

Ceremonial Focus: The shell of a hermit crab, uncracked and perfectly symmetrical.

Half Effect: The tidal wave crashes over the entire area of effect, but loses power so the water is no more than roughly 3 feet (1 meter) deep. All smaller objects take the full force of the wave and are washed away unless securely attached; living creatures also risk being knocked down and washed away by the force of the current – which automatically affects one tenth of everyone in the area. Player characters (and important non-player characters) inevitably take 4d8 points of bludgeoning damage and must pass a DC 15 Strength saving throw to avoid falling over – on a failure they are caught by the current, become prone and take 2d10 bludgeoning damage on their way out into the water.

Full Effect: The tidal wave sweeps ashore, several meters high, crushing everything in its path. Even the sturdiest stone structures collapse, partially or completely, and all living creatures are carried away. Player characters (and important non-player characters) have a chance to survive by clinging to something solid, like a large tree or boulder anchored in the earth – but it takes a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw followed by a DC 15 Strength saving throw. On a success they take 4d10 bludgeoning damage from objects crashing into them. On a failure, they are taken under the water and must hold their breath as they are washed far out into the water.

Unique Side Effect: The kinetic energy lingers in the area and smaller waves may appear without warning. Any group or person near the shoreline must roll 1d10; if anyone rolls a 1, all of them are hit by a crushing wave that deals 2d8 bludgeoning damage and overturns all vessels moored or beached there.

SUMMON DAEMON COURT

Tradition: Sorcery

The Yonderworld and the world of the living merge as the entire court of a daemon prince is summoned to the ceremony's area of effect, which in this case surrounds the ceremonial circle.

Ceremonial Focus: One or several skulls from people once loved by the Officiant.

Half Effect: A part of the Yonderworld materializes and replaces the area's ordinary nature. Everyone in the area (except the Officiant) is affected as if they were in the Yonderworld (see page 52). The court only remains in the living world for a single day, no matter how many skulls were used as the ceremonial focus.

Full Effect: As half effect, except everyone who participated in the ceremony is shielded from the place's Corruption; they also have the daemons to protect them from potential disruptors. The court remains in the world for as many days as the number of skulls used as ceremonial focus. During this time the Officiant may ask the Daemon Prince for one favor per day. If the favor involves a ceremony participant making a pact with the prince, the answer is always yes; favors of a different nature may be granted if the Officiant passes a DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check. If the favor is denied, the Officiant may ask for the same favor the next day, as long as there are days left. The Daemon Prince never grants a favor that requires it to leave its throne.

Unique Side Effect: Every year the area temporarily transforms into Corrupted Nature (see page 20 in the *Ruins of Symbaroum Bestiary*) on the days when the daemon court was there. In the middle of the blighted nature, where the Daemon Prince's throne once stood, is a portal to the Yonderworld.

INSECT SWARM

Tradition: Witchcraft

The Officiant attracts all flying insects within a day's march and gathers them in a seething cloud over the place where the ceremony is performed. The energies corrupt the winged creatures, and diseases carried by a few of them spread to them all. The enormous swarm which is finally directed at the defenseless victims in the target area is dangerous enough in itself, with poisoned stingers and thousands of ravenous jaws, but it also spreads corruption as well as deadly diseases.

Ceremonial Focus: A gem the size of a human eye, cut to resemble the compound eye of a fly.

Half Effect: Half the greater swarm is scattered on its way to the targeted area, where it then splits into several smaller (3d6) swarms. Present creatures may try to fight each individual swarm, but all who face them in melee combat are exposed to their effects (see below). Creatures must fight at least 1d4 + 1 swarms before escaping the area.

Full Effect: The entire greater swarm (6d6 swarms as below) reaches its target, buzzing and clacking as it attacks all living creatures. The only way to stay alive is to hide in a place with thick walls/doors and not even the slightest crack or air intake. Characters (and important non-player characters) present in the affected area may roll a DC 20 Intelligence saving throw to protect themselves; if the saving throw fails they must face 2d6 swarms, or 1d6 + 1 swarms on a success.

Unique Side Effect: The swarm is split but remains in the area as colonies of winged abominations. All living creatures moving through the terrain must succeed at a group DC 15 Dexterity (Stealth) ability check or attract 1d4 swarms.

Swarm of Deadly Insects

Large swarm of Tiny abominations

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)
Hit Points 27 (5d10)
Speed 20 ft., fly 40 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
3 (-4)	17 (+3)	10 (+0)	1 (-5)	10 (+0)	1 (-5)

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, slashing
Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, prone, restrained, stunned
Senses blindsight 10 ft., passive Perception 10
Languages –
Challenge 1 (200 XP)
Manner fierce buzzing
Shadow glossy darkish green, like the head of a blowfly (thoroughly corrupt)
Equipment none

Swarm. The swarm can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the swarm can move through any opening large enough for a Tiny insect. The swarm can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points.

ACTIONS

Bite. Melee Attack: +5 to hit, reach 0 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (4d4) slashing damage or 5 (2d4) slashing damage if the swarm has half its hit points or fewer. Additionally, the target must make a DC 11 Constitution saving throw or gain 1 temporary Corruption.

Sting. Melee Attack: +5 to hit, reach 0 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (4d4) piercing damage or 5 (2d4) piercing damage if the swarm has half its hit points or fewer. Additionally, the target must make a DC 11 Constitution saving throw or gain 5 (1d4 + 3) poison damage and be poisoned until the start of the swarm's next turn.

REACTIONS

Relentless. When a creature enters the swarm's space, it may bite or sting the creature.

EARTHQUAKE

Tradition: Wizardry

The power of the ceremony heaves the earth, razes buildings, and opens fissures in the ground. Living creatures caught up in the ferocious quake would be very lucky to get through the nightmare alive.

Ceremonial Focus: A fist-sized piece of black bedrock.

Half Effect: The ground shakes and wobbles so violently that buildings of wood, clay or similar inevitably collapse; the same may happen to stone structures (the Gamemaster decides or rolls 1d6 per building, where a result of 1 means collapse). Smaller cracks open in the ground, only to close once the earthquake has passed; anyone caught in a crack is badly injured and stuck until others dig them out. Player characters (and important non-player characters) must pass a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw to avoid tumbling into a crack or being struck by falling rocks and trees. Failure means that they take 5d10 bludgeoning damage.

Full Effect: The ground heaves several meters into the air, razing trees to the ground and opening deep earth wounds all over the area of effect. All buildings collapse and almost everyone in the area will be killed by falling trees or rocks, or by falling to their death into the chasm. Player characters (and important non-player characters) must pass a DC 20 Dexterity saving throw to avoid stumbling into fissures or being crushed by falling building material. On failure they receive 10d10 bludgeoning damage or half that on a success.

Unique Side Effect: The earth in the area keeps rumbling. Any group or person passing through there must roll 1d10; a result of 1 means that a series of 1d6 earthquakes occurs, each with the same effect as the earthquake spell.

LAVA LAKE

Tradition: Wizardry

Cracks open in the ground, all the way down to the liquid core of the earth, bringing devastatingly hot fumes and lava to the surface. Anyone who fails to get away dies a terrible death.

Ceremonial Focus: An obsidian shard from the heart of a slumbering volcano.

Half Effect: Abyssal fissures open in the ground inside the area of effect, and hot, poisonous fumes flow from the depths. A tenth of the people in the area are killed before they have time to escape. Player characters (and important non-player characters) inevitably take 4d8 fire damage from the heat and must pass a DC 15 Constitution saving throw each round to avoid gaining a level of exhaustion. The characters must leave the area before the lava comes bubbling up, covering the ground and destroying everything in the area.

Full Effect: The lava gushes up along with the fumes, only moments after the cracks have opened. Almost no one can escape, but player characters (and important non-player characters) might just be able to: each round they must pass a DC 20 Constitution saving throw to avoid the poisonous fumes. On the first round they must also pass a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 10d12 fire damage on a failure or half that amount on a success as lava spatters over them after erupting from below. The characters must leave, those that remain will meet their doom in the lava lake that continues to fill the area of effect.

Unique Side Effect: None, aside from the landscape being turned into a plain of cooled, solidified lava.

MASS CURSE

Tradition: Witchcraft

A village or settlement that angers the wrong witchcraft wielder might soon face a terrible fate that in the long run may jeopardize the lives of all its inhabitants, or at least make their lives unbearably difficult.

Ceremonial Focus: The spine of an amphibian.

Half Effect: The ceremony has the same effect as bestow curse and everyone in the area suffers the desired effect. The curse lasts until the death of the Officiant.

Full Effect: As half effect, but for each individual the Officiant can decide which effect the person suffers (or choose for them not to suffer at all).

Unique Side Effect: None

MASS RESTORATION

Tradition: Theurgy

The world under Prios' heaven is full of power, and faithful servants of the Sun God can channel that energy to treat the injured and infirm – healing their wounds and cleansing their bodies.

Ceremonial Focus: A sanctified sun symbol.

Half Effect: All living creatures within the area of effect (not Abominations or Undead) immediately recover 10d6 hit points, and are cured of all poisons and disease.

Full Effect: As half effect, but the Officiant can sense the aura around each individual in the area and thus has complete control over who is and is not blessed with Prios' gift.

Unique Side Effect: None, but Life Runs Out is a common side effect.

MASS RESURRECTION

Tradition: Sorcery

Dark mystics have always preferred undead slaves over living followers, whose loyalty may falter and whose bodies need feeding. The Mass Resurrection ceremony focuses its energies on whole battlefields for the purpose of raising, in one swoop, an army of Dragouls, bound to the Officiant's will – which is partly why it has become customary to gather and burn the dead after each battle.

Ceremonial Focus: A sacrifice in the form of a cultural being, whose heart is slowly incinerated in the process.

Half Effect: All corpses on the battlefield are reanimated (stats as a Dragoul, page 156 in the *Bestiary*), but the

Officiant only controls half of them and must direct them in battle against the others. When the dust has settled, the army is only a third of what it could have been – probably not large enough to achieve the goal of the ceremony (see below).

Full Effect: The Officiant reanimates and takes control of all corpses on the battlefield, creating an army large enough to achieve the goal of the ceremony. This could include storming a fortress, destroying a village, defending the mystic's own stronghold, or facing another hostile force on the battlefield.

Unique Side Effect: None, but the side effects Death Flees and the Dead Awake are quite common.

MONSTER CONTROL

Tradition: Sorcery

An immensely powerful creature is torn from its home and instantly relocated to the area of effect through a portal in space and time, and is now under the absolute control of the Officiant. At least initially...

Ceremonial Focus: A claw, tooth, or similar body fragment from the type of creature that is to be summoned.

Half Effect: The ceremony is successful, and a beast or monstrosity with a challenge rating equal to 1d10 + 10 or lower is summoned to the area of effect. The Officiant has complete control over the creature's actions, but only for 10 rounds – after that the monster regains control. The Gamemaster decides what the monster does next, but on the first turn after the awakening it will probably be too confused to act at all.

Full Effect: The ceremony summons a beast or monstrosity with a challenge rating equal to 2d10 + 10 or lower. The Officiant has complete control over the creature's actions for one day, after which the Officiant makes a Charisma saving throw against the monster's Intelligence, Wisdom or Charisma (whichever is highest) every day to see whether control is maintained. When the Officiant loses control, the monster has no memory of what has happened.

Unique Side Effect: The monster suffers 1d8 permanent Corruption when summoned. If it becomes thoroughly corrupted as a result, the control is immediately broken and the creature turns into an abomination, with all that entails in terms of new traits and insatiable hunger. Worse still: the monster is filled with a thirst for revenge and instinctively recognizes the mystical signature of the Officiant who summoned it – it can sense the direction and distance to the mystic whenever that person uses mystical spells/rituals.

DAEMONIC TUNNEL

Tradition: Sorcery

The ceremony digs a tunnel through the Yonderworld and creates a shortcut between two places in the world of the living. The tunnel goes from the ceremonial site to any place in the regular world where the ceremonial focus has been placed. Creatures who stand ready by the ceremonial circle can pass through the tunnel and thereby ignore distance and physical obstacles in the regular world.

Ceremonial Focus: A crystal cylinder made of sand from the Yonderworld.

Half Effect: The portal collapses earlier than expected and only half of the creatures inside the tunnel manage to get through (see Full Effect). Those who do not make it out in time are cast into the Yonderworld.

Full Effect: The portal is wide enough for four Medium or smaller creatures marching shoulder to shoulder, and lasts long enough for up to eight rows of Medium or smaller creatures to pass through it. Only two creatures of Large size can pass side by side, and only four rows will make it through in time. As for Huge creatures, only two individuals can squeeze through the tunnel before it collapses. Gargantuan creatures cannot fit into the tunnel at all.

Unique Side Effect: Sometimes the tunnel emerges spontaneously as a result of a magical echo, sucking in creatures from one side and spitting them out on the other. This can happen once per day, affecting everyone within sight of the place where the tunnel starts or ends, on a roll of 1 on 1d20. Everyone in the danger zone must pass a DC 15 Strength saving throw to avoid being sucked in, Large and bigger creatures have advantage on the saving throw. There is also a 1 on 1d10 chance of the tunnel collapsing so quickly that anyone sucked into it is cast into the Yonderworld instead.

PESTILENT WIND

Tradition: Sorcery

Dormant pathogens and disease-carrying insects come together into a whirling wind that sweeps the area of effect like a dark, buzzing fog.

Ceremonial Focus: A piece of meat from a cultural creature stricken by the Sight Rot disease.

Half Effect: Everyone in the area is exposed to the Sight Rot disease (see the core rules).

Full Effect: As half effect, with the addition that the disease is particularly virulent: all checks or saving throws for contracting and recovering from the disease are made with disadvantage. Furthermore, the course of the disease is very aggressive. Immediately after contracting it, the afflicted will experience vomiting, cramps, diarrhea or other symptoms that prevent the person from performing fully – they can take an action or move on their turn but not both for the duration of the illness.

Unique Side Effect: The disease lies dormant in the entire area, waiting to spread. Anyone who ventures there must roll 1d10; on 1 the person is exposed to the Sight Rot disease (see core rules), either airborne or transmitted through physical contact.

RAGE

Tradition: Wizardry

A blinding rage consumes all living creatures, driving them into a berserk frenzy and compelling them to attack everything and everyone around them with murderous intent.

Ceremonial Focus: A piece of charcoal, which starts to glow hotter and hotter during the ceremony.

Half Effect: The rage affects everyone and remains uncontrollable for one turn. After that, half of all creatures within the area of effect manage to quell their anger and break the frenzy. Player characters (and important non-player characters) attack the nearest creature within reach or spend their turn moving towards the nearest creature. At the end of their turn, they can make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw, with a success canceling the effect. They must then try to handle those who did not do as well. At the end of each of their turns an affected creature can repeat the saving throw, ending the rage on a success.

Full Effect: As half effect, but the rage is much harder to overcome – only one tenth of the creatures in the area are able to quell their anger. Player characters (and important non-player characters) make their saving throws against DC 20.

Unique Side Effect: None

CREATE CORRUPTED NATURE

Tradition: Sorcery

An area is drenched in corrupting energies, so much so that it is permanently damaged and darkened. The phenomenon as such is described in the *Ruins of Symbaroum Bestiary*, on page 20.

Ceremonial Focus: A fist of corrupted plant seeds.

Half Effect: The area is corrupted, but in what way is out of the Officiant's control. Roll randomly three times on the Corrupt Land Effects table on page 23 of the *Bestiary*.

Full Effect: The Officiant can decide in what way the affected area is corrupted, by choosing up to six effects from the Corrupt Land Effects table on page 23 of the *Bestiary*.

