

bag, a vial of *oil of repulsion*, a teak mask with a *scroll of mask of terror* scribed inside of it, a jeweled scepter worth 400 gp, a pair of gold goblets worth 375 gp each, and 312 gp, 6,802 sp, and 1,054 cp in coins.

If the PCs spare Sedisserax's life and they don't loot her treasure (apart from bringing the key to Blegkenu), the dragon eventually has a change of heart and extends a few tentative offers to Cloudspire to work at reparations for the damage she caused so long ago. At some point during the next adventure, after learning that her encounter with the PCs triggered her change of heart, representatives from Cloudspire seek out the PCs to thank them. How this plays out is left to you to determine, but the Cloudspire agents have more than thanks to offer the PCs: they bestow upon each PC a magic item gifted from the sky citadel's treasures. Tailor this choice to match each PC—the item in question

should be a permanent item of a level equal to the PC's level at the time -1. If the PCs ask, the Cloudspire representatives admit that the key Sedisserax stole was once used to lock a door deep under Cloudspire that sealed the way into the Darklands. The key itself is not much more than an historical heirloom at this point, for the dwarves of Cloudspire no longer fear the dangers that, long ago, attempted to pursue them upward from below. Still, they are grateful that Blegkenu eventually returned the key to the sky citadel and thank the PCs again for their role in its recovery.

RETURNING TO BLEKGENU

When the PCs return to the shrine to Balumbdar with the key, Blegkenu is quite pleased. While the PCs were gone, he embellished his massive painting of Balumbdar to be juggling the same items as seen on *The Juggler*. He's

convinced that the key is the vital component for his ritual to bring the great juggler, Balumbdar's minion, forth. As proof, he nods to the altar, where *The Juggler* now sits calm and motionless. He hasn't touched the card since it grew still, and now any player character can pick it up from the altar with no issue.

Blegkenu still intends to perform his ritual and invites the PCs to stay for it, but with the ritual being a multi-week event, the PCs probably

have more pressing business.

Whether Blegkenu successfully summons one of Balumbdar's heralds, and what this herald might mean for the region, is beyond the scope of this adventure.

XP Award: When the PCs recover *The Juggler*, award them 60 XP.

The Trumpet

When the PCs peer through the Arch of Shields, they do so from what appears

to be the top of a rubble-strewn hillside. A scree-covered slope angles steeply downward, with a ruined stone structure protruding from the rubble nearly 200 feet away, while beyond stretches a barren badland of jagged hills and twisted fissures. Now and then, strange monsters creep and flop and lurch across this landscape, scuttling from one fissure to the next. A character who studies this stark scenery can attempt a DC 25 Occultism check to identify the strange creatures as being a wide range of aberrations native to the Darklands, while a critical success on the check confirms that the region is Open Bridge—a land in southern Vudra that rose from the ocean at the dawn of the Age of Lost Omens, only to

Sedisserax



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become overrun by monsters. (Characters who are from or familiar with Vudra increase the result of their Occultism check by one degree of success.)

OPEN BRIDGE

The southernmost reaches of Vudra were once an archipelago of several bountiful islands, but the world-shaking changes that struck Golarion at the onset of the Age of Lost Omens did not pass this region by, resulting in the formation of a land bridge between the isles. It almost seemed as if the waters of the Obari Ocean itself were retreating when this bridge formed, yet surely the land must have risen as well. That all of this took place without significant impact on other shores (as one might expect such a tectonic upheaval to inflict) only deepened the mystery.

This newly formed peninsula became known as Open Bridge, and the people of southern Vudra expected a boom in trade and resources as a result of the ease in travel between what were once islands. Anticipation turned to horror when fissures on the peninsula spewed forth countless aberrations that swarmed out and overran many towns and trading posts, and then threatened to spill into greater Vudra. By working together, resolute soldiers and architects constructed massive walls and fortresses to keep the aberrations at bay. Providing vigilant soldiers for this wall is the duty of the local mahajanapadas, and it is one they perform with grim honor.

Over the century since Open Bridge became overrun with monsters, this fortification line has shifted many times. More often, the defenders have had to fall back, ceding territory to the aberrant hordes. Sometimes, however, the defenders can push forward to claim a ruined keep or establish a new defensive line atop a canyon edge or deep river.

A valiant officer named **Arraseesh** (LG nonbinary human captain 6) oversaw just such an attempt to claim a hill overlooking a rocky slope of scree. Not only did

this hill contain a natural rise serving as a battlement, but the unstable rocks could be tumbled down upon attacking aberrations with ease. Arraseesh sought permission to claim the hill from their superiors. They received a message that the mission was approved, but they failed to receive the follow-up message retracting the approval in light of new information about aberration horde movements. Arraseesh's surviving company of soldiers are now pinned down at the top of the hill. An attempt to retreat to an old ruin partway down the hill backfired horrifically, and their squad was attacked and devoured by monsters. Arraseesh alone survived that excursion, and has been trapped within the ruin ever since.

The PCs arrive from the Harrow Court at the top of the hill, amid the confused and desperate soldiers holding the line.

E1. HILLTOP BATTLEMENT

A ridge of jagged stone serves as a natural battlement at the edge of this hilltop. The ground on the other side is steeply slanted and strewn with scree. Armored soldiers look over the battlement with evident trepidation, while down below, roiling hordes of fleshly aberrations, from crawling globs the size of a human fist to bulbous, fleshy giants towering dozens of feet tall, rush back and forth between boulders and rents in the earth, as if unable to bear the light of the sun for too long.

When the PCs step through the portal, they arrive near the edge of the hilltop, immediately noting the muggy heat of the area and the low rumble of monstrous growls, slithering, and howling that rises up from the hillside below. The two dozen human soldiers stationed atop the hill behind the PCs are startled by the sudden arrival, but are quick to assume the PCs are reinforcements in the form of an adventuring party—the use of such bands of

mercenaries to aid in dealing with the monsters of Open Bridge is relatively common.

The PCs are approached by the ranking officer, a harried sergeant named **Japulipel** (LG female human soldier 5), who rushes over to the PCs to apologize for failure to follow the orders to retreat. Japulipel (along with all of the soldiers here) speaks Vudrani but not Taldane, which might pose a language barrier. Japulipel does speak Aklo and Undercommon—languages spoken by her enemies—but if the PCs can't establish communication, she groans in frustration and gestures frantically down the hill toward the ruined building at area **E2**, hoping the PCs get the idea and head downslope to provide aid.

If the PCs can communicate, Japulipel explains the mix-up in the orders and how her commanding officer, Arraseesh, went with a small group to attempt to take the ruined fortification on the hillside. She describes how a swarm of bhanyadas attacked the soldiers and tore most of the soldiers apart before they fell back, and since then she's seen enough activity down at the ruin to know that at least one person still lives. She doesn't change her stance if the PCs explain to her that they weren't sent as reinforcements, replying "Whatever your reasons for arriving here, you were sent at the right time!" She notes that the activity of the bhanyadas (creatures she can quickly explain basic details of to the PCs as if they'd critically succeeded at a Lore check to Recall Knowledge about them) indicates the swarming monsters are preparing for another assault, and time is obviously of the essence.

If the PCs ask her about *The Trumpet*, her eyes widen. She explains that Arraseesh found the card in their belongings some time ago, and decided to keep the curious object as it aided in their ability to react to danger. It also granted Arraseesh the ability to use a blast of sound once a day to damage foes—an ability they recently used against a bhanyada swarm (she points out the gory swath on the hillside near the ruins that remains as evidence). She's not sure of much more about the card, but the fact that the PCs asked about it makes her certain that they're destined specifically to rescue her commander.

E2. DOWNHILL PASSAGE

LOW 12

The slope isn't as safe as it looks. Characters on foot can either make the entire journey by scrambling and sliding down the loose scree and rubble on the hillside, or if they can reach one of the fissures along the hillside, can clamber along those jagged surfaces instead. A character on the hillside treats it as greater difficult terrain, and must succeed at a DC 16 flat check at the end of a round to avoid taking

2d6 bludgeoning damage from trips and falls and shifting rubble along the way. A character in one of the narrow rifts can instead Climb along the route with a successful DC 25 Athletics check. Doing so avoids the danger of taking damage from a flat check, but a critical failure on the Athletics check indicates a fall deeper into the fissure (roll 1d6 and multiply the result by 10 to determine the depth in feet of the fissure at that particular location).