Unique Side Effect: Nature's capricious vengeance causes half of the effects (rounded down) to occur around the ceremonial circle instead of in the intended area.

STARFALL

Tradition: Wizardry

The Officiant calls blazing rocks from the sky and steers them toward a specific area. People who are not directly hit may be killed by the shock wave or other side effects.

Ceremonial Focus: A meteorite fragment, at least the size of a fist.

Half Effect: A scattered shower of ten smaller rocks rains over the affected area. A tenth of all creatures present at the time perish from direct hits or the fiery area effect; the rest have a chance to survive. Characters (and important non-player characters) situated in the area may roll a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 2d6 × 10 fire damage on a failure or half that on a success.

Full Effect: A boulder the size of an ogre and a large number of smaller rocks crash into the center of the affected area. Nearby buildings are razed, damaged, or set on fire, and half of all creatures in the area perish immediately. Player characters (and important non-player characters) situated there may roll a DC 20 Dexterity saving throw, taking 4d6 × 10 fire damage on a failure or half that on a success.

Unique Side Effect: The impact of the crashing rocks agitates the elemental forces and gives rise to fire spirits who immediately try to possess surviving creatures in the area. The living must pass a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or their bodies are taken over by destructive fire elementals. Each possessed creature is affected in the following ways:

- They take 2d6 fire damage at the start of their turn. If they die as a result of this damage, the fire elemental has burned itself out.
- They move towards the nearest non-burning object or creature and try to set fire to it. They can use an action to cause 2d6 fire damage to a creature or to set unattended flammable objects ablaze.
- If made unconscious (other than by fire damage) or engulfed by water (by being grappled or shoved into a nearby water area, or by a spell or magic item that produces a great quantity of water) the spirit is banished and ceases to exist.

RESURRECT

Tradition: Theurgy

A dead or undead creature (not an abomination) is brought back from the dead and is fully alive once more, with or without side effects...

Ceremonial Focus: A personal link (a vial of blood, a tuft of hair, or a cherished item) to an individual who means a lot to the deceased; a descendant, a lover or a close relative.

Half Effect: The dead person returns to life, but with permanent Corruption still lingering inside (the creature has permanent Corruption equal to half their Corruption Threshold, rounded down) and with great memory gaps – a creature with levels has lost half of them (rounded down). Even hit points are affected, as they represent resilience and skill at avoiding serious damage as well as physical endurance. The resurrected individual is also more fragile than before: they have disadvantage on death saving throws.

Full Effect: The deceased returns to life and is essentially the same as they were at the moment of death, only perfectly healthy and without injuries. But the frailty of the flesh cannot be avoided: they have disadvantage on death saving throws.

Unique Side Effect: Raising the dead is of course an act of immense violence against Creation and may therefore have greater repercussions than other ceremonies. The amount of Corruption inflicted on the participants of the ceremony is doubled, from 2d4 to 4d4.



Many are the tasteless jokes uttered in regards to this collection of signs, recovered on a ruin at the forest edge near the town of Kastor.

Chases

THE FOLLOWING IS a set of rules that allow you to run exciting and dangerous chases in *Ruins of Symbaroum*. A chase begins when one group of creatures tries to escape from another group. A chase uses these rules:

Rules of the Chase

1. DECIDE THE RANGE OF THE CHASE

Chases start at Close if both groups of creatures were in combat before the chase began. A chase might begin at a different range if the groups become aware of each other by some means.

- **If the range of the chase is Close** then the pursuing creatures are nipping at the heels of the fleeing creatures and they could be caught at any moment.
- **If the range of the chase is Far** then the pursuing creatures can consistently see the fleeing creatures but need to gain ground or wait for them to hit an obstacle before they can catch them.
- **If the range of the chase is Seeking** then the fleeing creatures have all but escaped and the creatures pursuing them must use senses other than sight or follow a trail left by the fleeing group.

The range of the chase will change as the chase progresses.

2. THE CHASE CONTEST

Each turn we check to see if either group manages to outpace the other. To do this, each member of the opposing groups makes a Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) (their choice) check. The group with the highest single total wins the contest.

- **If the fleeing group succeeds** then the chase's range increases. If the range of the chase was at Seeking and the fleeing group succeeds they escape.
- **If the pursuing group succeeds** then the chase's range shrinks. If the range of the chase was at Close then they catch the fleeing group and the chase ends. Proceed to combat, which lasts for a minimum of one round as the fleeing creatures are forced to defend themselves before they have the opportunity to flee into another chase.

If the range of the chase is Seeking then the pursuing creatures may follow the trail of the fleeing creatures and use Wisdom (Survival) for the chase contest.

If anyone rolls a natural 1, then that group faces an obstacle.

3. OBSTACLES

If a group of adventurers faces an obstacle, roll on the common obstacles table and resolve the action. This may inflict damage or cause advantage or disadvantage on the next escape contest.

4. MAKE A RISKY MOVE (OPTIONAL)

The fleeing creatures may choose to Make a Risky Move, if they do, roll on the special table relevant to the environment of the chase and resolve the action. This may change the range of the chase or have long term consequences for the fleeing creatures.

After resolving the action from the special table, increase the range of the race. This is the payoff for the fleeing creatures making a risky move.

The fleeing creatures may only Make a Risky Move if the range of the chase is Close or Seeking.

If the chase is still going after resolving these steps repeat steps 2–4.



Obstacles

COMMON OBSTACLES TABLE

These events can occur in any environment.

COMMON OBSTACLES

1d8	Encounter
1	A group of hostile humanoids blocks your progress. Make a DC 14 Charisma (Persuasion or Intimidation) check (your choice). On a successful check you convince them to let you pass. On a failed check they hinder your progress and you have disadvantage on the next chase contest. Monstrous creatures never gain disadvantage from this result, the humanoids flee from them instead.
2	Your sprint takes you past a sleeping beast such as a feral dog or a creature of Davokar. Make a DC 11 group Dexterity (Stealth) check to pass without disturbing the beast. On a failed check the creature that rolled the lowest takes 1d8 + 3 slashing damage as the beast strikes them.
3	The environment around you becomes hazardous, such as a field of broken glass or a mass of thorns. Make a DC 11 Dexterity saving throw to avoid the hazard. Every creature that failed the save takes 1d4 piercing damage.
4	A barrier such as a dense thicket or a fallen statue blocks your path. Make a group DC 12 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to get past the obstacle. On a failed check you make the next chase contest with disadvantage.
5	Your path takes you underground or into a cluttered area. Make a group DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check, on a successful check you find a shortcut and have advantage on your next chase contest. On a failed check you become lost and make the next chase contest with disadvantage.
6	A herd of beasts such as cows or the blight-stricken animals of Davokar blocks the way. Make a DC 12 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check to pass through the beasts unimpeded. On a failed check you make the next chase contest with disadvantage.
7	Your flight takes you to higher ground, make a group DC 13 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check (your choice). On a successful check you gain advantage on your next chase contest. On a failed check the creature with the lowest result falls taking 1d6 bludgeoning damage and you make the next chase contest with disadvantage.
8	A group of friendly humanoids gathers in your path. Make a DC 14 Charisma (Deception or Persuasion) check (your choice). On a success they help you flee and you gain advantage on the next escape check. On a failed check they do not assist you and likely flee themselves. Monstrous creatures never gain advantage from this result, the humanoids flee from them instead.

CITIES AND FARMLANDS

Where people gather there is opportunity, filth, industry and corruption. The cities of Symbaroum and its surroundings are volatile settings for a chase.

CITY OBSTACLES

1d4	Encounter
1	You pass a group of nobles preparing for a hunt, their mastiffs break leash and attempt to subdue you. Make a group DC 16 Strength (Athletics) check to escape the hounds. On a failed check the creature that rolled the lowest is dragged to the ground and then savaged by the dogs. They take 2d6 piercing damage and the group makes the next chase contest at disadvantage.
2	A group of street performers has attracted a crowd. Make a group DC 14 Dexterity (Stealth) or Charisma (Deception) check to hide in the crowd. On a success you gain advantage on the next chase contest as you evade pursuit. If any of the characters give coins to the street performers then they receive advantage on the check to hide in the crowd.
3	Make a DC 13 group Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to avoid a merchant's stall. On a failed check the character who rolled the lowest crashes into the stall. Roll a 1d4 to determine the merchant's goods: **1.** Weapons, take 2d6 slashing damage. **2.** Perfume, creatures pursuing you in a chase have advantage on Wisdom (Survival) chase contests for the next hour. **3.** Exotic animals, take 1d4 + 1d6 damage and make a DC 11 Constitution saving throw, becoming poisoned for 1 turn on a failure. **4.** Luxury goods sold under the protection of hired guards. You must either bribe them with at least 10 thaler or succeed at a DC 14 Charisma (Deception, Intimidation or Persuasion) check (your choice) to talk your way out of it. On a failed check the merchant lets the characters go but uses their influence to attack the characters indirectly so long as they are in the city. The consequences of this will likely outlive the chase itself.
4	A deep rut in the ground has caused a wagon to become stuck blocking the narrow street. Make a group DC 13 Strength (Athletics) check to move the wagon. On a successful check the grateful merchant gives you a ride and you have advantage on the next chase contest.

FARMLAND OBSTACLES

1d4	Encounter
1	Beautiful, alluring flowers with deadly thorns block the way. Make a DC 14 Intelligence (Nature) check. On a success you recall that singing to this species of flower causes them to retract their thorns; you pass unimpeded. On a failed check each character takes 1d4 slashing damage and makes the next chase contest at disadvantage.
2	Several horses graze in a paddock overlooked by a wooden tower. If you take the horses a farmer in the tower makes a ranged attack against a random character with a crossbow (+3 to hit 1d10 + 3 piercing damage). Regardless of whether he hits, there will be repercussions for the theft amongst the local populace. The horses provide advantage on chase contests for as long as you ride them. It is likely that future obstacles will make keeping the horses difficult.
3	Your flight leads into an overgrown ditch, an unhinged cultist emerges from the brambles. On her face is an obvious and ugly blightmark. She hisses and casts a spell at you. Make a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw, on a failed save you suffer 2d6 psychic damage and make the next chase contest with disadvantage. On a success the witch flees into the thick brambles.
4	Your flight takes you near a group of predatory birds roosting on a scarecrow. Make a group DC 14 Dexterity (Stealth) check to pass without disturbing the birds. On a failed check you wake the flock and their cawing gives away your position to all creatures within earshot. In addition they harry you with beaks and talons, each character takes 1d4 piercing damage.

THE FOREST OF DAVOKAR

Whether you are in the eaves of the great forest where light can pass its canopy, or travel in the rampant madness and horror of the forest depths, you must be careful or your flight may very well lead you into even greater danger...

BRIGHT DAVOKAR OBSTACLES

1d4	Encounter
1	A rage troll blocks the path, it hurls rocks and tears at trees. Make a group DC 13 Dexterity (Stealth) check to pass by unnoticed. On a failed check it hurls debris at the creature that rolled the lowest and they take 1d10 bludgeoning damage. At the GM's discretion the rage troll may join the chase, either replacing the original pursuing creatures or by effectively joining them.
2	You hurtle through ruins of white stone triggering an ancient magical ward. Make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw to avoid the magical blast. On a failed save take 1d10 force damage.
3	You pass under an archway and find the world beyond is gripped by a different and extreme season. Make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save take a level of exhaustion from the extreme heat or cold.
4	You run afoul of a malefic garden of homunculi (*Player's Guide*, page 182), the half-formed creatures attempt to grapple you with a dozen tiny limbs. Make a DC 13 Strength saving throw to avoid their grasp. On a failed save you are dragged to the ground and take 1d4 slashing damage as they bite at you with tiny mouths.

DARK DAVOKAR OBSTACLES

1d4	Encounter
1	You run past an open tomb and are caught by a chill wind howling from its depths. Make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw taking 2d4 cold damage on a failed save and half as much damage on a successful one. In addition, any creature that failed the save makes the next chase contest with disadvantage as the unnatural chill saps their strength.
2	Your path takes you through a cloud of large parasitic insects. Make a DC 13 Dexterity or Strength (your choice) saving throw, on a success you beat away the insects before they infest you. On a failed save, green and purple maggots corrupt the host's brain. Every 24 hours that the host is infested they must choose one of the following burdens to gain; Bloodthirst, Impulsive or Nightmares. Each burden can only be chosen once. The burdens remain with the host even after the infestation is healed. An infested creature can be healed by a successful DC 16 Wisdom (Medicine) check or by the lesser restoration spell.
3	The ground gives way beneath your feet! You tumble into darkness and discover something horrifying beneath the earth. Make a DC 14 Charisma saving throw taking 2d6 psychic damage and gaining 1d4 temporary Corruption on a failed save. On a successful save you may willingly use the darkness to overcome your pursuers. If so you gain 1 permanent Corruption and the chase ends as the creatures pursuing you are driven off by a dark power.
4	You run beneath a large tree that is covered in skulls, from the empty sockets drips a foul smelling, tar like substance. Make a group DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check to avoid disturbing the corruption of this place. On a failure a hostile spirit latches onto the character that rolled the lowest. Gain 1d4 temporary Corruption, in addition you suffer nightmares for the next 2d4 nights. The nightmares can be discerned by making a DC 14 Intelligence (Arcana) check, on a success you may gain 1 permanent Corruption to learn some dire truth about your current quest or the world at large.

Domains

WHY SHOULD PLAYER characters always have to run around searching for adventure when adventure is just as likely to come to them? This chapter introduces rules and guidelines for owning and managing an area of land complete with buildings and inhabitants – a domain for the characters to govern and develop.

Coming into possession of a domain in Ambria often involves a liege lord (baron or count) accepting a player character as a vassal and presenting them with a fief. It may be obtained through inheritance, marriage or as reward for great deeds. An Ambrian fief can also be taken by force, particularly in the border areas of Davokar where an armed force has occasionally captured a fort and then "offered" their services to the actual liege lord. The lord then acknowledges the vassals out of practicality as much as coercion – retaking a fort from experienced warriors is hard, and since they have already demonstrated their talent for violence they could prove useful in the chaotic borderlands.

The rules for domains can also be used for other types of areas or properties governed by the player characters, such as a free settlement or outpost in Davokar, or a remote Ordo Magica chapter. Minor adjustments would have to be made, but the basics remain the same.

Ownership of the domain gives the player characters a connection to the place, either as a focus for adventures that come to them or as a rewarding activity between adventures in other locations (during the campaign). Finally, the Gamemaster can use the property as an opportunity to put pressure on the player characters, for example by interrupting an adventure in the wilderness with warnings of an ongoing or potential attack on their own domain. Should they act for the common good or rush home and protect what is theirs?

The Domain in Play

ONE OPTION IS to let the domain be a common base for all player characters – it is where they come from or usually operate, and their common goal is then to protect and develop the domain. The gaming group and its Gamemaster must agree on how this should work in play – the domain can either be the main focus of the game, in which case the adventure comes there, or a place of rest and distraction between adventures experienced elsewhere. Combinations are also possible, where the place is sometimes the setting for adventures and sometimes a reason for the player characters to have adventures in other hunting grounds.

The player characters can either govern the domain collectively, for example if they are leading members of a trading house or have blood ties to the family that rules the area. Alternatively, the gaming group can appoint one player character to lead – as a liege lord or mayor – with the others as confidants, servants or even serfs (difficult to play, but very interesting!). What matters is that the player characters are important and can serve as specialists that the domain depends upon; for suggestions, see the Domain Specialists table.

> **EXAMPLE:** *The gaming group decides to create player characters tied to the same place, a remote Ambrian village at the edge of Davokar. One character takes on the role of knight and liege lord, and the others create characters that fit with the village: an innkeeper, the village guard captain, and the local sun priest. Other specialties are held by NPCs of the suggested class, approach and feats.*

One of the players chooses a more challenging role as a serf serving as the knight's personal bodyguard. The serf is always present during his master's travels and meetings. The three friends constitute specialists and advisors to the liege lord, and choose the Enterprise boon or the new boon Profession to give themselves more concrete ties to the domain. The serf abstains from such ties, and acquires boons and burdens better suited for a bodyguard.

DOMAIN SPECIALISTS

Specialist	Recommended Class (Approach), Feats
Alchemist	Scoundrel (Sapper, Treasure Hunter)
Artisan	Any, Enterprise (workshop)
Artifact Crafter	Mystic (Artifact Crafter)
Blacksmith	Scoundrel (Sapper), Warrior (Rune Smith)
Gamekeeper	Profession (gamekeeper)
Guard Captain	Warrior (any), Profession (guard captain)
Innkeeper	Enterprise (inn)
Mystic	Mystic (any)
Personal Guard	Any, Profession (personal guard)
Soothsayer	Mystic (Self-taught or Witch), Enterprise (fortune teller's hut)
Spy	Scoundrel (Spy)
Surgeon	Any with Medicus, Enterprise (clinic)
Teacher	Any with Loremaster, Enterprise (archive, library, school)

New Feat: Profession (Boon)

This feat adds +1 to an ability score. The Gamemaster determines which ability best fits the given profession.

The player character has been given a position and a title, which comes with responsibilities as well as a regular income (usually 1–2 thaler a day, but the Gamemaster decides). The responsibilities mean that a superior decides what the player character should and should not do.

Once per adventure the Gamemaster can require a check against an appropriate ability. On a failure, some minor incident occurs which leads to a scolding from a superior or supervisor. If the character fails three of these checks in a row then the character loses the income benefit until they take action to atone for their mistakes. The Gamemaster might represent a restored income as an improvement in their present employment, a new job, or becoming self-employed.

Example Domains

THE RULES FOR domains can be applied to everything from a large farm or remote village somewhere in Davokar, to a small town in the relatively safe borderlands of Ambria. The rules are less suited for domains larger than that – a person who rules an entire barony, a barbarian clan's territory, or an Ambrian city has many times more resources at her disposal and is certainly a liege lord in her own right, with many vassals at her command. For gaming groups wishing to play on such a high social and political level, the rules can provide some support, but not the full picture.

Presented below are a handful of examples of different domains that are covered by these rules. The terms used have the following meaning:

- **Fortification.** Modifier to ability checks for defending the domain against external enemies or putting down revolts.
- **Management.** Modifier to ability checks for governing the domain.
- **Base Income.** Specifies the amount of thaler earned per season.
- **Pitched Battle Rules.** Describes how the defense of the domain is handled when using the rules for pitched battle from the next chapter (see pages 178–183), should the Gamemaster and players agree to do so.

FORTIFIED FARM

The player character is a poor knight or master of a lonely farm at the edge of Davokar. The farm houses twenty people, maids and farmhands included. There are no warriors, other than the player characters, but half a dozen laborers can if necessary handle weapons in desperate defense of the farm.

- **Fortification:** Sturdy farmhouse (+1)
- **Management:** +8
- **Base Income:** Single digit thaler
- **Pitched Battle Rules:** Challenge rating 1. 8 militia (Farmhands); the farm has no defenses, permanent or temporary (×1 challenge rating when defending the domain).

REMOTE VILLAGE

The character is a knight with land on the outskirts of Ambria, or a weak barbarian chieftain or leader of a settler village somewhere in southern Davokar. The village is made up of fifty people, most of them divided into ten families. It has no full-time warriors, so the task of defending the settlement falls to the characters and a dozen able-bodied villagers.

- **Fortification:** Palisade and tower of wood (+5)
- **Management:** +5
- **Base Income:** Tens of thaler
- **Pitched Battle Rules:** Challenge rating 2. 12 militia (Farmhands), 1 veteran (Infantry); the village defenses count as temporary (×2 challenge rating when defending the domain).

NORMAL VILLAGE

The player character is a knight in a domain located in the Ambrian heartland, or an established chieftain among the barbarians in Davokar. The village has a population of about one hundred people, including twenty families. It has a full-time guard or bailiff to organize the twenty poorly equipped villagers that serve as defenders, plus ten locals armed with bows.

- **Fortification:** Palisade and stone watchtowers (+7)
- **Management:** +3
- **Base Income:** Tens of thaler
- **Pitched Battle Rules:** Challenge rating 6. 20 militia, 10 archers, 1 army veteran (officer); the village defenses count as permanent (×3 challenge rating when defending the domain).

TRADING POST

The character belongs to a merchant family in Ambria and is the manager of a trading post on the outskirts of Ambria or the borderland between Ambria and Davokar. The outpost is populated by roughly a hundred people, half of them permanent residents (ten families) and the rest either long- or

short-term visitors. The fort has four guards and many of the residents and visitors can take up arms if the need arises.

- **Fortification:** Wooden fort (+9)
- **Management:** +1
- **Base Income:** Hundreds of thaler
- **Pitched Battle Rules:** Challenge rating 10. 4 guards (infantry), 8 adventurers (treasure hunters); the trading post's defenses count as permanent (×3 challenge rating when defending the domain).

SMALL MARKET TOWN

The character is a baron or baroness in Ambria and governs a small town, a place of trade and craft sheltered behind walls of stone. The town has a population of five hundred people, most of whom are residents (eighty families) and the rest (about a hundred people) visitors, mainly farmers from nearby villages. The town has a guard force and fire brigade of a dozen soldiers, led by the most experienced of them. Its population is ill-prepared – and even worse equipped – to fight for themselves; it is something they have long left to others in order to focus on their professions but a militia of 24 archers can be raised from nearby villages.

- **Fortification:** Wall and fort of stone (+12)
- **Management:** +0
- **Base Income:** Thousands of thaler
- **Pitched Battle Rules:** Challenge rating 13. 24 archers, 12 soldiers, 1 officer; the town's defenses count as permanent (×3 combat points when defending the domain).

Management and Development

THE MANAGEMENT OF a domain takes place on a seasonal basis (four times a year), and is handled in three steps:

1. Major event
2. The Management check
3. Possible investments

MAJOR EVENT

Every season there is a chance (depending on the season) of something unexpected happening in a domain. In spring and autumn there are even odds, while the darkness, rain and cold of winter reduces the chances, and the summer's light and warmth increases the likelihood of something occurring. See the table on the right.

Player characters in charge of a domain are expected to solve any problems that arise. Those who live or own property in the domain will suffer or benefit from what happens, depending on whether the event is positive or negative. Characters living in a domain may of course volunteer to solve its problems in order to protect their own property. If the listed event does not fit the characters' domain or the overall situation, make another roll – or create a unique event better suited to the circumstances.

MAJOR EVENT OCCURRENCE

1d8	Spring	Summer	Autumn	Winter
1	Major Event	—	—	Major Event
2	Major Event	Major Event	—	Major Event
3	Major Event	Major Event	—	—
4	Major Event	Major Event	—	—
5	—	Major Event	Major Event	—
6	—	Major Event	Major Event	—
7	—	Major Event	Major Event	—
8	—	—	Major Event	—

MAJOR EVENTS

1d20	Event	Effect
1	Plague	The plague adds a –1d6 penalty to the Management check every season until it has been eradicated by a successful DC 20 Wisdom (Medicine) check. The medicus or alchemy feature provides advantage on the check.
2	Brigands	The brigands hinder travel and trade, giving –1d4 to Management checks every season until they are defeated or driven away.
3	Monsters	Monsters are wreaking havoc, (1d4) **1:** group of rage trolls, **2:** elven warband, **3:** arch troll, **4:** lindworm. The monsters add a –1d6 penalty to all Management checks until defeated or driven off.

MAJOR EVENTS		
1d20	**Event**	**Effect**
4	Crop failure	Crop failure strikes the region for 1d8 seasons, during which time a –1d4 penalty to all Management checks is in effect.
5	Riot	Make a DC 15 Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion) check to quell the riot, otherwise apply a –1d4 penalty to this season's Management check.
6	Serial killer	A murderer is killing 1d4 – 1 victims per season. The killer must be stopped – requires a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check – otherwise a cumulative –1 penalty is applied to the Management check each season, to a maximum of –3.
7	Robber gang	Until the gang is stopped, a cumulative –1 penalty is applied to each season's Management check; in other words, after three seasons the modifier is –3, which is the maximum.
8	Cultist infiltration	Rumors of strange figures and unholy meetings are circulating, and soon people start disappearing – mostly vagrants, homeless beggars and other down-and-out individuals. As long as the cultists are influencing life in the domain, all Management checks are modified by –1. The cultists are not easy to get rid of.
9	Wave of refugees	The refugees cause –1 to Management checks for 1d8 seasons, then +0 for 1d8 seasons, and finally the established refugees add a permanent +1 bonus to all Management checks.
10	Distinguished guests	A wealthy group of people, perhaps a mercenary company or a traveling carnival troupe, boosts trade in the domain. Then they move on. The visit adds +1 to the season's Management check.
11	Visiting liege lord	The leader's liege lord comes to visit accompanied by an entourage of warriors, advisors and courtiers. Such a visit calls for a feast, for princes and commoners alike. It adds +1 to the current season's Management check, then –2 to the next one.
12	Call for aid	A neighboring domain is in crisis and requests assistance. Heeding the call initially modifies the current season's Management check by –1. Then there is a 50% (4+ on 1d6) chance of the neighbor emerging from the crisis stronger and grateful for the help, adding +2 to the next season's check.
13	Trade proposal	A delegate shows up with a trade agreement that adds +1 to Management checks for 1d4 seasons.
14	Settlers moving in	The settlers give a +0 modifier to Management checks for 1d8 seasons, after which the established settlers add a permanent +1 bonus to all Management checks.
15	Missionaries arriving	(1d6) **1–2:** Witches, **3–4:** Church of Prios, **5–6:** The Young Gods. If they adhere to the same faith as the leader of the domain, the missionaries raise a temple that adds a permanent +1 to Management checks. If the missionaries do not share the leader's faith, their presence causes unrest: –2 to Management checks for 1d8 seasons, then +0 for 1d8 seasons, and finally a permanent +1 from then on. If they are driven away during the initial phase, the missionaries go into hiding and keep recruiting souls in secret, which means a permanent –1 to all Management checks. Rooting them out is bloody work (or smoky, if one prefers fire over steel) and causes –1d4 to Management checks for 1d4 seasons.
16	Bad omen	Seers are reading bad omens, roll 1d8 on this table, that event will occur in 1d4 – 1 seasons.
17	Good sign	The seers see good signs, roll 1d8 + 8 on this table, that event will occur in 1d4 – 1 seasons.
18	Tempting treasure	A valuable deposit or treasure site has attracted fortune hunters to the area for 1d6 seasons. (On a 6 roll again, with a second 6 indicating their stay is permanent.) Roll 1d4 at the start of each season: **1–2:** –1 penalty to Management check; **3–4:** +2 bonus to Management check.
19–20	Military attack	Roll 1d4. **1:** Foreigners; **2:** Elves, **3:** another vassal of your liege lord; **4:** Abominations. Roll 1d6. **1–3:** their challenge rating is lower your domain's rating; **4–5:** their challenge rating is equal or up to twice your domain's rating; **6:** their challenge rating is between double and triple your domain's rating. The leader of the domain can choose to Flee, Negotiate or Fight. See the Under Attack sidebar for more details.

THE MANAGEMENT CHECK

The domain is managed on a seasonal basis (spring, summer, autumn, and winter) and during each season a Management check is made. They are easier in summer (DC 10) and harder in winter (DC 20). Summer means crops, increased traveling, and high productivity. In winter the stores are slowly depleted, people travel less, and productivity decreases. Spring and autumn do not modify the check and both have a DC of 15.

The player character who manages a domain and is present for most of the season makes the Management check, using Charisma (Persuasion) plus the current Management value. In the leader's absence a replacement must be brought in to make the decisions; even if the leader's player makes the check, use the replacement's Persuasion.

After a success the difference is calculated; each point of difference yields the Base Income specified for the season.

> EXAMPLE: *The knight Karala governs a remote village in northern Ambria. Every season she makes a Charisma (Persuasion) check, modified by the domain's Management [+5]. It is Autumn, so the DC is 15. Karala has Persuasion +7 and rolls a 6 for a total of 18 (6 + 7 + 5). That is 3 above the DC. Since her remote domain yields tens of thaler in income, Karala collects 30 thaler this season.*

Similarly, a failure costs the specified Base Income multiplied by the difference. If the player character is unable or unwilling to pay, the domain's Management value is instead decreased by one step. If the value drops below –5 the domain collapses and ceases to exist as a cohesive entity; it goes bankrupt, is abandoned, or similar.

> EXAMPLE: *Winter comes, and Karala is hard at work governing her remote village. Once again she makes the Management check. She must roll 8 or higher, since the DC is now 20 because of the season. The die lands on 6; a failure with a difference of 2. She must either pay 20 thaler to the domain or accept that future Management checks will be rolled with a +4 modification instead. Muttering something about lazy peasants, she takes 20 thaler from the coffers to mend the domain's economy.*

INVESTMENTS

Investments are money spent on improving the domain. The improvement can be made to either Fortification, Management or Base Income. Ten times the domain's Base Income must be spent to make any difference, and the player must describe in what way the domain is improved. The effect of an investment on Fortification or Management is that the modifier in question increases by one step. However, the Fortification modifier can never exceed +15.

Under Attack

ENEMY

Foreigners: For Ambrians, barbarians attack from Davokar in search of plunder. For barbarians, an Ambrian war leader attempts to claim new territory. The leader of the domain may choose to negotiate, fight or flee.

Elves: Elves attack, attempting to drive away the local inhabitants. The leader of the domain can either fight or flee. Elves do not negotiate.

Another vassal: Another vassal of the same liege attacks in order to annex the domain. The attack could be launched under the pretext of some old border dispute or a false accusation of crime or heresy. The leader of the domain can choose to flee, negotiate or fight. Fleeing means that the domain is annexed by the attacker and can only be retaken by force.

Horde of abominations: A horde of abominations swarms out of the forest, with destruction as their only goal. The leader of the domain can fight or flee. The horde cannot be negotiated with.

STRATEGIES

Flee: The domain's inhabitants flee to other areas, either allied territory or inaccessible land where the enemy cannot easily (or does not want to) follow. The domain is destroyed, but most of its people survive. The returning inhabitants have a hard task ahead of them – the Management modifier during the reconstruction is reduced by –5 for 1d6 seasons, and then a permanent –2.

Negotiation: The negotiation concerns the price it takes for the enemy to break off its attack. The leader of the domain rolls an opposed Charisma (Persuasion) check. On a success, the tribute is –2 on Management checks for one year (four seasons), after which it returns to normal. On failure the tribute is –4 for the first year, and then a permanent –1.

Fight: The enemy attacks. The guidelines from the chapter on Pitched Battles can be applied to determine which side is victorious. The alternative is to handle the battle abstractly as described below. No matter what method is used to determine which side prevails, the effect of victory or defeat remains the same.

ABSTRACT METHOD OF DECIDING THE BATTLE'S OUTCOME

The leader of the domain makes a Charisma (Persuasion) check. The DC is set by the domain's defense (20 minus Fortification value, see page 168 for the effect of mercenaries on the Fortification value). On a success the enemy is driven off and what has been destroyed is rebuilt in 1d4 seasons, during which time Management checks are modified by –2. Then the domain is fully restored.