Characters who use other methods to reach areas **E2**, such as flight or teleportation, can bypass the peril of traversing the slope, but the swarms that infest the hillside (see Creatures below) notice any newcomers to arrive at area **E2** and surge downhill to join any battle there 1d4+2 rounds after combat begins at the ruins.

Creatures: Two swarms of smelly, fleshy masses of bhanyadas burst up from below to attack the PCs midway down the slope, burrowing up from the rubble to roll initiative with Stealth. A swarm fights until it's destroyed.

BHANYADA SWARMS (2)

CREATURE 11

Page 85

Initiative Stealth +22

E3. HILLSIDE RUIN

MODERATE 12

A tumble of stones surrounds a circular foundation of what must have once been a taller tower. The ruins are filled with tumbled stones, many marked with weathered runes.

Arraseesh has been relying upon the tenuous security afforded by these ruins to hide from the bhanyadas that infest the surrounding terrain, but they know it's only a matter of time before the aberrations overwhelm their defensive position. After repelling the latest attack with a power afforded by *The Trumpet*, Arraseesh spent much of their time stacking stones over the bodies of their fallen soldiers, reasoning that the best use of the short time they might have left is to honor the sacrifice of the dead.

When the PCs arrive, Arraseesh draws their longsword but quickly realizes that the PCs aren't their aberrant enemies. Arraseesh speaks Taldane in addition to Vudrani and can thus communicate with the PCs more easily than Japulipel could. Arraseesh asks for aid in evacuating this site. They have already used *The Trumpet*'s once-per-day activation. If asked where they found the card, Arraseesh says they found the card in their possession recently (at about the same time the PCs found their cards)—while they've used the card several times to their advantage, they've also

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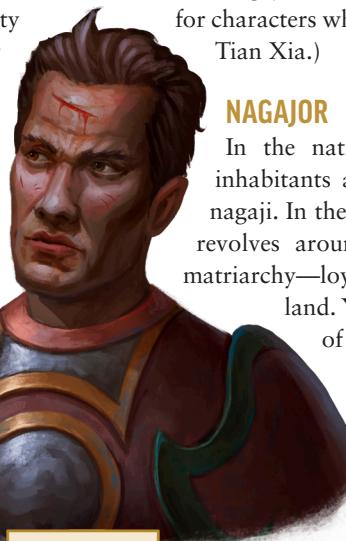
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Arraseesh

ARRASEESH CREATURE 6

UNIQUE **LG** **MEDIUM** **HUMAN** **HUMANOID**

Nonbinary human captain of the guard
(*Gamemastery Guide* 234)

Initiative Perception +15

HP 95 (currently 15)

BHANYADA BEHEMOTH

Page 85

Initiative Perception +23

CREATURE 12

BHANYADA SCAVENGERS (4)

Page 84

Initiative Perception +17

CREATURE 8

Treasure: Arraseesh discovered a *marble elephant wondrous figurine* and a metal vial containing two doses of *greater healing potion* and a single dose of a *panacea* in the ruins. The vial containing the potions looks like intertwined serpents made of platinum with emerald eyes; the vial itself is worth 600 gp. Arraseesh intended to keep these treasures, but instead offers them and *The Trumpet* to the PCs as thanks for their timely rescue.

XP Award: Award the PCs 60 XP when they receive *The Trumpet* from Arraseesh. If Arraseesh survives and is reunited with their solders at the hilltop, award the PCs an additional 30 XP.

The Snakebite

When the PCs peer through the Arch of Tomes, they gaze into a 70-foot-wide jungle clearing in a dense, tropical jungle. A character who studies the plant life

visible can attempt a DC 30 Nature check to identify the species as being common to the southern reaches of the Tian Xia, and that the region is likely in the nation of Nagajor in Tian Xia. (Reduce this DC to 15 for characters who are from or are familiar with Tian Xia.)

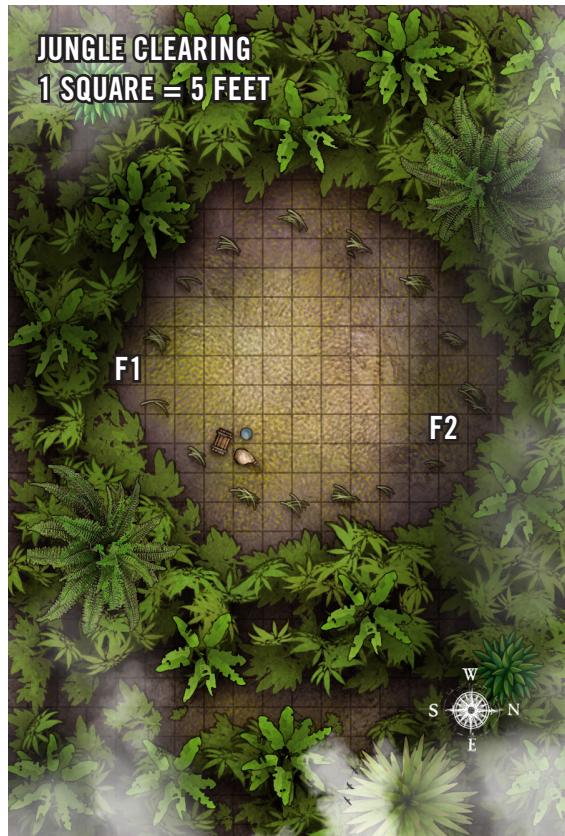
NAGAJOR

In the nation of Nagajor, the primary inhabitants are reptilian humanoids called nagaji. In the nation's urban centers, society revolves around servitude to the ophidian matriarchy—loyalty to the nagas who rule the land. Yet beyond the cities and towns of the nation, vast reaches of wilderness sprawl where other organizations hold sway.

One such group is the Scaleseed Order—a group who works to protect nature from undead and other unnatural creatures. One isolated

group of Scaleseeds, caught on the side of a volcanic range covered in dense jungles, learned that a vampiric threat named Kannijo has been feeding on the essence of those who lived in the region. The Scaleseeds quickly learned they lacked the skill to face Kannijo, and when their attempt to destroy the vampire succeeded only in drawing his attention, they began to despair. With their resources already depleted, the Scaleseeds regrouped in a jungle clearing where they decided upon a desperate gamble. Hoping that Kannijo had the same revulsion of rice that many of his vampiric ilk possess, the Scaleseeds have raised a ring of rice plants around their clearing, hoping to instill protective enchantments into it before Kannijo arrives to destroy them.

Kannijo is not a vampiric nagaji, as the Scaleseeds expected, but an undead spirit naga—a true abomination to their nation's fundamental traditions. Kannijo has been a jiang-shi vampire for longer than any of his neighbors on the mountain realize, feeding slowly on hermits and travelers no one would miss over the past several years. Kannijo is only a single victim away from consuming qi from a thousand victims, and as such is nearly ready to ascend to a more powerful type of vampire. When *The Snakebite* came into his possession, Kannijo took it as a sign to finally complete his ascension, even if it meant abandoning the subtlety that had kept him safe so far. He has thus begun the killing spree that has terrified the dwellers in the mountainous jungle (and, thus, the Scaleseeds).



MEETING THE SCALESEEDS

When the PCs step through the portal from the Harrow Court, they emerge into the southern side of a clearing within a sweltering jungle on the side of a vast mountain range (at area **F1**). On the opposite side of the clearing (near area **F2**), a group of five figures work diligently at siphoning magic into a handful of seeds to grow the last of a ring of rice plants that surrounds the clearing.

These five figures are the last of this band of Scaleseeds who remain. As night draws near (time this encounter so that sunset isn't far off), the Scaleseeds fear that their defenses won't last—if they can just make it through the night, they can retreat to safety and report to their superiors that Kannijo is a greater and more powerful threat than any of them feared. The fact that Kannijo is an undead naga shames and horrifies the nagaji, but they're also astounded by the magical power the vampire controls—including the strange card affixed to her head in place of the warped fulu that most jiang-shi possess.