On a failure the domain is lost and surviving inhabitants are forced to flee (see above). The effect is much worse, though, since many will have died in battle or had their spirit broken by the defeat. The Management modifier during the reconstruction work is reduced by –5 for 1d12 seasons and then by a permanent –2.

Bookkeeping

It is important for at least one of the players to keep a detailed record of revenue, expenditures and investments, preferably with the Gameaster's help. Once the profits have been collected and potential investments have been made, the player calculates the cash balance and adjusts the contents of the coffers accordingly. The player characters are of course free to add money out of their own pockets, if they so wish, or dip into the coffers for personal use.

An investment in Base Income increases the domain's income by 10% of the original value; if the Base Income is tens of thaler, each investment yields a one thaler increase. A Base Income of single-digit thaler means that each investment adds an extra shilling for every thaler earned, while a Base Income of hundreds or thousands of thaler increases the total by ten and a hundred thaler, respectively. The Base Income can never be more than doubled (double amount of thaler, scores of thaler, two hundreds of thaler, or two thousands of thaler). The domain's productivity cannot be improved beyond that; it is running at more or less maximum efficiency, given the conditions of the area.

EXAMPLE: *The knight Karala invests in her domain, the remote village. Whatever she decides to improve the cost is 100 thaler: the domain's income is tens of thaler, and investments cost 10 times that. Her first investment is to raise the village's Fortification from (+5) to (+6). The Gamemaster asks Karala's player to describe the nature of the improvement: Karala constructs a stone tower to replace the old wooden one. The next investment she makes is to improve the village's income. With a Base Income of tens of thaler, the income is raised to 11 thaler. Karala decides that this increase in productivity is due to the construction of a watermill.*

SAMPLE INVESTMENTS

Fortifications	Management	Income
Construct watchtowers	Hire a tax commissioner	Build a road
Build higher walls	Arrest troublemakers	Bridge or ferry
Better equipment for militia	Fight corruption	Construct harbor or canal
Dig a moat	Build a village school	Drain a marsh
Place siege weapons on walls	Invest in a temple or poorhouse	Clear a forest
Train troops	Reorganize bookkeeping	Build a brewery
Increase supplies	Install informers in population	Open an inn

Mercenaries in the Domain

IF THE CHARACTERS' domain is attacked by a hostile force (see Major Events table), there are two ways of handling the challenge. You can either use the rules for pitched battles presented in the next chapter, or the abstract method based on the domain's Fortification value (see page 164).

The domain's base militia are included in the Fortification value, but you can hire mercenaries to increase your ranking.

EFFECT ON FORTIFICATION

In order to play a decisive role, the hired sellswords must at least match the house troops in terms of challenge rating. To reinforce a normal village (CR 6) one must add sellswords worth an equal or higher challenge rating to get +1 to your Fortification when defending the domain. 48 local farmhands could get the job done, or two knights and their two squires.

Mercenary Example

A robber baron is plaguing the region, and the characters decide to station mercenaries in their small market town. Their current defense force is comprised of 20 militia and 10 archers, for a total of 31 warriors, including an officer. This means that every time they reach a multiple of 31 additional sellswords (31, 62, 93, etc.) they get –1 to the Management check: –1 for 31 troops, –2 for 62, and –3 for 93.

The cheapest option is to hire loads of ill-trained warriors, such as the local goblin tribe. But the domain is hard enough to govern already; perhaps it is worth paying for a couple of freelancing knights and a wizard willing to sell their services in defense of the town? That way they could obtain a much-needed Fortification bonus without diminishing their chance of passing the Management check.

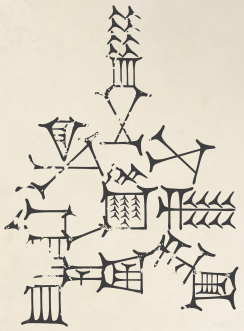


Mercenary companies are often made up of warriors of Ambrian ancestry, but some of the most respected outfits come from the clans of Davokar.

Every time the reinforcements reach the house troops' challenge rating, a +1 bonus is granted: two knights, two squires and 6 fortune hunters would give +2, as they triple the house troops' value.

EFFECT ON MANAGEMENT

A complicating factor is that the increased troop presence risks destabilizing the domain. When it is time for the Management check, the leader suffers a –1 penalty for each time the number of sellswords equals that of the house troops (militia included). Unlike in the case of Fortification, it is the number of soldiers that matters, not their challenge rating – a fortified farm has 8 defenders, a remote village has 13, a normal village 37, and so on. In other words, leaders who can afford it are better off hiring more professional (and therefore more expensive) soldiers rather than filling their domains with huge numbers of fortune hunters and armed farmhands.



Symbols on parchment that according to Clan Varakko are a map of a shrine from the age of Symbaroum. The adjacent symbols, which mean Deity and Bloodshed, tickle the imagination of many wizards.

Pact-Making

TO ENTER INTO a pact with one of the ancient powers of the world can be a shortcut to knowledge and power – but it is far from risk-free. To commoners, pact-making and sorcery are more or less the same, but even if many sorcerers use pacts as a means to grow stronger anyone who is brave or desperate enough can enter into a pact.

Pact-making requires an agreement with a mighty being who is interested in becoming the character's protector and tutor; usually a nature spirit or an undead.

In short, this being imbues the character with some of its power, to gain a loyal agent who can reach places that the being cannot, or with the long-term goal of consuming the spiritual force of the character when he or she finally turns blight born – or sometimes both. In the first case, the character will be forced to act in a way which furthers a goal that the being strives for; in the second case, the being will try to tempt the character into attracting and amassing corruption in any way it can.

THE BENEFITS OF THE PACT

The character can gain XP in exchange for accepting permanent Corruption; each point in permanent Corruption provides Experience Points equal to a monster of a challenge rating equal to the character's level. This happens when the pact is forged. Later a maximum of 1 permanent Corruption per adventure can be accepted. The player decides if and when this exchange will be made.

When the character could take a feat, they can instead gain a monstrous feature that the creature has. See the *Ruins of Symbaroum Bestiary*, pages 215–221 for more information. If they choose a monstrous feat, they also gain another point of permanent Corruption.

THE PRICE OF THE PACT

The character must accept one of the being's goals as his or her own and strive towards it. This goal may either replace one of the character's own goals, or be assumed as an additional goal for the character. Either way, the goal is determined when the pact is forged. The character can no longer have personal goals which contradict the being's objectives. This is also made clear when the pact is forged, and a requirement for reaching an agreement at all.

If the character starts to divert from or act in disagreement with the being's goals and objectives, the being will know this. Initially, the character will be warned in the form of nightmares, physical discomfort or similar. Then, if the character does not change his or her ways, things will go from bad to worse; the being will deny the character the choice to exchange Corruption for XP and put a curse on them – either meaning that all Corruption gained by the character is doubled or that he or she cannot heal naturally and that all other healing is halved. Another option is that all the oath-breaker's checks using their highest ability score will have disadvantage. The being will choose the alternative which is most damaging to the character.

BREAKING A PACT

There is no known way to break this sort of pact. You can temporarily hide from the pact and the curse in a *magic circle* or inside a *private sanctum* (for details, see the *Ruins of Symbaroum Player's Guide*, page 203 and 210, respectively). However, as soon as the character steps outside such a location, the curse returns in full force. It is possible that a wish spell might be able to break a pact.

Pact-making Beings

So, what beings may be interested in forging a pact with the characters? In general, they are creatures of the categories beasts, undead or abominations of higher challenge rating (CR 10 or more).



Social Challenges

THERE ARE DEFINITELY tensions between the game world's various factions and their leaders – their relationships range from strained to downright hostile. In one way or another, the player characters and their actions will almost certainly affect, and be affected by, these tensions. Whatever they do, their deeds will be applauded by some groups and criticized, or outright condemned, by others. The social challenge system appears in the *Ruins of Symbaroum Player's Guide*, pages 36–37. Here's a brief summary of the process:

The group introduces themselves to the other party(s) by way of a Charisma (Persuasion) check (other skills are possible). Depending on the result, they may have advantage or disadvantage on the evaluation check. They then have a discussion with the subject, giving them another chance to earn either advantage or disadvantage on the evaluation check (advantage from one source cancels out disadvantage from another source as usual). A final evaluation check (usually Persuasion again) determines the outcome of the challenge.

Scheming

THE VARIOUS FACTIONS of Ambria, Davokar and beyond can further complicate a social challenge. Certain factions respond well to skills other than Persuasion and will more likely respect close allies over strangers. In addition, the player characters themselves can earn a Reputation among certain factions.

FACTION DETAILS

The following table indicates what the various factions like, dislike and are impressed by. The column headings should be interpreted as follows:

- **Leader.** The faction's most powerful and influential individual/individuals. Other members are likely to share their views, but may also deviate from the faction's official line – no faction is without internal conflicts.
- **Impressed by.** All representatives of a faction can be influenced with a successful Persuasion check, but most of them also have another attribute which they admire and appreciate in their allies. This attribute can replace Persuasion in interactions with faction representatives.
- **Likes.** Indicates whether the faction is particularly fond of a certain origin or class. Obviously, they usually have an affinity for their fellow faction members, but also for other close allies. Those who fit the description gain a positive modifier of +1 on their social challenge checks.

FACTIONS

Faction	Leader(s)	Impressed by	Likes	Dislikes
House Kohinoor	Korinthia Nightbane, Beremo Herengol	Investigation	Ordo Magica	Barbarians, Ironsworn, Blight-marked
Ordo Magica	Grand Master Seldonio	Arcana	Ambrians	Varies
The Priesthood	First Father Jeseebegai, Brother Eumenos	Religion	Worshipers of Prios	Witches, Ironsworn, Heretics, Blight-marked
The Templars	Iakobo Vearra	History	—	Witches, Ironsworn, Heretics, Non-humans, Blight-marked
The Witches	The Huldra Yeleta	Insight	Witches	Sun knights, Explorers, Blight-marked
The Iron Pact	Elori, Prince Eneáno	Intimidation	Ironsworn	Sun knights, Explorers, Nobles, Blight-marked
The Sovereign's Oath	Razameaman, Odralintos	History	—	Witches, Ambrians, Blight-marked
Sacred of the Old Blood	Duke Sesario, Esmerelda	Insight	Nobles	Ordo Magica, Worshipers of Prios

- **Dislikes.** Indicates whether the faction has a particular loathing for a certain origin or class. Those who fit the description, possess the relevant attributes, or are heard praising them, suffer a –1 modifier on all social challenge checks when interacting with the faction.

It should be noted that people are often thought to be members of a faction because they "look and sound like it." Individuals claiming to belong to a certain category are usually believed, and those who openly express strong support for one category risk being thought of as one of them, and labeled with epithets like "witch worshiper" or "elf lover."

The following categories are relevant to what the factions like/dislike. The categories are not mutually exclusive and they have no common, systematic point of reference – just like it can be with preconceptions in general.

- **Ambrians.** People of Ambrian heritage
- **Ordo Magica.** Members of Ordo Magica
- **Barbarians.** People of barbarian or mixed heritage
- **Non-humans.** Elves, changelings, dwarves, ogres, goblins and trolls
- **Witches.** People who share the witches' attributes, features and views
- **Worshipers of Prios.** People who look like they worship Prios
- **Heretics.** People who hold heretical views, or seem to have a bad influence on others
- **Blight-marked.** People exhibiting physical stigmas
- **Explorers.** People who, for one reason or another, probe the ruins of Davokar
- **Nobles.** Ambrians of noble blood
- **Ironsworn.** Members of the Iron Pact

PLAYER CHARACTER REPUTATIONS

At the end of this book (page 198) there is a simple form which the Gamemaster can use to keep a record of the player characters' status with each faction, updating it as they go about their lives and adventures. If the characters have already been in contact with representatives of the various factions, the Gamemaster must (preferably together with the players) assess their previous encounters and determine a starting value, which could be positive or negative.

Whether they start at 0 or have an already established relationship, each player character will have an individual Reputation value for each faction. This means that one character can enjoy a positive status with one faction, while others might have a neutral or even negative status – which, needless to say, ought to be taken advantage of as the players interact with the factions.

Below are examples of deeds which can affect a player character's status with a faction, either positively or negatively. Note that the change in status requires that the character is recognized by the factions, makes themself known to them, or that the character can take credit (convincingly!) for what happened.

- **Side with:** Is often heard praising or expressing support for the faction. Maximum +1 and must be maintained by making public remarks, or the modifier will expire after 3 months.
- **Complete mission:** Successfully completes a specific mission for the faction. Maximum +1 and must be maintained by completing further missions, or the modifier will expire after 6 months.
- **Complete adventure:** Brings about an outcome that benefits or pleases the faction. +1 per adventure (maximum +3), and must be maintained, or the status decreases by 1 every 3 months.
- **Eliminate enemy:** Kills or otherwise disposes of a high-ranking representative of the faction's enemy. +1 or +2, depending on the victim's rank.
- **Side against:** Is often heard denouncing or denigrating the faction. Maximum –1, and must be maintained by making public remarks, or the modifier will expire after 3 months.
- **Complete adventure:** Brings about an outcome that is detrimental to, or angers, the faction. –1 per adventure (maximum –3) and must be maintained, or the status decreases by 1 every 3 months.
- **Eliminate ally:** Kills or otherwise disposes of a high-ranking ally/friend of the faction: –1 or –2, depending on the victim's rank.
- **Eliminate representative:** Kills or otherwise disposes of a high-ranking representative of the faction. –2 or –3, depending on the victim's rank.
- **Fraternize with enemy:** Frequently fraternizes with the killer of a high-ranking representative of the faction. Maximum –1, expires when there has been no fraternization for 3 months.

The player characters might suffer/enjoy the effects of their Reputation whether they want to or not, but they can also take an active part in them. Such participation could involve making careful decisions as to who will speak for the group, having someone wait outside, concealing or acquiring symbols for deceptive purposes, smearing enemies by spreading false rumors, or even disguising themselves in order to sabotage relations between enemy factions. This devious game is being played by many, in all kinds of contexts, and if the characters do not put in some serious effort, a faction might choose someone else to carry out their missions – someone who has made sure to discredit the characters in the eyes of the faction.

Hiding one's affiliation with a certain faction normally requires a successful DC 13 Charisma (Deception) check, while posing as a member of another group is more difficult and requires a DC 20 Charisma (Deception) check. Usually, it is not possible to convincingly impersonate a specific

individual, but it could be, if one possesses the relevant magic, traits, boons, or equipment. That is for the Gamemaster to decide.

Effects of Reputation

The player characters will be faced with a number of situations where they have to interrogate or negotiate with others. Sometimes this might be a formal social challenge. Usually, this is done by having the characters flatter, threaten or argue with an individual, whereupon the one with the highest appropriate skill makes a check. If the check is successful, the characters receive the information they are looking for or achieve their negotiation goals.

If these advanced rules for scheming are applied, the player characters' relations with the faction must also be taken into account, by adding a modifier to each character's check based on what faction the opposite party belongs to and what status they hold within that faction.

> EXAMPLE: *Grumpa the Ogre (with a –1 for Charisma, +3 for being proficient in Persuasion) is known for speaking highly of witches and for having destroyed a Templar-administered excavation on one of her adventures. If she was to negotiate with the Huldra on Karvosti, her effective Charisma (Persuasion) modifier would be +4 (+1 for praising witches, +1 for a pleasing outcome of the adventure). On the other hand, if she negotiated with Alisabeta Vearra, her effective Persuasion would be +0 (–1 for a displeasing outcome of the adventure, –1 for being non-human). In that case, perhaps Grumpa should stand back and let someone else speak for the group...*

Additional Modifications

IN AN EFFORT to give social challenges extra depth, and also provide them with greater tactical complexity, here we introduce four suggestions related to the individual, rather than to the factions. Before the Persuasion check is rolled, the faction modifiers are taken into account; then, additional modifications can come into play depending on which individuals are involved in the negotiations.

SOCIAL DISTANCE

Race and nationality aside, the distance between individuals in the social hierarchy can be a complicating factor when it comes to communication in general, and especially if one of the parties is trying to influence the other. It is not only that the more prominent person looks down on "commoners"; there may very well exist a level of distrust and prejudice that works in the other direction. Furthermore, individuals from different social classes tend to speak and reason somewhat differently, which adds to the difficulties.

A simple way to handle this is by taking into account the traits Privileged and Pariah, which, when combined with persons without any such trait, form a three-step-scale:

Privileged – neither – Pariah

If the negotiating parties are on the same step, no modification is made. If the difference between them is one (1) step, the active party suffers a –1 modification on its checks, or –2 if one of them has Privileged and the other Pariah.

FACTION AFFILIATION

In addition to the distinction Likes/Dislikes, the active party in a social challenge may gain a general +1 bonus if both parties are active members in the same faction. In order for this to come into effect, having the same sympathies is not enough (for instance, believing in the Lawgiver or fighting for House Kohinoor) – they must both have official positions within an organization, order, army, religious sect or similar.

LIKES AND TASTE

Specific individuals are not always impressed by the same attributes as their faction at large – a commander in the Queen's army may be impressed by Athletics (instead of History), and a single village witch can be impressed by Deception (instead of Insight).

Among other things, this fact may be used to force the player characters to do research before taking on the social challenge, to learn more about the particular person they will be negotiating with.

ESTABLISH A RELATIONSHIP

If the gaming group likes to make use of degrees of success, the following may be appealing:

If the success check in a negotiation succeeds by 5 or more, this means that the negotiating parties get along unusually well; they really hit it off and the connection between them will have a positive impact on future meetings. The player whose character handled the negotiation gets to pen down the name of this new friend on the character sheet, and next time the two individuals are negotiating, the active party has advantage on the check.

If instead the check fails with a difference of 5 or more... Well, then the meeting ends in quarreling and bad blood. Again, the player takes note of the name, because next time these two individuals meet to negotiate the active party has disadvantage on the check. Maybe it is best to let someone else speak for the player characters...

The relationship can change – if the active party has advantage but still fails by 5 or more, they receive disadvantage (canceling out the advantage). With another similar failure, they would then have disadvantage.

The People of Ambria & Davokar

THE FOLLOWING RUNDOWN of the various social groups that characterize the Davokar region has no rules related implications, but may be useful to Gamemasters when describing individuals the characters see or come into contact with. Both Ambrian society and the clans are based on a hierarchical structure, and sometimes it may seem like Ambrians and barbarians of similar status have more in common than an Ambrian crofter and the village blacksmith.

Thrall

Thralls are found among the barbarians, either born into servitude, taken captive in battle, or held in bondage for unpaid debts. Thralls are considered property and thus have no rights. Killing them amounts to destruction of property. Thralls cannot own anything, but rely on their owners for food, shelter and tools. Healthy thralls are a status symbol among barbarians, but spoiling them is considered a sign of weakness – "at the hold of Chieftain Lardos even the thralls are fat" is a way of saying that Chieftain Lardos is both rich and weak in spirit.

Crofter

Crofters rent a plot of land and pay for it with hard labor in the landowner's fields. Every month a crofter family receives roughly an orteg's worth of surplus crops. This is often traded for everyday luxuries at the local market; some families save it in the hope of one day owning a farm of their own.

Daythalers

Daythalers are the crofters of the towns, workers who give their bodies to hard labor such as construction. The wage for manual labor in the cities is an orteg a day, which just about covers the minimum expenses of living there.

Soldier

Ambrian soldiers are entitled to a small plot of land which provides their families with a meager subsistence, while the soldiers serve in the army. A soldier's salary is one orteg a week, but then all the soldier's expenses are covered by the army, including weapons and armor.

Mercenary

Sellswords normally earn a shilling a day as infantrymen, but must pay for their own weapons and armor. Mercenary cavalry – where the warriors provide their own horses – are paid 10 shillings a day, with a maintenance cost of almost as much, at least if there is a family to support. Mercenaries like crossbowmen, pikemen and light cavalry can make good money, at a very high risk of mutilation, death and unemployment once peace is restored. Long wars can easily empty the war chests, in which case the mercenaries are only paid in booty, which contributes to further brutalization during the conflict.

Yeoman Farmer

Self-owning farmers earn about a shilling a day in produce from their own farm which, but for a couple of ortegs, is also the cost of living, taxes and farm maintenance. Many yeomen farmers also serve in their liege lord's army a certain number of days per year – usually 30 days per year as archers – in exchange for reduced taxes. This increases the farm's surplus to half a dozen ortegs per day, and farms with a tradition of archery can grow into large-scale operations, with their own crofters and a more comfortable life for the family – if the farmer survives the military service, that is.

Artisan

Ambria's strong guild system allows artisan families to earn one shilling a day, which, after food and beverage expenses, rent and tool maintenance, leaves several ortegs for a comfortable life or a future investment. The guilds are very keen to keep the number of artisans from growing too large, to ensure good wages for their members. Barbarian artisanship is simpler, but regulated by the fact that each village may only have one artisan of each type, which has a similar effect.

Merchant

Traders in Ambrian cities often make one thaler a day and count their expenses in shillings, which allows many merchant families to grow rapidly in status and pomp. Some also marry into declining noble houses to get a fancier name for their business.

Knight

Heavily armored cavalry is the backbone of the Ambrian army. It costs one thaler per day to keep a knight with a family appropriately housed and provide combat equipment like two horses, heavy armor, lance, sword and shield. Some knights are freelancers, landless nobles in a prince's service, but the majority are landowners themselves and princelings in their own right.

Noble

Barons and their families live on 100 thaler a day, which is not so strange considering that politics and festivities are intimately connected. A class appropriate lifestyle is viewed as the foundation of a trustworthy individual, and tournaments, lavish parties, and purchasing the goodwill of important guilds are all common practices for achieving one's plans and protecting the family's privileges.

Troupe Play

AN ALTERNATIVE TO traditional play where each player controls a single character is that the players take on multiple characters, often connected by a common place, organization or theme. This way of playing is known as "troupe play."

Troupe play allows you to play on multiple levels at the same time. For example, the schemes of princes (a set of influential player characters) can be alternated with direct actions (a physically capable but less socially distinguished group of player characters), perhaps rounded off with a group of young servants taking their first faltering steps into the world as adventurers. Every player inhabits one character from each of these groups, switching between roles as they go from palace intrigues in Yndaros to dirty work in Davokar or local adventures in their home village.

The advantage of troupe play is that it allows for a great deal of variation, in terms of both social standing and adventure locations, while still being thematically coherent. The variation lets the players experience many characters, places and adventures that are all connected by a larger story. The theme is also a strong reason for the player characters to be working together – regardless of position, they all have something to gain from the group's collective success, and much to lose from their failure. Because Experience is granted to all player characters that are part of the same troupe, the fact that you may not get to play your favorite character in a certain scenario does not adversely affect their progression.

Troupe play is often played in a certain location (a principality, a witch circle, a temple, or one of Ordo Magica's chapter towers), but it is also possible to play a mobile unit – a company of sellswords, a merchant caravan, or why not members of a large expedition into the depths of Davokar? Troupe play can even let you play a whole clan or an entire nation and experience its eventual fate.

Getting Started with Troupe Play

THE FOUNDATION OF troupe play is a discussion within the gaming group; it is such a different form of gaming that it requires enthusiasm, or at least consent, from all participants. Since it is not a standard part of roleplaying games, the game form must also be explained so that everyone is on the same page.

For troupe play to work, each player must have characters in all groups, meaning that all players must buy into the idea of inhabiting multiple characters rather than just one. One way of presenting this is to view the game as a TV series: it involves lots of characters, organized into several groups, instead of a few people in a single group. When everyone agrees that troupe play is appropriate, it is time to let the game begin.

FROM THE GROUND UP

If you decide to begin a game of troupe play, the players create multiple characters right from the start. An option is to first create one group and play a session with it, and then create another group. However, there are advantages to creating all groups before the first gaming session begins. It will give the players a sense of scale. The drawback to this method is of course that it takes more time before the game can begin.

DEVELOPING ONGOING GAMES

Introducing troupe play into an ongoing game is fully possible and often rewarding. The first generation of characters might be very successful and establish the place or organization in which the second (and third) generation's adventures will take place.

This organic way of developing the game is often appreciated by the players, since they themselves have built the most prominent characters and sometimes get to go back and play them. Once again it is important that everyone agrees on the game form, as it fundamentally changes the rhythm of the game.

SETUPS FOR TROUPE PLAY

Location/Group	Troupe 1	Troupe 2	Troupe 3
Border Fortress	Officers and senior officials	Competent soldiers	New recruits or servants
Order chapter	Masters	Adepts. bodyguards, etc.	Novices and servants
Sun temple	Temple leadership	Priests, assistants, etc.	Lay members
Barbarian village	Chieftain's council	Guard warriors	Common villagers
Treasure hunters	Founders	Ambitious treasure hunters	Losers and beggars
Traveling jesters	Owners	Performers, guards, etc.	Children or helpers
Goblin village	Chieftain and advisors	Prominent goblins	Common goblins

Troupe Play in Practice

TROUPE PLAY IS based on the same fundamentals as regular roleplaying, but introduces a couple of additional elements. These are described below.

SUPERIORS AND SUBORDINATES

The most common form of troupe play is based on a clear hierarchy between the groups of player characters. One group has social or other kinds of power over a certain place or organization, and the other group/groups are subordinates of the first. Normally the groups consist of a) the leaders, b) competent agents, and possibly c) a third group that is often very ordinary or down-to-earth, in contrast to the more competent and powerful groups above them.

There can be no serious conflicts between the groups; it does not work well in the context of troupe play. Grumbling about unsympathetic princes is a fun part of the game form, but outright revolts are not.

INFLUENCE BETWEEN THE GROUPS

Troupe play works best if one group's decisions and experiences affects the others. For example, the leaders' decisions become orders for a subordinate group to obey, and the latter's degree of success (or failure) becomes new information for the leaders to act on. A third, less powerful group will suffer the consequences, and possibly discover something that can help solve the problem.

MEETINGS BETWEEN THE GROUPS

It is desirable that the groups meet, and one way of having this happen is to let a subordinate group encounter a member or two from a superior group in a meeting where all characters are played by their players. Such a scene might occur when some of the subordinate player characters report to one or two of their superiors – who are then controlled by their players during that scene.

JOINT ADVENTURING

It is certainly possible for characters from different groups to have adventures together, though one may have to deal with great disparities in social standing and Experience between them.

Many stories from books and movies are about such groups: an experienced mystic leading a bunch of less experienced individuals on amazing adventures. This becomes a bit difficult for gaming groups whose members have different ambitions concerning game balance, and some players may find it boring to play less influential characters. But if you talk it through and reach a consensus on how and why this is fun, it can really enrich your experience.

At the next gaming session it is recommended that you play another mixed group and let the players switch from powerful to subordinate or vice versa.

Playing in Different Eras

An attractive version of troupe play (at least to us) is to play two or three gaming groups in the same location, but during different times in history. This becomes particularly exciting if set in a region where many dramatic and tumultuous events have taken place over the decades, or even centuries.

Experience Points in Troupe Play

DURING TROUPE PLAY, each character earns Experience Points (XP), regardless of whether or not they were an active member of play or not. We can imagine the other characters taking care of other challenges while the camera follows one particular group.

Note: If you use another advancement scheme, whenever a member of a troupe at a certain level gains a new level, all members of the troupe at that level gain a new level.

To determine the number of XP earned for each member, take the total amount of XP earned and convert it to a base value by dividing it by the value given for the highest level character that was active in play:

Level		Level	
1–2	Do not divide	9–12	Divide by 20
3–4	Divide by 5	13–16	Divide by 30
5–8	Divide by 10	17–20	Divide by 50

This gives you the base value. For every character in the troupe, take this base value and award the following amount of XP:

Level		Level	
1–2	Base value × 1	9–12	Base value × 20
3–4	Base value × 5	13–16	Base value × 30
5–8	Base value × 10	17–20	Base value × 50

EXAMPLE: *a troupe with three 2nd level characters, two 5th level characters and a single 10th level character earn 6,500 XP on an adventure. Since the 10th level character is the highest, the base value is 325 (total XP divided by 20). Each 2nd level character in the troupe earns 325 XP, each 5th level character earns 3,250 XP and each 10th level character earns 6,500 XP. If there was a 15th level character (perhaps the overall leader), they would earn 9,750 XP.*

War & Battles

BOTH AMBRIA AND Davokar are scenes of large-scale battles in which the player characters can play a direct role or even lead one side's troops. For many gaming groups it is enough for the Gamemaster to describe the major developments while the player characters act as usual in specific scenes, with the larger battle as a dramatic backdrop with no impact on the player characters' fight. For other groups it is more relevant that the overarching battle is also governed by rules, and that the player characters' actions echo in the wider context.

Presented below are rules for situations where the player characters participate on a battlefield, or lead their own combat unit during larger battles. Note that the rules are not about managing the battle as a whole, but about the player characters taking part in the fighting and thus experiencing dramatic scenes.

The pitched battle should be viewed as a "combat scene generator" where the player characters' success, or lack thereof, mirrors the overall course of events. The larger battle is divided into a number of combat scenes which the player characters experience first-hand, and the outcome of these smaller skirmishes affects the major developments – and vice versa.

Pitched Battles

WITH OUR SYSTEM, a pitched battle is broken down into five phases. First you calculate or estimate the odds of the battle as a whole; this is only done once per battle. Then the player characters decide their conduct in the coming battle (heroic, moderate or cautious). They can change their conduct for every combat scene. By fighting aggressively they can contribute more to their side's success, at higher personal risk; heroes live dangerously, but can more or less decide an entire battle by fighting their way to – and taking out – the enemy's leader.

The odds and conduct determine what level of resistance the player characters will face in the upcoming combat scene; then, when the outcome of their fight has been decided, it is time to determine how it affects the battle as a whole. Phases 2 to 4 are repeated until the pitched battle has reached one of four outcomes: victory, defeat, desertion or player characters eliminated.

Battle Phases

1. Calculate the odds (once per pitched battle).
2. The player characters choose a conduct for the coming combat scene (before every combat scene of the pitched battle).
3. Roll to determine enemies of the combat scene.
4. Determine the outcome of the combat scene.
5. Calculate the outcome of the pitched battle. If any of the four outcomes are reached, the battle is over, otherwise you start over at phase 2.

ODDS OF THE PITCHED BATTLE

The first order of business is to calculate the odds of the battle by determining the relative strength of the forces involved. The possible odds are 1:1, 2:3, 1:2, 1:3, 1:4, 1:5, 1:10. Anything in between is rounded down.

The method for determining the odds may vary from battle to battle, from gaming group to gaming group, but we suggest that you pick one of the following:

- **Intuitive Method.** The odds are determined based on gut feeling rather than calculation. You simply choose whatever odds seem reasonable from the list and start the battle. This is particularly appropriate when the player characters do not have a lot at stake, for example when they are participating in a battle without leading it, or when a defeat would not rob them of anything important.
- **Simple Method.** Count the number of warriors on each side of the conflict, regardless of their strength/capacity; a defending army entrenched behind fortified walls has its number multiplied by 3. This method is well-suited for battles between human armies, where the difference between the individuals is not that big (mostly lower challenge ratings, with the majority of the warriors at CR 1 or less).
- **Advanced Method.** Each creature participating in the battle – not including the player characters! – is assigned a point value equal to their challenge rating, after which you compare the sum of both sides. If a side has temporary fortifications, double their challenge ratings. If they have permanent fortifications, triple them.