As they complete the last of their rites to grow a rice plant in the last spot surrounding the clearing (using a variant form of the *plant growth* ritual altered to focus on a smaller scale than normal), the five Scaleseeds are unlikely to notice the PCs' arrival, but once the PCs make themselves known, the nagaji cry out in shock and assume defensive positions. As with many

other people the PCs have encountered, these nagaji do not speak Taldane, but if communication can be established, the Scaleseeds relax quite a bit. If the PCs can't establish communication, the nagaji do their best to communicate to the PCs (perhaps even by drawing pictures in the soil) that, come nightfall, a vampiric undead monster will be attacking, and that the PCs should prepare.

If the PCs can establish communication with the nagaji, the Scaleseeds visibly relax but remain vigilant and worried. They can explain what they've been doing, and that they hope to hold out for the night here in a ring of rice plants they hope will keep their foe at bay, and invite the PCs to stay with them.

"You should stay with us for protection, for once the sun sets, Kannijo hunts. We have come here to face Kannijo, to learn about him, yes, but hopefully to defeat him. Few live in this place, but we heard they had trouble, so we came to help. But what feeds nightly upon them is more than we were prepared for. Kannijo is beyond an atrocity. We had feared he was one of us, but spurned by death to feast upon the breath of the living, but we had no idea he was once one our glorious leaders—a naga. We must report to our leaders of this development, but such a journey can't be made before nightfall. Please, help us to survive the night, and your place in the world beyond would surely grow the grander for your aid!"

A character who succeeds at a DC 25 Religion or Vampire Lore check to Recall Knowledge (or any character who has at least master proficiency in Religion) knows that rice is often viewed with revulsion by vampires, but that the minions they often employ do not share these weaknesses. If the PCs point this out, the nagaji forlornly note that Kannijo commands the inner violence of plants themselves, and they worry that his carnivorous plant minions may well be just the tool the vampire needs to bypass their defenses.

The Scaleseeds push back against any offers the PCs have to whisk them away to safety, noting that if they can learn more about Kannijo's power and weaknesses, they'll be able to bring greater forces against the vampire in the future. Yet it should be obvious to the PCs that the Scaleseeds are tempted by an offer for a quick escape. Before talk of escape goes too far, though, one of the Scaleseeds should mention to the PC that beyond being a jiang-shi naga, Kannijo's warped fulu is of a type they have never before encountered. They'll describe this "fulu" as being a stiff square of paper depicting a humanoid figure armed with green poison. If any of the Scaleseeds notes any Harrow cards the PCs carry, or if the PCs ask about

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The Snakebite itself, the nagaji offer this information about the strange “fulu” in response. Make sure the PCs know that Kannijo possesses *The Snakebite* before they decide to simply abandon the area!

The Scaleseeds share two important pieces of information beyond the fact that the vampire is repulsed by rice. First, they tell the PCs that if they keep their mouth and nose covered and hold their breath, Kannijo will have difficulty spotting them unless he’s right next to them. Second, and perhaps more importantly, they explain that if he is destroyed, he won’t stay down—unless a significant amount (1 Bulk) of glutinous rice is scattered over his body, he’ll rise again within a minute of his destruction. The Scaleseeds have 4 Bulk of rice handy, fortunately, and any PC willing to carry 1 Bulk of the rice to be ready to finish Kannijo off is more than welcome to it.

With only a few hours before sundown, the Scaleseeds are eager to get back to the final act of performing their adjusted *plant growth* ritual, and invite the PCs to aid them. Even if the PCs don’t know *plant growth*, if they agree to aid, they can potentially make the ward function even better by undertaking the Aid Rice Ritual activity. Doing so builds up Rice Ritual Points that determine the strength of the ritual—the PCs begin with 1 Rice Ritual Point from the Scaleseeds’ effort, and can increase (or potentially decrease) this total by undertaking the following activity. Regardless of how many PCs take part, the rice ritual cannot have more than 7 Rice Ritual Points.

AID RICE RITUAL

CONCENTRATE **EXPLORATION**

A character spends the last few hours before sundown aiding the Scaleseeds in preparing the ring of rice plants by attempting a DC 23 Farming Lore or Survival check, a DC 28 Nature check, or a DC 30 Religion check.

Critical Success The PCs gain 2 Rice Ritual Points.

Success The PCs gain 1 Rice Ritual Point.

Critical Failure The PCs lose 1 Rice Ritual Point.

SCALESEED NAGAJI (5)

RARE **N** **MEDIUM** **HUMANOID** **NAGAJI**

Nagaji naturalists (*Pathfinder Bestiary 3* 182)

Perception +15; low-light vision

Languages Draconic, Sylvan, Tien

Skills Nature +17, Religion +15, Survival +15

Str +1, **Dex** +2, **Con** +3, **Int** +1, **Wis** +4, **Cha** +2

Items leather armor, +1 sickle

AC 23; **Fort** +14, **Ref** +13, **Will** +17

HP 115; **Resistances** poison 5

Speed 25 feet

CREATURE 7



Scaleseed Nagaji

VAMPIRE SIEGE

SEVERE 12

Creatures: Kannijo isn't the only danger about to arrive, for as the Scaleseeds may have warned the PCs, the jiang-shi enjoys the servitude of dangerous plants. The undead spirit naga already knows where the Scaleseeds have made their desperate defense, for the presence of the rice plants within his domain create an impossible-to-miss mental beacon—a beacon he can home in on when teleporting. He arrives via that spell in the region within a few minutes of sundown, along with four giant flytraps that serve him without question. The sudden stillness of the early evening animal sounds in the region is the only warning the PCs get before Kannijo begins his siege.

Rice Ritual Effects

Fortunately for the PCs, the rice ritual does afford them protection from Kannijo—but unfortunately, the rice gives them no protection from the four giant flytraps that the vampire brought with him when he teleported into the area. The exact effect on Kannijo depends on how many Rice Ritual Points the PCs currently have.

4+ Rice Ritual Points: Kannijo is slowed 2 when he first enters the clearing. As long as Kannijo is within the clearing, he takes the effects of the weak adjustments detailed on page 6 of the *Pathfinder Bestiary*. He also feels revulsion from living rice plants, and at the start of his first turn, he must attempt a Will save against his bitter epiphany vulnerability (*Pathfinder Book of the Dead* 157).

1 to 3 Rice Ritual Points: Kannijo is slowed 1 when he first enters the clearing. A character can Interact with a living rice plant to brandish the plant and trigger his revulsion, but Kannijo can approach such a plant without penalty if it is not being brandished.

0 Rice Ritual Points: Kannijo suffers no penalties from the rice ritual.

First Wave

The assault on the clearing begins as Kannijo sends three giant flytraps into the clearing. The plants use Stealth for initiative, then enter the clearing at the three points marked **F3** on the map. A giant flytrap can destroy an adjacent rice plant by taking a single Interact action. Every two rice plants destroyed lowers the rice ritual's effectiveness by 1 Rice Ritual Point (thus, even if the PCs have achieved the maximum of 7 Rice Ritual Points, if all 14 plants are destroyed, the ritual effect ends). Since a giant flytrap fills a 15-foot space, on this first round each plant takes 1 action to move into a position where it is adjacent to two rice plants, then takes 2 Interact actions to destroy those

two plants. After this, a giant flytrap moves to the next closest plant and destroys it, then moves to the next one so that it's ready on the round following to destroy that plant.

Left unopposed, the giant flytraps can destroy the rice plants swiftly, but by attacking a plant, the PCs can distract them. If a flytrap takes damage from a creature within 15 feet, it automatically uses one of its actions that round to attempt a leaf Strike against that creature. If a flytrap is reduced to fewer than 80 Hit Points, it focuses entirely on PCs and no longer attempts to destroy rice plants.

A character who is adjacent to a rice plant can use a reaction to defend the plant when a giant flytrap takes an action to destroy it—in this case, the giant flytrap makes a leaf Strike against that character instead of destroying the rice plant.