Soldier Types and Terrain

The *Ruins of Symbaroum* pitched battle rules are deliberately abstract, ignoring factors such as troop quality or type or terrain features. Gaming groups who want to take into account these considerations are encouraged to expand this system or share their own for doing so.

BATTLE ODDS

Odds (Allies:Enemies)	Modifier
10:1	+15
5:1	+10
3:1	+7
2:1	+4
3:2	+2
1:1	+0
2:3	–2
1:2	–4
1:3	–7
1:5	–10
1:10	–15

This advanced method is suitable for battles where one side has several (or consists almost entirely of) monsters and warriors of high challenge ratings).

No matter what method is used, the calculated value is rounded down to the nearest level in the Battle Odds table. The Modifier column shows what value should be used when rolling to decide the course of the battle, which is done after every combat scene.

PLAYER CHARACTER CONDUCT

Before every combat scene the players jointly decide whether their characters should take a Heroic, Moderate or Cautious approach, which will affect the resistance they face during the combat scene:

- **Heroic.** The player characters actively seek out the most heated part of the battle, challenge the enemy's leaders, and try to win the battle as quickly as possible – or lose in a way that will make people sing songs about their valiant demise. Heroic conduct adds +3 to the roll for the Combat Scene table.
- **Moderate.** The player characters follow orders and do not back down, which sometimes places them in the heat of battle and sometimes in less dangerous situations. Moderate conduct adds no modifier to the roll for the Combat Scene Outcome.
- **Cautious.** The characters keep clear of dangerous areas and seek out less explosive situations. Their actions may be considered tactical or cowardly, depending on what they did during the previous combat scene. Few allies will view the group as cowards if they regroup after a heroic effort, while a group consistently avoiding hot spots will gain a reputation for being spineless curs. Cautious conduct results in a –3 penalty to the roll for the Combat Scene table.
- **Desertion.** The characters might decide that the battle is lost and flee. Deserting is against the law and traditions of Ambrians and clanfolks alike, and punishable by death. Characters who run away will become wanted criminals and should expect to be hunted as deserters. Desertion also gives –1 Reputation if those rules are applied (see page 173), resulting in insults like "gutless scoundrels" or "deserter scum" being thrown their way.

Note that the mass escape taking place when your side loses a battle does not constitute desertion.

THE COMBAT SCENE

The overall battle consists of a series of combat scenes. Each combat scene lasts three rounds and introduces fresh enemies (any enemies remaining from a previous scene are swept away by the tides of battle). The player characters' conduct modifies the roll for determining the enemies faced during the combat scene. Roll on the Combat Scene table, modified by the characters' chosen conduct.

After three rounds of normal combat, evaluate the scene. If all or almost all of the enemies are dead or incapacitated then the scene counts as a win for the player characters. Otherwise, it counts as a loss.

COMBAT SCENE

1d20	Description	Enemies	Effects
5 or lower	Out of battle	There is no combat scene and the characters can use actions to drink elixirs, use healing spells, etc.	–3 to the Course of Battle.
6–10	On the fringes	The enemy's total challenge rating is lower than the characters' level.	Winning is +0 to the Course of Battle, Losing is –1.
11–15	In the midst	The enemy's total challenge rating is equal to the characters' level.	Winning is +1 to the Course of Battle, Losing is +0.
16–20	Critical point	The enemy's total challenge rating is higher than the characters' level but less than half again as much.	Winning is +3 to the Course of Battle, Losing is +0.
21+	Moment of truth	The enemy's total challenge rating is equal to one and a half times the characters' level.	Winning is +5 to the Course of Battle, Losing is +0.

CHARACTER FATE

If a character is unconscious at the end of a combat scene, roll on the character fate table below:

CHARACTER FATE

1d6	Fate	Effect
1	Dead from wounds	The character fails any remaining death saving throws.
2	Killed by enemy	A new enemy appears; the player can narrate a spectacular, but ultimately futile, last stand.
3	Captured by the enemy	The player character survives their wounds but is held by the enemy. The other player characters must pay a ransom or rescue the character.
4	Wake among the dead, looted	The unconscious character was believed dead and had their valuables removed.
5	Wake among the dead, unlooted	The character's body was hidden by the dead and still has its gear and other valuables.
6	Saved by allies	The character is saved by other allies and wakes up in the main encampment.

If all characters are eliminated during a combat scene, the Gamemaster decides how the combat scene ends – that is, which side wins and which side loses, or whether the battle rages on after the fate rolls have been made.

THE COURSE OF THE BATTLE

At the end of each combat scene a roll is made to determine the course of the battle.

First you roll to determine how many steps up or down the scale the battle moves, using the Combat Outcome table. You add 1d20, the Battle Odds modifier, and the result from the combat scene. This results in a movement up or down on The Course of the Battle table. All battles start at Stalemate, no matter the odds.

Rerolls on the Character Fate Table

The gaming group should decide whether to allow re-rolls on the Fate table so that it is consistent with the risk of dying in the rest of the game. If the gaming group has a forgiving attitude towards re-rolls in general, for example with regard to death saving throws, it is only appropriate to be as forgiving when it comes to fate rolls – that is, to make it possible for player characters to be rescued at the last minute, perhaps at the cost of 1 point of permanent Corruption? Conversely, if the gaming group is stringent about death saving throws, no re-rolls should be allowed on the Fate table either.

After reaching Victory or Defeat the pitched battle is over, whether good or bad for the player characters' side.

COMBAT OUTCOME

1d20 + Battle Odds +Combat Scene result	Course of Battle movement
25+	Two steps up
10–24	One step up
0–9	One step down
Below 0	Two steps down.

THE COURSE OF THE BATTLE

Battle Status	Effect
Victory	The battle is over and the player characters' side has prevailed. The enemy suffers (1d4 + 4) × 10% casualties in the battle and subsequent slaughter. Your side suffers 1d8 × 10% casualties in the battle.
Winning	—
Advantage	—
Stalemate	(Battle begins here)
Disadvantage	—
Losing	—
Defeat	The battle is over and the enemy has prevailed. Your side suffers (1d4 + 4) × 10% casualties in the battle and subsequent slaughter. Your enemy suffers 1d8 × 10% casualties in the battle.

The Player Characters as Commanders

THE RULES FOR pitched battle presented above assume that the player characters operate as an individual combat unit among their allies, without necessarily leading the entire army. But the army they are marching with may actually be their own – for instance if they rule their own domain as described in the next chapter, or if they seek to conquer some territory according to the Conquest section on page 83.

The guidelines below are meant to be used when the player characters (or one of them) are commanding an army. It is a matter of keeping one's troops in line during the march to the intended destination (the Commander check), and also what soldiers they have at their disposal in terms of house troops and hired sellswords. You can read more about house troops in the next chapter, under Example Domains on page 164.

Note that the rules are designed for smaller armies of up to one company (roughly 100 soldiers). Gaming groups wishing to stage larger battles, with their characters as leaders, will likely have to make certain changes and adjustments. For example, you might declare a sub-commander for each company, and then a general to be in overall command.

COMMANDER CHECK AND ARMY SIZE

Number of Soldiers	Commander Check DC
1–19	9
20–39	10
40–59	11
60–79	13
80–99	15
100+	17

THE COMMANDER CHECK

Keeping a marching army of agitated warriors together, and keeping them in line, is a challenge in itself. The leader (a player character or hired commander) should make a Charisma (Persuasion) check once per day while the army is on the move. If you have the Commanding Voice boon, you have advantage on the check.

The size of the army, in terms of participating warriors, also affects how hard it is to steer it towards its destination. In other words, it is easier to lead a smaller force of well-drilled knights than a large horde of pitchfork-waving peasants, even though the two armies have the same number of combat points. This is reflected in the Commander Check and Army Size table, but also in the Hiring Troops table (page 183), which shows that stronger and more disciplined soldiers are much more expensive to recruit.

If the Commander check succeeds, everything works out well (unless the Gamemaster has other surprises in store!), but failure leads to a roll on the Army Misfortunes table – alternatively, the Gamemaster can choose an effect from the list or make up a new one. Adjust the event based on whether the army is marching through mountains, forests or plains.

ARMY MISFORTUNES

1d20	Misfortune	Description	Effect
1–4	Deserters	1/10 of the troops run away, affecting morale	The commander must make a DC 10 Charisma (Persuasion) check once per day. An equal amount of troops flee each day until the check succeeds.
5–7	Stragglers	The column is divided and the rearguard attacked by local predators	Casualties equal 1/5 of the total army, which may be cause to recalculate the odds of the upcoming battle (see page 178).
8–10	Miserable terrain	Faulty navigation sends the army marching through rough terrain (such as wetlands)	Movement speed is reduced for 1d6 days or 1d4 days if a player character with Bushcraft makes a DC 13 Wisdom (Survival) check.
11–12	Diseased water	An erroneous assessment of water quality causes stomach problems for a large chunk of the army	A portion (1d4: 1: 1/4 of the army, 2–3: 1/2 of the army, 4: 3/4 of the army) is weakened (–1 modifier to rolls for The Combat Outcome per 1/4 affected) for 1d6 days or 1d4 days if a player character with Bushcraft makes a DC 13 Wisdom (Survival) check.
13–14	Mass desertion	A significant portion (1d4: 1: 1/4 of the army, 2–3: 1/2 of the army, 4: 3/4 of the army) refuses to continue unless their pay is doubled	Affected soldiers/officers will leave the army unless their pay is increased by 100%, or 50% if the commander (or a negotiator) passes a DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check.
15–16	Sabotage	Enemy agents set fire to the army's supply of basic necessities, elixirs and medical equipment	The army arrives on the battlefield weakened and poorly equipped, which results in a –2 modifier to rolls for The Combat Outcome (see page 180).



Player characters only experience limited scenes, but will nonetheless impact the outcome of the entire battle.

ARMY MISFORTUNES

1d20	Misfortune	Description	Effect
17–18	Infiltration	The enemy's spies infiltrate the night camp and identify the player characters as the army's leaders and toughest fighters	The enemy's leaders are warned to stay away from the player characters during the battle; the player characters have a –2 modifier when rolling on the Combat Scene table.
19	Nature's revenge	Lack of concentration risks leading the army into an area with Corrupted Nature (see page 20 in the *Bestiary*)	The commander must make a DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check and a DC 10 Charisma (Persuasion) check. If both fail 1/2 of the total troops die; if one fails then 1/4 of the troops die; if both succeed then only 1/10 of the soldiers are slain.
20	Primal blight beast	A monster with a challenge rating higher than the commander's level suddenly appears in the army's path	The commander (and other party members) must defeat the monstrosity within five rounds or the army will disperse as the soldiers flee in all directions.

HOUSE TROOPS

The size and strength of the player characters' own force depends on the size of their domain, according to the Domain House Troops table.

If the house troops are brought into the field, the domain's Fortification value decreases by one level – a Normal Village gets the Fortification of a Remote Village, and so on. A fortified farm without a militia is defenseless and may not even try to defend against a potential attacker; the attacker automatically takes over the farm. Furthermore, the militia is composed of the domain's most able-bodied individuals, so with them away on a campaign, the domain becomes one level more difficult to govern: A Remote Village gets the Management modifier of a Normal Village, and so on. You can read more on Fortification and Management in the chapter Domains (page 163).

DOMAIN HOUSE TROOPS

Type of Domain	Total CR	Description
Fortified farm	1	8 militia (CR 1/8 each, see Farmhand in the *Bestiary*)
Remote village	2	12 militia (as above), lead by an army veteran (counts as Infantry)
Normal village	6	20 militia, 10 archers, 1 army veteran (officer)
Trading post	10	4 guards (infantry), 8 adventurers (treasure hunters)
Small market town	13	12 soldiers (infantry), 24 militia (archers), 1 officer

MERCENARIES IN PITCHED BATTLE

An alternative to using one's own house troops is to recruit sellswords. The cost depends on the strength/competence of the mercenaries. The Hiring Troops table shows how the challenge rating corresponds to a number of points when calculating the odds of the battle using the advanced method (see page 178).

The price of sellswords is specified in cost per day, which is standard for warriors hired to defend something. For campaigns with hopes of loot it is possible to pay less in advance, if one also offers a future share of the spoils. The initial cost is then halved (e.g. 5 ortegs/day for a CR 1/4 warrior), but with the combined cost of the entire table paid in arrears – since future shares come with far greater risk than thaler paid up front, the sellswords demand a fair chance of making a decent profit. If the spoils of war turn out to be less valuable than expected, so that the player characters are unable to pay the agreed amount, the sellswords will leave the army.

In fact, they might then offer their services to the enemy instead, in the hope of payment as well as payback for being cheated.

Campaign Chronicles

Depending on the type of chronicle you're running (see page 111), war and battle may feature heavily in your stories. If you're going to run a military storyline, consider using troupe play (page 176), with several members of the troupe the commanders and special forces of certain military units, adding more of these characters as your army's strength grows. Another set of members of the troupe can represent the high command, while some troupe members can allow you to experience the day-to-day life of the lower ranks.

Such military chronicles have plenty of external media to inspire you, from *Band of Brothers* and *Saving Private Ryan* to *The Guns of August* or *Gates of Fire*. All of those sources have little to do with the arms and equipment of the armies of Symbaroum but focus instead on the universal experiences of warfare and death on the battlefield.

HIRING TROOPS

Category	Total CR	Cost/Day	Examples
Basic	0–1/2	1 orteg	Archers, farmhand, goblin, goblin chieftain, goblin warrior, infantry, pike soldier, sapper, village guard
Ordinary	1	1 shilling	Fortune hunter, goblin shaman, officer, squire, village warrior
Challenge	2	1 thaler	Knight, monster hunter, squire, wilderness guide
Strong	3+	5+ thaler	Keeper witch, Pansar, plunderer, queen's spy, village witch

Ambrian Wars

TO BETTER UNDERSTAND the role of pitched battles and sieges in Ambria and Davokar, it may be worthwhile to study the lessons learned from the wars of the past decades, primarily the costly victory over the Dark Lords in Alberetor and the more recent invasion and occupation of Ambria.

The Great War

In Ambrian wars the odds normally favor the attacker, since Ambrian warlords are unlikely to attack without a clear advantage – they would rather build their forces over longer periods of time than attempt an attack against unfavorable odds. This is something the Ambrians learned particularly well in The Great War.

The Dark Lords' march on the west was likely preceded by many years of planning, as illustrated by their attack on the border town Berendoria in the year –21, when a massive army surprisingly marched out of Lyastra. Infiltrators in the city, in the form of sorcerers and cultists, quickly made the town's situation untenable, which became a pattern that defined the early years of the war.

It was only when Queen Korinthia's newly established Ranger Corps started operating deep within areas occupied by the Dark Lords that similar surprise attacks could be anticipated and met with a stronger defense. At the same time, the theurgs and Black Cloaks learned how to effectively track down and weed out darkness-worshiping traitors in Alberetor, which stopped the enemy from relying on insiders in towns and castles. The effectiveness of the witch hunters, combined with the development of alchemical siege weapons on the Alberians' side, made sieges so lengthy and expensive that the Dark Lords quickly became reluctant to engage in them at all.