The giant flytraps fight until slain.

GIANT FLYTRAPS (3)

CREATURE 10

Pathfinder Bestiary 160

Initiative Stealth +24

Second Wave

Kannijo prefers to wait until the rice ritual is completely ruined before moving in to attack, but if the PCs manage to defeat all three of his giant flytraps, the vampire grows frustrated and enters the clearing to attack, using *dimension door* to appear in the middle of the clearing. The horrific vampire appears as a pale spirit naga with milky white eyes and shreds of unshed skin hanging from his coils. When Kannijo moves, it is not with a serpent's sinuous grace, but with a series of awkward thrashing heaves and flops. Affixed to his brow is *The Snakebite*.

As he appears, Kannijo hisses out the following threat to the PCs.

"Nine hundred and ninety-nine breaths I have stolen. I have received this sign that my ascension is at hand. Who among you shall feed me your breath, this precious final gasp I require?"

Creatures: Kannijo's primary goal in this combat is to steal the breath of any living target by using Drain Qi. If he manages to kill a creature with Drain Qi, he immediately ascends in power to that of a jiang-shi minister (*Book of the Dead* 158). He'll focus this attempt on one of the Scaleseeds, knowing these nagaji are weaker than the player characters, but if the PCs intervene he's more than willing to shift his focus to one of them. Kannijo works to capture at least one of the characters (be it PC or Scaleseed) alive, but he

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has no issue about slaying the rest. Any surviving giant flytraps continue to attack PCs, of course.

Kannijo fights until destroyed, at which point any surviving Scaleseed warns the PCs that the vampire will rise again very soon unless his body is sprinkled with at least 1 Bulk of glutinous rice. If he does rise again, Kannijo flees the mountain—whether he'll track down the PCs later in the adventure to seek revenge is left to you to determine, but in this event, *The Snakebite* falls from his brow before he flees.

KANNIJO

CREATURE 13

UNIQUE NE MEDIUM UNDEAD VAMPIRE

Male spirit naga jiangi-shi vampire (*Pathfinder Bestiary 2* 179, *Pathfinder Book of the Dead* 156)

Perception +23; **breathsense** (precise) 60 feet, darkvision

Languages Aklo, Common, Necril, Tien

Skills Acrobatics +23, Athletics +23, Deception +25, Intimidation +25, Nature +23, Occultism +25, Stealth +25

Str +4, **Dex** +6, **Con** +3, **Int** +4, **Wis** +4, **Cha** +6

Breathsense 60 feet (precise). As jiang-shi.

Items *The Snakebite*

AC 34; **Fort** +20, **Ref** +25, **Will** +23

HP 180, fast healing 10, negative healing, one more breath;

Immunities death effects, disease, paralyzed, poison, prone, sleep; **Resistances** physical 10 (except darkwood)

Jiang-Shi Vulnerabilities As jiang-shi.

One More Breath (divine, necromancy, negative) As jiang-shi.

Harrowed Fulu Unlike the typical jiang-shi, Kannijo's

warped fulu has been replaced by a card from the *Deck of Destiny*—a replacement that has largely gone unnoticed by the vampire. Kannijo is immune to spells cast from a magic item without expending a spell slot, such as from a scroll or wand, and also gains the passive abilities granted from *The Snakebite* (but not its activation ability). A creature can Steal *The Snakebite* to remove it (DC 33). This immediately ends Kannijo's immunity to these effects, negates the card's passive effects, and removes Kannijo's fast healing. Kannijo can no longer use *The Snakebite* as its fulu, but can create a replacement warped fulu by spending 1 uninterrupted hour inscribing a strip of paper (or similar) with a writing instrument.

Speed 15 feet, swim 15 feet; rigor mortis

Melee ♦ fangs +26 (agile, finesse), **Damage**

3d10+10 piercing plus Grab and spirit naga venom

Occult Spontaneous Spells DC 33, attack

+25; **7th** (3 slots) crushing despair, paralyze, phantom pain; **6th** (4 slots) dispel magic, phantasmal calamity, teleport, spirit

blast; **5th** (4 slots) black tentacles, dimension door, subconscious suggestion, synesthesia; **4th** (4 slots) clairvoyance, confusion, fly, modify memory; **3rd** (4 slots) clairaudience, dream message, mind reading, vampiric touch; **2nd** (4 slots) blur, humanoid form, mirror image, telekinetic maneuver; **1st** (4 slots) charm, command, grim tendrils, unseen servant; **Cantrips** (**7th**) daze, detect magic, mage hand, read aura, sigil

Rituals DC 33; *inveigle*

Drain Qi ♦ (divine, necromancy) **Requirements** A grabbed, paralyzed, restrained, unconscious, or willing creature is within Kannijo's reach; **Effect** As jiang-shi.

Manipulate the Green Kannijo can use *inveigle* against plant creatures normally immune to mental effects, and can communicate with inveigled plant creatures as if under the effects of *speak with plants*.

Rigor Mortis As jiang-shi.

Spirit Naga Venom (poison) **Saving Throw** DC 33 (34 against flat-footed targets); **Maximum Duration** 6 rounds; **Stage 1** 2d6 poison damage and stupefied 1 (1 round); **Stage 2**

3d6 poison damage and stupefied 2 (1 round)





Treasure: The Scaleseeds are grateful for the aid the PCs provided. If Kannijo was destroyed, the Scaleseeds thank them profusely and reward them with one of their greatest treasures—a *runestone* etched with a *fortification* armor rune. They also offer to teach the PCs either of the rituals they know before bidding their farewells and making their way back home to report the good news to their leaders.

XP Award: When the PCs recover *The Snakebite*, award them 60 XP. Award them an additional 30 XP if at least half of the Scaleseeds survive the night.

The Silent Hag

When the PCs peer through the Arch of Stars, they look out across a landscape of grassy, rolling hills, dotted here and there with coves of trees. An ancient road, its paving stones nearly overgrown with grass, winds off into the distance from the base of the portal's view. A character who studies terrain can attempt a DC 35 Hills Lore check to identify the region as likely being part of the land of Iobaria. (Reduce this DC to 25 for characters who are from or are familiar with Iobaria.)

IOBARIA

Places with strange connections to the Harrow exist all over the world, and one of these is an old carving depicting the Silent Hag deep in the wilds of Iobaria. *The Silent Hag* from the *Deck of Destiny* was drawn to this ancient monument and now rests within it. The Arch of Stars doesn't place the PCs as near to *The Silent Hag* as it does to other *Deck of Destiny* cards; a part of the Silent Hag's traditions include treacherous

secrets that must be discovered through insight, often involving strife.

The PCs step out of the portal into an area of hills covered with scrub and short grasses poking up between patches of earth laced with the remnants of past snowstorms. The PCs are in Iobaria, a rugged and untamed land east of the Inner Sea region. They are close to the eastern border of Brevo, the nation that claims the plains to the west of the hills. The ancient road that leads east, away from Brevo, is a remnant of the cyclops empire that once held sway over these lands. If the PCs look to the west, they'll see that they've appeared at the end of the road: no trace of it continuing further west remains apparent today.

G1. STONE TEETH PLAINS

TRIVIAL 12

This marks the point at which the PCs first appear in Iobaria after stepping through the Arch of Stars. Whether the PCs begin to travel in any direction or remain in the same area, they find themselves with company within about ten minutes. Plumes of dust indicate the approach of horses; a character who succeeds on a DC 25 Perception check notes that the six creatures approaching are centaurs (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 60), not horses—although this becomes obvious once the centaurs reach the PCs.

Creatures: Unlike the centaurs who dwell closer to Brevo (who have an unfortunately violent history with humanity), these centaurs are more curious than hostile upon encountering the PCs. They approach with friendly caution, calling out to the PCs first in Sylvan, and then in Elven (the only two languages

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these centaurs speak). If the PCs attack, the centaurs break off contact and flee. If communication can't be established, the centaurs speak quietly among themselves before retreating; they continue to observe the PCs from afar for a while but eventually lose interest. Without speaking to the centaurs, the PCs are on their own here—the road does point them in the right direction though!

The centaurs' leader, **Rohrry Gray-Eyes** (N female elite centaur), is stocky and short, with bright orange hair in a braided coil on the top of her head. She wears a breastplate covered with a repeating pattern of interwoven vines. Rohrry does her best to keep the encounter civil while she determines who is in charge of the party, addressing the perceived party leader with both firmness and respect when she tells them they are in the home of the Stone Teeth. She notes that the Stone Teeth have long protected and cared for these lands before asking what business the PCs have in their territory.

Rohrry has a starting attitude of indifferent and is quite curious to find out what the PCs have to say. Her Will DC is normally 21, but intruders make her uneasy, so the PCs' efforts at Diplomacy (or other interaction skills) use a Will DC of 26 instead. If the PCs insist that their stay is short or that they can sustain themselves during their stay, their Diplomacy checks to sway Rohrry's attitude gain a +1 circumstance bonus. If Rohrry's attitude becomes friendly, she answers the PCs' questions to the best of her ability. Possible questions and Rohrry's answers are as follows.

Do you have a harrow card? "I have no idea what that is."

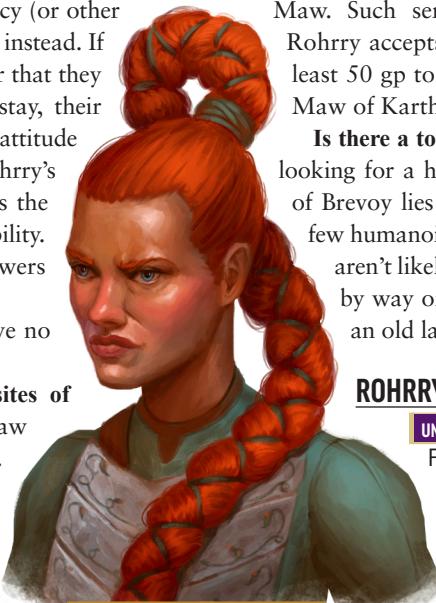
Are there any magical areas or sites of interest around here? "There's the Maw of Karth, further east along the road. The Maw is a stone gate carved to look like a cyclops face. The road passes through its mouth on its route further east toward Finadar Forest. I'm told that the road ends at a place watched over by a great stone hag, but that's much further east than I've ever cared to go. The Maw draws many folk, including giants and trolls, so you'd best be careful if you travel there."

How far away is the Maw of Karth? Rohrry gives the PCs an accurate distance and direction, noting that the surest way to reach the Maw is to follow the ancient road.

Will you guide us there? Rohrry pauses and thinks, sizing up the PCs. "We have duties that don't lie that direction, but we can lead you to within sight of the

WHERE TO GO?

Unlike the other encounter locations in this part, the Arch of Stars does not place the PCs conveniently close to *The Silent Hag*. If the PCs don't follow the road toward area **G3** or don't speak to the centaurs at area **G1** and instead head off in other directions, feel free to have them encounter dangerous local monsters now and then (such as packs of chimeras or bulettes, goliath spiders, mammoths, or even a great cyclops), but when they sleep for the night, each PC has a compelling dream of following an ancient road toward the rising sun—a clue that their goal lies at the end of the old pathway. If they've wandered far astray, the easiest way to return to the road, is to return to the Harrow Court and step through the Arch of Stars again to return to area **G1**. You can even have the PCs automatically wake up back in the Harrow Court after this dream to ensure that they get the point.



Rohrry Gray-Eyes

ROHRRY GRAY-EYES CREATURE 4

UNIQUE N LARGE BEAST

Female elite centaur (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 6, 60)

Initiative Perception +11

CENTAURS (5) CREATURE 3

Pathfinder Bestiary 60

Initiative Perception +9

XP Award: Grant the PCs 30 XP if they establish communication with the centaurs.

G2. MAW OF KARTH

MODERATE 12

A massive cyclops head looms over the ancient road, built up between two low hills. Rather than block the road's passage between the hills, the cyclops' yawning mouth forms a short tunnel through the carving, so that those who travel

the road are symbolically swallowed by the great one-eyed visage. Worn inscriptions encircle the carving's bulging eye.

Though difficult to discern due to their great age, the inscriptions, written in Cyclops, repeat the following: "I am the Maw of Karth. I speak to his strength and wisdom. I am a place sacred and terrible, of magic and of power. Here begins your journey."

Creatures: As the PCs approach, they automatically hear the sound of deep chanting coming from somewhere beyond the head. This chanting comes from two taiga giant sisters who are deep in meditation on the far side of the Maw of Karth. The giants, Erska and Yeska, have recently journeyed for days from the Ice Steppes on the northern edge of Iobaria on a pilgrimage to this ancient place, believing that it can help them attune to deep primal magic and assist them in recovering lost knowledge.

Although being interrupted at their meditations means they start with an unfriendly attitude toward the PCs, they don't relish getting into a fight, because entering combat disrupts their days-long meditative ritual and would require them to start it over again. The giants therefore engage in discussion with the PCs reluctantly if the PCs want to talk (provided the PCs speak Jotun or Sylvan, the only two languages the giants know), and give the distinct impression that they don't have a lot of patience for "wee folk." Erska observes to her sister that the fastest way to get rid of annoying strangers is simply to knock them unconscious, but Yeska tends to be a bit more reasonable in this regard.

The giants don't have *The Silent Hag*, nor do they know what the harrow is. However, if the characters describe what the card looks like, Yeska tells them that they passed a hill that had a similar image carved into it. The hill lies about a day's journey further along the road toward Finadar Forest.

If all else fails, the characters can also simply start walking northwest along the ancient roadway. They'll spot the hillside carving in area **F3** on their own.

In the event a fight breaks out despite the giants' reluctance, they first call upon their ancestral guardians and fight with their longspears. They flee the area around the Maw if both are reduced to fewer than 100 Hit Points.

TAIGA GIANTS (2)

Pathfinder Bestiary 2 126

Initiative Perception +23

Treasure: If the PCs fought the giants, the packs they've left behind contain food, some unusual relics

CREATURE 12

like carved bones, and a hide map showing interesting landmarks between the Ice Steppes and the Maw of Karth. One of these landmarks is a sketch of a hill that bears an appearance similar to that of the Silent Hag.

Remains of an older camp (from creatures much smaller than the giants) atop the northern hill that abuts the Maw contains some torn backpacks, spoiled food, and an intact *greater knapsack of halflingkind*. If the PCs don't specifically head up the hill to investigate, allow the characters a DC 35 Perception check to notice the old camp atop the hill as someone glances backward after leaving the area. The taiga giants consider this campsite unlucky and don't want anything to do with anything the PCs might find there.

XP Award: If the PCs get the information from the taiga giants without a fight, award them 80 XP as though they'd defeated the taiga giants in combat.

G3. CARVED HAG

While not nearly as obvious or massive as the Maw of Karth, the hillside into which the visage of the Silent Hag has been carved is easy to see once the party draws near.

A steep, bare hillside that at first seems to evince odd patterns of erosion reveals itself upon closer observation to have been carved to resemble a long, narrow face. Two small, shallow caves look out over the ancient road partway up the carved hillside, resembling nothing so much as empty eye sockets above a narrow spur of rock that evokes imagery of an almost beak-like nose. What appears to be a third cave sits near the ground, yet this stalactite- and stalagmite-adorned opening seems to have been blocked from within by an immense round boulder carved to resemble an eye.

The carving should be immediately recognizable to anyone familiar with the harrow as closely resembling a classic representation of *The Silent Hag*—others can recognize this connection with a successful DC 25 Occultism check. The site itself is quite ancient; while its builders are lost to the mysteries of time, their influence ensures that the hillside never becomes overgrown with foliage.

The face itself is 50 feet high. The two eye socket caves are empty, but an examination of the lower entrance confirms that it is indeed a cave that has been blocked from within by the round, carved boulder. A character can Interact with the 5-foot-diameter eye to rotate it a few feet within its mouth "socket," but the eye will only allow itself to be rotated enough so it appears to be looking in a slightly different direction before it quickly self-corrects to shift back to its neutral position, staring straight ahead.