Towards the end of the war, the dark hordes started circumventing their enemies' major strongholds and tried to starve them out rather than storming them. Out on the open battlefield the Queen's armies – led by mounted Pansars, witch hammering Templars, and battlemages – finally managed to break the dark horde. This culminated in the march on the darkened heart of Lyastra, its capital city Bright Haven, and the subsequent siege and storming of the Dark Lords' fortress. Thanks to lessons learned, Korinthia was freed and resumed command of her increasingly triumphant people, a people who came to beat the Dark Lords at their own game: siegecraft.

The Invasion of Ambria

Up north, during the occupation of Ambria, the barbarians' fatalistic view on life and death made their warriors willing to accept more equal (and sometimes even bad) odds. This fighting culture can be explained by the fact that the barbarians rarely waged long wars, but usually fought clan against clan in battles under the canopies of Davokar – bloody, to be sure, but also with ritualistic elements such as duels and taunts as important ingredients.

Before the arrival of the Ambrians, the clan chieftains usually contented themselves with driving the enemy away; crushing and destroying other clans was not their aim. Sieges were rare, since the clans had not developed the form of siegecraft that makes storming fortified positions a viable strategy. As a result, the weaker party often retreated to its stronghold and held out until the attacker got tired and left.

The barbarians' widespread hero complex was obviously to their detriment when the Ambrians established themselves on the plains south of Davokar, as death-defying clan troops attacked Ambrian armies patiently waiting behind their defenses until they had assembled enough troops to launch an overwhelming and successful offensive. But Davokar's chieftains quickly learned that this new

enemy was not like the others, and clan Jezora offered considerable resistance in the form of joint armies, and abandoned their swift style of warfare in favor of troublesome raids against Ambrians on the march.

They found no effective way of countering the superior Pansar cavalry, however, and after retreating into their strongholds they found themselves surrounded by an enemy who had perfected the art of siegecraft. The siege of Kadizar in the year 0 ended with the defenders capitulating after only three days, while the Jezites once again put up a brave fight against impossible odds. It was not until the year 10 that the clan and its chieftain Haloban were so utterly defeated that clan Jezora effectively ceased to exist.

The Battles of Karo's Fen

According to Ambrian doctrine, a defending commander should not accept unfavorable odds if there is any chance of retreat; sometimes there is not, especially in a war where a deliberate disadvantage in one place might create an advantage somewhere else. Before The Great War, a surrounded force could consider surrender, as it was common practice among Alberian princes to spare the lives of surrendering soldiers and military leaders.

Since the war against the Dark Lords, few Ambrian commanders have found themselves surrounded by enemies stronger than they are, but on the few occasions when it has happened, none of them have chosen capitulation; they are trained in the annihilating practices of The Great War, where no quarter was shown on either side. Thus, the first battle on clan Vajvod's territory, at the free settlement of Karo's Fen in the year 8, ended with the superior clan warriors wiping out a large Ambrian force to the last man, despite the barbarians' repeated attempts to make the intruders put down their weapons.

Ambrian junior officers have of course been in trouble in more recent times and then shown great unwillingness to surrender; however, they have often retreated by leaving behind a small force to stall the enemy. One example of this is the third battle of Karo's Fen in the year 9, where an army captain led a company supported by a troop from the Queen's Rangers. Once again the clan warriors were far more numerous than expected, and faced with devastating odds the Ambrians withdrew. The rangers volunteered to delay the enemy, with the result that the army soldiers escaped with their lives while the rangers were slain to the last scout.

Such a miscalculation would never happen again; Queen Korinthia took her time to gather her army for a decisive battle. Even though clan Vajvod had assembled its forces as well, the odds were entirely in the Ambrians' favor – they marched to attack in broad daylight and crushed their Vajvod adversaries. Afterwards, the Queen decided not to continue into Vajvod, instead occupying The Marshes up to Karo's Fen and incorporating the area into the Ambrian realm after the local heretics were burned out. A series of agreements were then signed with clan Vajvod's high chieftain, Zoltar the Old.

There were two reasons why the Queen did not continue her campaign north: an old bit of wisdom says that all battles are expensive and that a long war might bankrupt even a Queen; another aspect is that only large realms can muster huge armies, since it requires a large population and high taxation. The downside of being a large realm is that one has many enemies and a long border to defend. And so the Queen ordered the Ambrian troops to disband after the final battle of Karo's Fen, to disarm or solve more pressing issues elsewhere. She only left a ranger unit stationed near Karo's Fen to remind the Vajvod chieftains of the military might of the Ambrians.



SECTION 6

Blight Night

This scenario is intended to function as an example of how a small adventure landscapes in *Ruins of Symbaroum* can be designed, following the guidlines presented on page 108. Of course, it is also an adventure landscape that can be played, for instance right after *The Promised Land* – the introductory adventure featured in the Quickstart PDF which can be downloaded for free from the Free League webstore.

The adventure may take place on the way to Thistle Hold when the party has taken a wrong turning somewhere and reached the edge of Davokar but not Thistle Hold's precise location. Or the group might be exploring the boundaries of the forest and decide that the inn is preferable to another night of roughing it.

During a journey along the border of Davokar, the player characters make a stop at the inn Jakad's Heart – a place with a history full of both hope and tragedy. At night the inn is attacked by howling goblins, commanded by the robber-baron Nightblade. She is on a desperate hunt for the Water of the Dusk, an artifact said to be able to save a blight-stricken soul from becoming thoroughly corrupt.

***BLIGHT NIGHT* IS** a miniature adventure landscape. It presents a setting (Jakad's Heart), a handful of NPCs with their own ambitions (the knight Nightblade among others) and a dramatic incident which sets events in motion (the siege) – then it is up to the players to (re)act!

The legend of the artifact called the Water of the Dusk is a key ingredient of the adventure, but the artifact itself does not have to make an appearance if the gamemaster doesn't want it to. Read more about the fabled artifact on page 141.

Jakad's Heart

AT DAVOKAR'S EDGE lies the solitary inn Jakad's Heart. Jakad was a Black Cloak who felt drawn to the location by dreams and inner voices. When he arrived he found a wellspring flowing with the holy Water of the Dusk. Jakad built a shrine by the well,and all who travelled along the forest edge were welcomed to stay there, to rest and heal and enjoy the comfort of the miraculous water.

But the fate of the chapel was predetermined, vulnerable as it was, resting there in the shadow of Davokar. Jakad was killed by an elven war band, and the shrine was razed to the ground to avenge human transgressions deeper into the woods.

Placing Jakad's Heart on the Map

This adventure assumes that Jakad's Heart is located along the southern edge of Davokar, but the inn may easily be relocated to some other place where Ambria borders on the wilds. The place just north of the Titans where – according to legend – Queen Korinthia found holy water suits just as well, but if so the shrine was probably burnt down by robbers instead of by elves. Also, the goblins of Nightblade are probably human robbers instead. This location is a good choice if the GM wants to run *Blight Night* as part of *The Promised Land*.

The light of the spring dimmed out as soon as Jakad's heart was pierced by an elven arrow.However, that did not stop the energetic adventurer Koldra from monetizing the legend, by building an inn near the well. She settled on the name Jakad's Heart and fortified the place with a palisade – in contrast to her precursor, she was not about to trust solely in Prios' mercy for her survival.

LOCATIONS

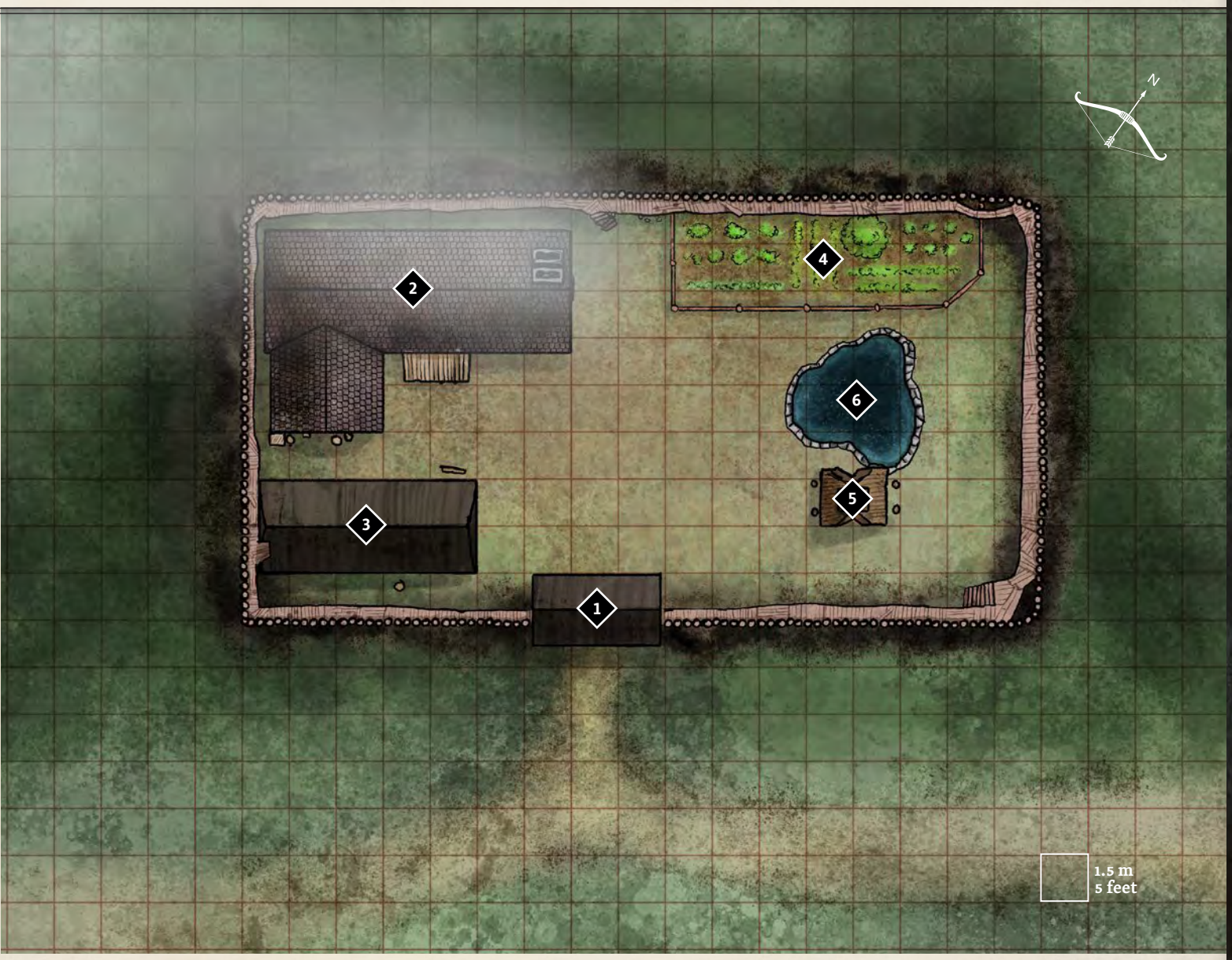
The following areas are indicated on the map:

1. Palisade and Gatehouse

On the upper level of the gatehouse there is a bronze bell covered in verdigris, serving as an alarm. The palisade, made of sturdy logs poking up from an embankment, is about 12 feet high. There is a narrow ledge on the inside so that a defender can fight against anyone trying to scale the wall. Defenders have three-quarters cover (+5 to AC and Dexterity saving throws). To set the palisade on fire is not possible unless you have some kind of alchemical concoction; the goblins (see Varraguldru, page 192) have no such mixture, but that does not stop them from trying.

2. The Inn

The inn itself is a robust stone building with a slate roof. The house has three levels and a basement where goods are stored. Joists and floors are made of wood. If the goblins make it over the palisade they will try to set the inn on fire, but will not succeed.



3. Stable
The stable is made of wood alone and will start to burn as soon as the goblins have made their way into the courtyard.

4. Garden
The garden is the oasis of the house-ogre Leaf, where he grows vegetables and herbs.

5. Shrine
A chapel stands next to the wellspring, waiting for travellers who have heard the legend and want to pray in this holy place.

6. Wellspring
A pond encircled with paving stones that also serves as a well for drinking water – pilgrims can kneel on one side, and on the other the house-ogre Leaf fetches buckets of water for the inn and the garden.

BACKGROUND

A few days prior to the arrival of the player characters, a suspicious "pilgrim" was driven away by Koldra as he showed an unhealthy interest in the sacred spring. The obviously drugged man (see Ashfaru) spoke about wanting to *"prepare the well-spring for the arrival of his mistress,"* but Koldra refused to let him stay within the palisade.

The supposed pilgrim swore that he would return and that he would be much less diplomatic when he did: *"Lady Nightblade will not be forgiving towards those who stand in her way!"*

Koldra did not think twice about it; she had experienced worse during her adventuring days. However, she has made sure that at least one family member is always on the lookout at night. That way the keeper of the inn, as well as any guests, will get a warning when the pilgrim and his mistress return – which they do, with a vengeance!

Non-player Characters

IN ADDITION TO the player characters, the following characters are present at the inn when it is attacked.

KOLDRA

This middle-aged woman is a charismatic person with hard hands due to her previous career as a treasure-hunter.

Koldra

Medium human

Armor Class 15 (studded leather armor)
Hit Points 26 (4d8 + 8)
Speed 30 ft

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	15 (+2)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Dex +4, Cha +4
Skills Insight +3, Perception +5, Stealth +6
Senses passive Perception 15
Languages Ambrian
Challenge 1 (200 XP)
Manner always watchful, friendly
Shadow bronze darkened with soot (Corruption: 2/6)
Equipment the inn's guestbook, 1d6 gold pieces, 2d6 silver pieces

Alchemy. Koldra is proficient with alchemist's supplies. She can make an Intelligence (Alchemist's Supplies) check to identify drugs and poisons.

Backstab. Koldra can add 2d6 to her attack roll if she has advantage on the attack or an enemy of the target is within 5 feet and that enemy is not incapacitated and she does not have disadvantage on the attack roll.

Cunning and Fast Hands. Koldra can take a bonus action to Dash, Disengage or Hide on her turn. She can also use the bonus action to use her thieves' tools to disarm a trap, open a lock, or take the Use an Object action.

ACTIONS

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

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

KOLDRA'S FAMILY

Koldra's husband Tandrag and their four children Melga (13), Nefer (11), Sandros (7) and Pegel (5), keep to themselves and manage the inn. During the siege they will help to the best of their abilities, which under the circumstances amounts to not much more than keeping watch and fetching water to quench fires. Use the Commoner statblock in the core rules if needed.

LEAF

This unusually meek ogre is happiest tending the well-kept garden of the inn. He also does odd jobs around the grounds, like fetching water from the pond and simple carpentry. When he gets agitated – for example if Koldra's family is threatened – he will grab his shovel and rake and begin to lay into the goblins.

Leaf, House Ogre

Medium humanoid (Ogre)

Armor Class 10
Hit Points 40 (4d8 + 16)
Speed 40 ft

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	10 (+0)	18 (+4)	10 (+0)	15 (+2)	9 (-1)

Senses darkvision 60 feet, passive Perception 12
Languages Ambrian
Challenge 1 (200 XP)
Manner friendly, loves plants
Shadow copper with verdigris edges (Corruption: 0/3)
Equipment gardening tools, water bucket

Calmness. Leaf has advantage on Wisdom saving throws against enchantments or other mind-altering magics.

Pariah. Leaf has disadvantage on Charisma checks when dealing with folk other than Goblins and Ogres.

Unending Labors. When Leaf takes a long rest and ingests some food and drink he reduces his exhaustion level by 2.

Tough Skin. Each of Leaf's Hit Dice provide an average result of 6.