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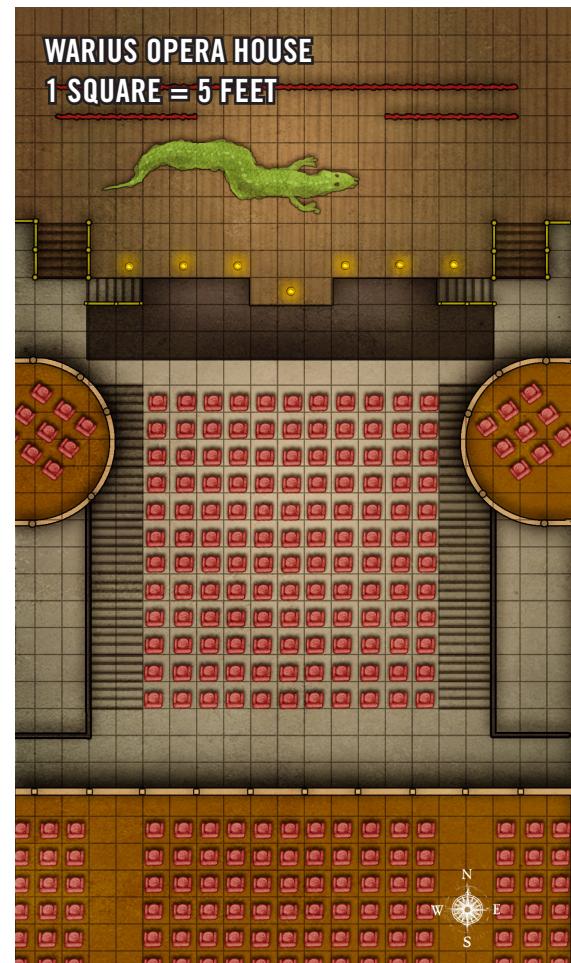
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Up close, the stalactites and stalagmites that decorate the lower cave are clearly carvings, not natural formations, meant to evoke the Silent Hag's sharp teeth. A player character who examines these teeth and makes a DC 30 Perception check notes faint traces of dried blood around the edges of some of the teeth where the stone presses to the eye just within.

If the PCs don't hit upon this themselves, a character who ruminates on the nature of the Silent Hag and succeeds at a DC 20 Harrow Lore check, a DC 25 Fortune-Telling Lore check, or a DC 30 Occultism check recalls that the Silent Hag is often invoked when forging blood pacts involving secrets. If a character anoints any of the "teeth" with fresh blood (requiring at least 1 point of slashing or piercing damage to the donor), the blood quickly seems to spread across the eye, giving it a glistening bloodshot appearance for 1 minute. During this time, any attempt to rotate the eye finds that the eye moves smoothly and freely. Rotating it upward, so that they eye's pupil slides beyond the upper lip of the cave, reveals a small hollow within the boulder—a hidden cache that once served the long-lost creators of the eye but has gone neglected for eons (see Treasure below).

A character can attempt to force the eye to rotate into this position without a blood offering, but doing so requires a successful DC 40 Athletics check. Alternatively, if the eye is destroyed (Hardness 20, HP 100) the hidden cache is revealed as well.

Treasure: In addition to *The Silent Hag*, the niche exposed by rotating the eye contains a stone coffer that holds 13 eye-shaped gemstones. Of these stones, a dozen are worth 50 gp each, while the thirteenth is an *eye of apprehension* talisman.

XP Award: Once the characters recover *The Silent Hag*, award them 60 XP.

The Theater

When the PCs peer through the Arch of Crowns, they see what appears to be a partially constructed balcony seating area with billowing red and black curtains, which obscure the view of the main theater beyond. A PC who studies the area, including the style of furnishings and the embroidery on the curtains, can attempt a DC 20 Performance check or a DC 25 Religion or Society check to confirm that the VIP box the portal opens into must be located within one of the many high-class opera houses in the nation of Cheliax.

WARIUS OPERA HOUSE

As soon as the PCs step through the portal, they'll hear the telltale murmuring of a large crowd just beyond the curtains. The portal deposits the PCs in

the western (and currently vacant) upper VIP box of the Warius Opera House in Cheliax's capital city of Egorian. Regardless of the time of day the PCs make this trip, they arrive in the middle of the venue's latest show—an opera called *Linnorm's Lost Legacy* that presents a revisionist history of how the first linnorm slain in the Lands of the Linnorm Kings was, in truth, slaughtered by an ancient ancestor of House Thrune (thus implying that the whole of this northern nation should belong to Cheliax).

While the VIP box the PCs have arrived in is vacant, the main floor of the opera house is packed—the only reason the VIP box the PCs step into is empty is because it's the site of a recent assassination, and has been closed for the time being out of respect to the minor nobleman who met his fate here only a few days prior. As soon as the PCs arrive, the tumultuous swell of an orchestra in full swing along with the sound of opera sung in Infernal becomes unmistakable. No one notices if the PCs open the curtains, for all eyes are on the group of magnificently clad adventurers onstage in a singing duel against an immense linnorm. The beast

MISSING CARDS

The Choosing assumes the PCs recover all six cards in this part of the adventure, but in some situations, they may miss a card. In such a case, the easiest solution is to assume that far-flung agents of the Prince of Wolves tracked down any cards the PCs missed during this part, and then allow them to recover those cards during Chapter 1 of the next adventure. Alternately, you could allow the PCs to use the Six Arches to return as often as needed to try to secure cards—a solution that affords you the opportunity to expand portions of this chapter into new encounters of your own design!

is crafted from a clever framework operated by several technicians, all obscured underneath the linnorm's deep green cloth exterior. Illusion spells further give the mechanical linnorm the appearance of life, but a DC 20 Perception check is enough for the PCs to note that it is but an elaborate special effect. The linnorm, as well as much of the stage scenery and the curtains that hang throughout the opera house, shimmers with a faint blue glow that gives the entire affair an appropriately chilly look reinforced by the fake snow that floats down from above and adorns the stage in periodic drifts.

A PC who makes a successful DC 20 Performance or Society check or appropriate Lore check recognizes the opera, recalling its notoriety outside of Cheliax for its blatant attempt to appropriate the heritage of the Linnorm Kingdoms. The "hero" facing the linnorm is a fictional character, Alangus Thrune, who is presented by the play as an actual historical figure from Cheliax who swept north to save the Ulfens from the notorious (also fictional) fire-breathing linnorm Bandraguzun. Regardless, the outrageous costuming of Alangus Thrune makes it difficult to look away.

At this point, have all the PCs attempt Perception checks. Whoever rolls highest notices something startling—Alangus Thrune's outfit incorporates among his unwieldy amount of "adventuring equipment" *The Theater* card, tucked into one of the many belt straps that adorn his leather armor.

The Firebrands' Debut: As long as the PCs remain in the VIP box and make no attempt to enter the theater itself or otherwise exit their balcony seating, the opera continues to play out, but as soon as the PCs are about to leave (or, at your discretion, as soon as feels dramatically appropriate), something monumental takes place. A masked, black-clad figure descends from the opera house's rigging, swinging

on ropes over the attendees to land upon the stage. She draws a flaming sword as she lands, then turns to face the crowd and cries out the following: "We, the Firebrands, proudly interrupt this program to bring you a dose of... liberation!" A moment later, with a swing of her sword, the Firebrand unleashes a blast of flame across the stage.

This whole thing is meant to be a distraction, for as the central Firebrand on stage does her thing, four more of the rebels quietly steal into the VIP box on the opposite side of the theater from the PCs in an attempt to abduct its important patron—a high-ranking officer in the Chelaxian navy, who the Firebrands hope will give them leverage over several atrocities currently playing out at the hands of the navy on the western coast of the nation.

But the fire quickly proves to be more effective than the Firebrands anticipated. Unknown to them, the method that the opera house's technicians used to give the decor the faint blue glow makes everything unusually flammable—not to mention all the material they used for the fake snow. What the Firebrands intended to be a showy blast of fire that would start a minor blaze onstage almost immediately explodes into a full-fledged inferno.

The crowd immediately panics, while the frightened actors onstage fall into a tangled heap of linnorm and limb. The Firebrands themselves, shocked by the sudden flames, abandon their attempt to abduct the naval officer and swiftly make their way down into the main hall to direct the crowds toward the exits to the south.

At this point, the PCs are free to act; have them and the Stage Fire all roll initiative to set things in motion. If a PC asks about the crowd below, it should be obvious that the fire is currently focused on the stage, and that the Firebrands' work to direct the panicked guests and orchestra members looks to be working well, even though the rebels are likely putting themselves in a position where they'll soon be arrested. On the stage, though, the fire is more intense, and Alangus Thrune's actor appears to be trapped by flames along with all of the technicians who were controlling the linnorm.

Flight and teleportation are swift routes to reach the stage, but barring these methods, a PC can grab one of the many ropes hanging from the opera's rigging to swing down to the stage from the VIP box.

SWING TO THE STAGE ➤➤➤

You find one of the hanging ropes from the opera house's rigging and swing onto the burning stage. Attempt a DC 30 Acrobatics check.

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Critical Success You swing the distance with style and land anywhere on stage that you choose.

Success You swing down to the stage, landing anywhere adjacent to the fire that you choose, but take 4d6 fire damage in the process (DC 30 basic Reflex save).

Failure You swing down to the stage, landing in the square of fire that's closest to the point you swung from. You take 6d6 fire damage (DC 30 basic Reflex save).

Critical Failure Your grip on the rope slips, and you fall into the orchestra pit, taking 4d6 bludgeoning damage and 6d6 fire damage (DC 30 basic Reflex save). A DC 20 Athletics check allows you to clamber up from the orchestra pit onto the stage.

While *The Theater*, being an artifact, is in no danger of burning in the fire, and callous PCs can certainly wait for the actor to succumb to the flames before plucking it from his remains, kinder PCs won't want to leave the actors to die, and should take steps to fight the blaze. When the fire begins, there are six technicians trapped within the linnorm costume, while the panicked actor facing the linnorm cowers 10 feet to the east of the linnorm's head. All of these NPCs remain frozen in fear until directed to move by a visible character who achieves a DC 25 success with a Diplomacy or Intimidation check made as a single linguistic action, or until they are physically guided by a PC.

The actor and technicians alike are effectively immobilized with fear. Each is equivalent to a troubadour (*Gamemastery Guide* 237) if statistics are needed, but all lack the ability to cast spells.

STAGE FIRE

HAZARD 12

UNCOMMON **COMPLEX** **ENVIRONMENTAL** **FIRE**

Stealth 0 (initiative modifier is +28)

Description Flames engulf the opera house's stage.

Disable Survival DC 27 to extinguish two adjacent squares of fire (with a critical success extinguishing four adjacent squares); any water spell (such as from *create water* or *hydraulic push*) cast at the fire extinguishes two squares automatically, or 2d4 adjacent squares if the caster of the spell achieves a DC 30 result with a spell attack roll; *quench* (*Advanced Player's Guide* 223) instantly extinguishes all fire within its 20-foot burst.

Erupt in Flame When this encounter begins, the fire erupts in a ring that encircles the entire stage, as shown by the dotted outline on the map. The stage fire then rolls initiative.

Routine On its turn, the stage fire expands inward and outward by 5 feet, filling all adjacent squares with fire. Creatures within these squares take 4d6 fire damage (DC 30 basic Reflex save), as do any creatures that enter a burning square. This fire damage can be inflicted on a creature only once per turn.

In addition, a creature that ends its turn in a burning square takes 8d6 fire damage (DC 30 basic Reflex save); on a failed save, that creature also takes 1d6 persistent fire damage.

Ramifications: Neighborhood firefighting support from the immediate area responds relatively quickly, but if the PCs don't work to put out the fire themselves, much of the opera house is consumed in the blaze before the fire is contained. The fate of the overzealous Firebrands, as well as what might develop if Chelaxian officials encounter and confront the PCs, is beyond the scope of this adventure—strongly consider having the PCs automatically return to the Harrow Court as soon as they claim *The Theater* if they seem eager to remain on-site and you don't have additional encounters prepared.

XP Award: The PCs earn 20 XP for each endangered NPC among the actor and six technicians they rescue from the fire. If the PCs fully extinguish the fire, they earn an additional 20 XP. If the characters recover *The Theater*, award them 60 XP.



Burning Linnorm



Dawn K.

Chapter 3:

Queen of the Storval Stairs

Arodeth was raised from childhood to believe that she and the secret society whose leadership she inherited from her father—the Harbingers of Fate—could bring about Aroden’s return by ensuring the fulfillment of the prophecies from the *Book of 1,000 Whispers*. Her life since becoming the leader of the Harbingers has been an unending series of stinging losses, as time and time again, those prophecies didn’t come to pass—despite her agents’ best efforts. The Harbingers of Fate (along with the Band of Blades, the mercenary company who they often used as cover for their operations) grew increasingly worried as 4714 approached, for this year was supposedly when the last of the prophecies described in the *Book of 1,000 Whispers* would take place.

When the year passed without even a single prophecy coming true, Arodeth grew desperate for success. Even though the book’s implied timeline for the prophecies had already expired, she attempted no less a grandiose solution than to force fate back “on track” by attempting to manipulate time itself. Arodeth failed at this endeavor, too, and would’ve been destroyed but for the mercy of a group of heroes who rescued her from the brink of oblivion. This mercy might have saved her, but it also showed that her life had been a waste.

Thoroughly defeated, Arodeth disbanded the Harbingers of Fate and fell into leadership of the Band of Blades, leading them into self-imposed exile far from her homeland. The role of mercenary leader

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CHAPTER 3 SYNOPSIS

The next batch of cards the Six Arches send the PCs after are located in Varisia. Here, Arodeth has headquartered the Band of Blades at the Storval Stairs and is extorting tolls from travelers. This puts her group in tension with the Shoanti people who usually protect the stairs and a gang of harpies who want to move in on the area. Just when the PCs manage to resolve these conflicts and meet with Arodeth, Lord Drustan launches his attack with a group of devil minions. If the PCs can overcome him, they gain the final cards that give them a third of the *Deck of Destiny*.

wasn't anything near the vaunted position as head of a secret society dedicated to "set right the flow of fate," but Arodeth had no other options. She has struggled to keep the Band of Blades operating. Her inheritance ran out, money grew tight, and she was forced to take on more dangerous but lucrative opportunities.

Her most recent attempt to secure a source of income came from an ill-advised scheme to use the Band of Blades to hold the Storval Stairs, a massive flight of stairs that connect the Storval Plateau to the Varisian lowlands, 500 feet below to the west. The Storval Stairs were carved millennia ago, in the days of ancient Thassilon, and the numerous towering statues, lofty rooms, and hidden chambers along the stairs' length still carry that lost empire's grandeur and menace. The Shoanti people have protected these stairs for generations, but the Band of Blades ran them off and started collecting tolls from travelers. As the Storval Stairs is one of the only routes connecting Varisia to the Storval Plateau easily navigated on foot, the mercenaries found they could charge exorbitant fees—and simply murder the travelers who wouldn't pay what they demanded. The Band of Blades are finally making money again; their spirits are high, and they'll fight to defend their racket on the Storval Stairs.

Nevertheless, discontent within the Band of Blades lingers. Many of Arodeth's lieutenants are frustrated with her, but she has dealt with challengers looking to seize her power before. Many of these upstarts met their end at her hands. One of the potential challengers to her authority is Drustan, and Arodeth was only too eager to approve his recent request to pursue a "personal mission," figuring that she could take advantage of his absence to further cement her influence over the Blades that remain stationed at the Storval Stairs.