ACTIONS

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

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

BLACKHAWK, THE MINSTREL

The minstrel Blackhawk travels along the edge of Davokar, entertaining others in exchange for shillings and ortegs. The overly genteel bard, "tutored by the elves of Ylhurandy"according to himself, is a heavy drinker but knows much about the region's legends. If no one else has told the legend of Jakad's Heart to the player characters, Blackhawk will. The minstrel has no intention of fighting other than in self-defense, but can be persuaded to grip his spiked club if the player characters can get him to understand that they must stand together in order to survive. He uses most of the stats of a Commoner but has 9 hit points (2d8) and his club does 3 (1d6) piercing damage.

NIGHTBLADE, ROBBER BARON

The tragic figure who calls herself Nightblade would be laughable or pitiful if not for the fact that she is blight-stricken and very desperate: she has lived a long life plagued by corruption and is placing her last hope in the legend of the Water of the Dusk, hoping that it can save her from the darkness gathering within her. With the help of powerful drugs she has been able to keep the madness at bay, but the elixirs do nothing to stop or delay the physical corruption. Nightblade displays a number of visible blight marks – her blood-red eyes glow in the dark, there is pus secreting from wounds on her neck, and she brings with her an odor of sulfur and doom.

Nightblade's Corruption

Nightblade's permanent corruption is equal to her corruption threshold and another point of permanent corruption will see her lose control of herself and become blight-born. If you like, make rolls to trigger corruption and to learn the corruption effect each time she uses her sword's Shackles of Battle feature. If she gains another point of permanent corruption her darkness will swallow her entirely and she becomes a Blight-born Human, as described in the *Ruins of Symbaroum Bestiary* (page 122).

Nightblade

Medium human

Armor Class 16 (Breastplate, Shield)
Hit Points 38 (4d8 + 20)
Speed 30 ft

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	18 (+4)	20 (+5)	10 (+0)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Str +2, Dex +6
Skills Deception +5
Senses darkvision 60 feet, passive Perception 12
Languages Ambrian
Challenge 1 (200 XP)
Manner brooding, desperate
Shadow Dark purple with bobbing flakes of silver, slowly sinking into darkness (Corruption: 7/7)
Equipment soothing drugs, 1d10 thaler

Hunter's Instinct. Nightblade can use her bonus action to mark one creature as her chosen target. The first time she does damage to the creature on her turn, she does +2 damage to it. If she is wielding a ranged weapon, she can use her reaction to make an attack when the creature moves.

Rough Fighting. Nightblade does 1d6 bludgeoning damage with her unarmed strikes.

Sturdy Holds. If Nightblade has a creature her size or smaller grappled, the creature has disadvantage on attempts to end the grapple.

ACTIONS

Rapier (Black Gift). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8 + 5) magical piercing damage. Nightblade can use her bonus action to add 1d4 fire damage (see Villainous Stab, page 195).

Longbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage.

REACTIONS

Shackles of Battle (Black Gift). When an enemy creature falls to 0 hit points each ally of that creature within 30 feet of Nightblade must make a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or be incapacitated until the end of their next turn. Nightblade gains 1 temporary corruption.

VARRAGULDRU, NIGHTBLADE'S GOBLIN TRIBE

The remnants of what was once the proud goblin tribe Varraguldru is a sad sight. The leader of the tribe joined up with Nightblade as she promised him gold and honor, a promise on which she initially delivered as they were pillaging ruins. They found gold as well as terrors enough to drive them into abusing the drugs offered by the knight. Since then Nightblade has ruthlessly exploited them for her dark cause; the remains of the tribe now serve her with drug-instilled loyalty. The drugs make the goblins stronger, but at the cost of emotional instability and odd compulsions.

A character observing the goblins can make a **DC 13 Wisdom (Insight or Perception) check**. On a regular success they observe the goblins scratching their arms, laughing or crying hysterically, foaming at the mouth, or staring into nothingness. A character that succeeds by 5 or more, or a successful character that has the Medicus feature or is proficient with Alchemist's Supplies can determine that the goblins are definitely on drugs!

The following statistics take the effect of the drugs into account:

SHUGGLUDD, REBELLIOUS GOBLIN

The tribe of Varraguldru no longer has a leader, but is instead commanded by Nightblade, constantly dreaming about the poison maker Ashfaru's drugs – with one exception: the goblin Shuggludd. By studying Ashfaru at work, Shuggludd has learned enough to be able to concoct Blue Drops of his own, thereby negating the corrupting power of the Wild Chew. Sadly, he has instead become addicted to the seductive comfort of the Blue Drops. They make him docile, but at least they will not kill him.

Shuggludd Takes Action

The freedom-loving goblin Shuggludd will try to contact the player characters as soon as possible – for example by surrendering in combat or sneaking in over the palisade – hoping to gain allies against the real enemy: Ashfaru and his damned cauldron!

Drugged Goblin

Small humanoid (Goblin)

Armor Class 15 (Leather, Shield)
Hit Points 9 (2d6 + 2)
Speed 25 ft

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	15 (+2)	7 (–2)

Senses darkvision 60 feet, passive Perception 12
Languages Ambrian, Goblin
Challenge 1/4 (25 XP)
Manner cackling and crazed
Shadow a kaleidoscope of colors twinged by darkness (Corruption: 1/2)
Equipment tobacco pouch with Wild Chew (see page 183 in the *Ruins of Symbaroum Player's Guide*), 1d10 ortegs

Reckless. The goblin has advantage on its attacks and attackers have advantage on their attacks against the goblin.

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

ACTIONS

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

Shuggludd

Small humanoid (Goblin)

Armor Class 15 (Leather, Shield)
Hit Points 13 (3d6 + 3)
Speed 25 ft

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	15 (+2)	7 (–2)

Senses darkvision 60 feet, passive Perception 12
Languages Ambrian, Goblin
Challenge 1/4 (25 XP)
Manner pretends to be mad, looking for opportunities to negotiate
Shadow healthy green colors (Corruption: 0/2)
Equipment alchemist's supplies, Blue Drops (see page 195), 1d10 ortegs

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

ACTIONS

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

Shuggludd has an alchemy set in his backpack, with which he makes Blue Drops that he consumes every time he has been force fed Wild Chew. This has saved him from its negative effects, both the short-term and the long-term ones. A **DC 13 Wisdom (Insight) check** allows a character to realize that this goblin tries to behave like the rest, but acts rationally and with an evident will to survive. A character that succeeds by 5 or more, or a successful character that has the Medicus feature or is proficient with Alchemist's Supplies can determine that his intoxication is an act!

How many goblins are there?

The exact number of goblins is not set in stone. The most important thing is that it's clear that the player characters cannot simply win by meeting them in the open field.

- If the characters hold the gatehouse, they face at least a goblin for each of them. When one goblin falls another fresh one steps up. They must resist from three to five waves before Nightblade tires of waiting and joins the battle herself.
- If the characters rely on the others to hold the gatehouse, the goblins break through after a few rounds. Swarms of goblins flood the grounds but then split up and the characters never have to face more than twice their number of goblins at any one time.

ASHFARU, THE POISON-MAKER OF NIGHTBLADE

Ashfaru is a renegade alchemist who left his clan after having poisoned a rival in love. Nightblade saved the alchemist from the jaws of a rage troll, and since then they have traveled together. Nowadays Ashfaru's primary task is to provide the goblins of Varraguldru with drugs, to make them serve Nightblade as loyal slaves. He also provides Nightblade with an elixir which stabilizes the fragile mind of the blight-stricken knight. He has not been able to do anything about the physical condition of his mistress – for that stronger fluids are needed, as for instance the Water of the Dusk.

Ashfaru has become addicted to his own drugs, which is evident when looking into his blood-shot eyes or at his pale lips and quivering hands. You can often see dusty traces of Dream Snuff around the old mystic's nostrils.

Ashfaru

Medium human

Armor Class 13
Hit Points 27 (5d8 + 5)
Speed 30 ft

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (–1)	16 (+3)	13 (+1)	17 (+3)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)

Saving Throws Int +5, Wis +3
Skills Arcana +5
Senses passive Perception 11
Languages Ambrian
Challenge 1 (200 XP)
Manner hides behind cauldron, bloodshot eyes
Shadow greenish-grey like mold on a decaying tree (Corruption: 2/5)
Equipment Barrvalg's cauldron, recipes and samples of Wild Chew, Dream Snuff and Blue Drops (see page 195)

Alchemy. Ashfaru is proficient with alchemist's supplies. He can make an Intelligence (Alchemist's Supplies) check to identify drugs and poisons, or to create them. His magic cauldron gives him advantage on all Alchemist' Supplies checks.

Poison. Ashfaru has one dose of strong poison, which he will coat his dagger with if threatened. This adds 2d6 poison damage to each strike for 1 minute. If he is somehow allowed to escape with Nightblade but fails to get the Water of the Dusk he instead imbibes the poison, knowing that to be a more pleasant death than Nightblade's rage.

ACTIONS

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage.

Action and Aftermath

The player characters wake up in the middle of the night as a black-feathered arrow hits the shutters: the inn is under attack! Koldra's eldest, Melga, sounds the alarm bell, and moments later the fortified inn is in an uproar. Nightblade is back, and this time she is not asking for permission – the inn shall fall and all witnesses must die, so that she can enjoy the legendary water of the wellspring in peace and quiet.

OUTSIDE THE PALISADE some thirty goblins are running around, trying to get the gate open (requires a battering ram that they do not have) or climb the walls (requires ladders). The goblins only have one ladder, which they put to good use – they will soon join Melga atop the gatehouse. If she is killed the gates will swing open and the roaring goblins pour into the courtyard, followed by Nightblade herself. If Melga is saved and the gatehouse secured, the goblins retreat.

They surround the inn and start chopping wood to make more ladders and a battering ram. This gives the defenders a chance to prepare and it is up to the player characters to decide if – and in that case how – the inn should be defended against the next wave. Further out, on the field south of the inn, out of range from projectiles, a larger group of goblins are dancing around a lone, towering figure (Nightblade). The robed shape stands absolutely still, until the time has come to order the goblins to attack.

A successful **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check** reveals that another tall person stands in the midst of the goblins, crouching over a cauldron from which a red mist rises to shroud those around. The goblins that inhale the red mist seem to become even more agitated.

EXPERIENCE

The experience points gained from this adventure landscape is based on what scenes emerge: each scene which is a challenge in the form of problem-solving or a social dilemma gives 50 experience points, and experience for defeated foes is given as normal. It is possible that 2nd level characters will achieve enough XP to reach 3rd level, and a 3rd level character will be well on their way to 4th level.

DEVELOPMENT

This one-shot adventure may be expanded in a number of ways, depending on what the gamemaster wants and the players do:

- Maybe there is some of the holy water left, a couple of drops in a bottle hidden in the basement? The player characters may find the bottle, or someone (most likely Koldra or Leaf) knows it exists and asks the player characters to take it to safety. This will require a dramatic escape from the burning inn, and a wild hunt for the nearest fortress or temple where the artifact can be properly defended.
- The goblins of Varraguldru are fed up with the bully Nightblade and her poison-maker. Sadly, they are severely addicted to the Wild Chew and the addiction must be broken if the tribe members are to be spared from insanity and death. Player characters who promise the freedom-fighter Shuggludd to aid the tribe will get a group of loyal goblins as allies in the fight against the blight stricken Knight – allies that first must be helped in ridding themselves of the addiction, before they succumb to or run amok due to withdrawal symptoms.
- If the player characters get a hold of Barrvalg's Cauldron, it can be used to liberate the Varraguldru goblins, but it will also attract the attention of Davokar's witches. According to them, the cauldron is theirs, and they need it in the fight against the horrors that are currently haunting their clan territories in alarming numbers. If the player characters are reluctant to hand it over they are willing to trade for the cauldron, in exchange for another artifact or a serious favor/service. If the PCs still refuse a smaller group of witches may – driven by the desperate situation – try to win back the cauldron through sneaky maneuvers or more violent methods.

Drugs and Artifacts

THROUGH NIGHTBLADE'S COMPANION Ashfaru, the goblins have access to – and are addicted to – a number of potent drugs. Ashfaru harvests ingredients at secret locations in Davokar, which he then combines into three different concoctions. All of these can be crafted by someone proficient with alchemist's supplies.

Adding to that, the adventure introduces two artifacts: Nightblade's sword Black Gift, and Barrvalg's Cauldron, stolen by Ashfaru. The drug Wild Chew is described on page 183 in the *Ruins of Symbaroum Player's Guide*, the rest are described here.

DREAM SNUFF

This white powder is inhaled and induces a comatose state with very real and often strikingly beautiful hallucinations. To the goblins the Dream Snuff is a reward for a job well done. The drug is treacherous in the sense that anyone who has tried it always wants more of the wonderful dreams. When living a life without any other pleasures, the risk is great that the user gets caught up in the dreams and fades away. It is only thanks to the restricted access, controlled by Ashfaru, that the whole Varraguldru tribe has not died a collective and peaceful dream death.

Rules: A dose of Dream Snuff lasts 1 hour, during which most affected creatures are stunned. Mystics, however, are not stunned (their speed is reduced by half and they have disadvantage on any ability checks instead). The drug helps mystics in producing vivid illusions – if a mystic affected by Dream Snuff casts an illusion then other creatures have disadvantage on saving throws against the illusion and on Perception checks to identify it as an illusion.

BLUE DROPS

The Blue Drops are used to bring down a drug-addled goblin and negate both Wild Chew and Dream Snuff. Sometimes it is force-fed to goblins that have overdosed on Wild Chew; then half a dozen goblins hold down the rabid warrior and force them to swallow the drops. The drug makes the goblins calm and wistful, although the latter may have less to do with the drops and more to do with them realizing that they are living a degrading existence as the slaves of evil humans.

Rules: Blue Drops work as a weak antidote and also takes the edge off Wild Chew and Dream Snuff.

THE SWORD BLACK GIFT

A night-black sword, forged in Symbaroum on the altar of dark gods and found by Nightblade in a flooded temple a decade ago. When she was disowned by her family, the knight renamed herself after the weapon. The blackened steel hums a blood-thirsty melody, which in the midst of combat turns into a murderous hymn that spurs the wielder and intimidates the enemy.

Black Gift requires attunement and its wielder gains 2 permanent corruption.

Villainous Stab

When the master uses a bonus action to activate it, the blade is licked by black flames dealing 1d4 fire damage with each attack. The flames last until the beginning of the wielder's next turn. This causes no additional corruption.

Shackles of Battle

To a wielder with sufficient willpower, the sword has even greater powers. Each time an enemy falls, the master of Black Gift can use their reaction to let the cold winds of death sweep across the battlefield. When an enemy creature falls to 0 hit points each other enemy creature within 30 feet of Black Gift must make a **DC 13 Wisdom saving throw** or be incapacitated until the end of their next turn. The wielder of the sword gains 1d4 temporary corruption.

BARRVALG'S CAULDRON

The witch Barrvalg forged this powerful cauldron, whose rim is decorated with thorns and winding vines of iron. With the cauldron the master alchemist Barrvalg could protect his people by cooking invigorating elixir mists for the village warriors. The cauldron was handed down from witch to apprentice for generations – until it was stolen by Ashfaru. The artifact is of little value to non-alchemists, but in the hands of an alchemist it is a powerful tool.

Mist of Elixirs

If the master of the cauldron knows alchemy, he or she can cook a mist of an already existing elixir. The mist then affects all who stand close to the cauldron, with the same effect as if they had swallowed a dose. Player characters who wish to stay unaffected by the mist must succeed a **DC 13 Constitution saving throw**. The master of the cauldron may always exempt itself from the effect, without needing to make a saving throw.

Using the cauldron requires attunement and grants one point of permanent corruption.

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