Even now her command is being subtly threatened by a creature under the guise of a gaunt banker from Garund named Ndede. Ndede presented himself to Arodeth as a capable financier, willing to invest in the Band of Blades because of his faith in their skills. Arodeth took his money and allowed him to join; to her surprise, the banker proved to be both handy in a fight and well-liked by his compatriots. Yet, Ndede has a secret; he isn't human at all, but a creature called a popobawa who feeds on despair. Ndede has taken Arodeth as his pet project, working hard to spiral her despondency and self-doubt into misery while magically charming the rest of her company so that he's welcome and trusted. Ndede has also positioned himself as caretaker of the company's wealth; once he has driven Arodeth to the edge of despair, Ndede intends to kill her, destroy all the funds, and thus drown the rest of the company in hopelessness as well.

Several cards from the *Deck of Destiny* have fallen into the hands of the Band of Blades. Arodeth received *The Rakshasa*, Ndede *The Liar*, and a stout mercenary captain named Endlo gained *The Publican*. None of them are really sure what the cards mean, although Arodeth wonders whether another opportunity to twist fate has fallen into her lap. She's looking for ways to control her own destiny again, and the PCs might be that opportunity. A fourth card, *The Locksmith*, is kept by one of the Shoanti who were forced out of the Storval Stairs. The remaining two cards (*The Fiend* and *The Mountain Man*) are destined to arrive at the Storval Stairs when Drustan returns to confront the Band of Blades—and by extension, the PCs themselves.

The Storval Stairs

Once the PCs have gathered the six initial cards revealed to them by the Harrow Court's Grand Hall (or have attempted to obtain them only to have some slip through their grasp), four of the arches refocus to the next location the PCs are fated to seek out—the Storval Stairs. The timing of this change should coincide with the PCs reaching 13th level as well, but consider giving them some time to rest, recover, and explore the Harrow Court before presenting them with this tantalizing new lead.

When the time is right, the Arch of Hammers and the Arch of Shields remain filled with mist, while the mist in the other four Arches (Keys, Tomes, Stars, and Crown) clears to present identical views—rolling grasslands that feature a magnificent view of an immense flight of stairs sized for giants ascending to the top of a 500-foot-high cliff. The stairs are flanked to either side by massive statues of an imperious bald man in robes clutching a book and a polearm. With a successful DC 20 Society or appropriate Lore check, a PC can recognize the location as the infamous Storval Stairs.

The Storval Stairs were constructed ages ago by enslaved giants during the days of ancient Thassilon, many centuries before Earthfall. When Karzoug, runelord of greed, became the region's ruler, he commanded that towering statues in his likeness be built along the stairs and had several nearby hidden chambers expanded to preserve magical secrets and lore. Everything here was constructed for use by giants, as well as smaller humanoids, and is lofty and imposing in scope. Due to powerful enchantments, the Storval Stairs and their associated chambers have resisted the decay of ages.

Today, the Storval Stairs serve as a vital trade route between the Varisian lowlands and the arid Storval Plateau. While many Shoanti who dwell in the region distrust visitors, those of the Shriikirri-Quah, the Hawk Clan, have traditionally been exceptions and serve as emissaries to the rest of the world. For centuries, the Shriikirri-Quah also guarded and maintained the Storval Stairs. While the Shriikirri-Quah have lost control of the stairs several times over the eons, these lapses have never lasted very long—even when the Storval Stairs' would-be conquerors were quite powerful. The stone giant wizard Mokmurian briefly

took command of the stairs just over a decade ago; more recently the hill giant Formoch, the self-styled "King of the Storval Stairs," tried as well.

Each time, it was never long before a group of adventurers arrived to help the Shriikirri-Quah take back the legendary site, and so while the latest loss to a group of mercenaries still stings, the leader of the local Shriikirri-Quah has faith that a new band of heroes will arrive soon—faith that has only been bolstered by the sudden manifestation among her gear of a card from the harrow: *The Locksmith*. Knowing this card represents the key to a new destiny, Shaldar Falls-Far eagerly awaits the next group of adventurers to arrive, knowing they'll be the "key" to longer lasting control over the Storval Stairs.



Shaldar Falls-Far

SHOANTI WELCOME

After the PCs step through the portal, regardless of which of the four active Arches they choose, they appear in the middle of a ring of hide shelters, almost as if they just stepped out of the large campfire that burns at the center of the camp. The campsite itself is occupied by a small group of Shoanti scouts led by Shaldar Falls-Far—most of their number have moved to more distant locations after losing control of the Storval Stairs, with Shaldar and her handpicked cohort remaining behind to watch and wait. They have a tenuous stalemate with the Band of Blades—as long as they don't approach the stairs, the mercenaries suffer the sight of their camp a few hundred feet to the west.

In addition to Shaldar, there are nine Shoanti scouts stationed at this camp. Shaldar has, for several weeks, done her best to keep morale up among her scouts, promising them that, just as before, adventurers will come and they shall be the "key" to victory. The PCs' arrival couldn't have come at a better time, for as they step out of the portal into view, Shaldar was losing an argument with her fellow scouts and was preparing to agree that it was time to abandon the camp for good.

As such, the scouts greet the PCs' arrival with a strange mix of relief and frustration. While they're glad to see proof of their leader's claims that adventurers would soon arrive, the fact that they had to wait this long can't be ignored. As such, the scouts quickly recover from the shock of the PCs' arrival to subside into what seems like sullen frustration, while Shaldar greets the PCs with open arms.

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Shaldar's initial attitude is friendly, but as soon as she realizes the PCs possess other cards that match *The Locksmith*, she becomes helpful. Regardless, she invites the PCs to share a meal of stew and flatbread while they talk. She's eager to know why (and how) the PCs have come to the Storval Stairs, and as soon as Shaldar realizes they have ties to the harrow, she claps in delight and produces *The Locksmith* from a pouch. "I believe this is yours, then!" she says as she graciously hands the PCs the card. If the PCs ask how she came across the card, Shaldar admits she found among her belongings only a few days before she and her people were driven from the Storval Stairs by an evil group of mercenaries calling themselves the Band of Blades. She explains further how she believes the card serves as a sign of something greater and points to the fact that the PCs possessing more of these cards as all the justification she needs to give them *The Locksmith*.

Shaldar is eager to move on to the topic that really matters to her—dealing with the Band of Blades. She explains the value of the Storval Stairs and how the Shriikirri-Quah have traditionally guarded it from monsters (like giants and harpies) or brigands who would use it as a stronghold to extort travelers. The newest arrivals to seize control of the Storval Stairs, she explains, are a mercenary group called the Band of Blades. While most mercenaries wouldn't pose the Shoanti much of a problem, the Band of Blades is particularly powerful, as they work alongside giants and other creatures.

The Shoanti fled quickly when it became apparent that the Band of Blades outclassed them, but during that flight and in the weeks since spent spying from afar, they can tell the PCs that the Band of Blades consists of at least a dozen mercenaries and is allied with some powerful harpies and a stone giant. The mercenaries likely have other allies as well, she warns, lurking deeper in the underground chambers to the north or south of the stairs themselves.

Though Shaldar is frustrated that she and her scouts were so easily routed, she expresses gratitude for the PCs' arrival. She hopes the PCs can oust the bandits for the good of the Shoanti people and all those who travel the stairs in peace. She doesn't believe the mercenaries will listen to reason or depart peacefully, so a show of force—and certainly a show of force against their leader—might be the only way to get them to depart. Traditionally, Shoanti have avoided venturing far into the indoor, underground chambers of the Storval Stairs, less out of respect for Thassilon's legacy and more out of common sense—Shaldar warns the PCs that despite the stairs

being well traveled, some locations nearby likely hide dangerous hazards or guardians left over from Karzoug's time. She also informs the PCs that once they begin their assault on the Storval Stairs, she and her scouts intend to break camp and make their way back to the quah's heartlands in the plains to the southwest. Shaldar intends to report the latest development to her leaders, but she admits it will likely take several weeks before her people can send a more robust force back here. If the PCs can clear out the bandits by then, Shaldar is confident the Shriikirri-Quah will reward them well.

SHALDAR FALLS-FAR

CREATURE 6

UNIQUE NG MEDIUM HUMAN HUMANOID

Female human scout

Perception +13

Languages Common, Jotun, Shoanti

Skills Athletics +15, Nature +13, Stealth +13, Survival +11

Str +4, **Dex** +3, **Con** +3, **Int** +1, **Wis** +1, **Cha** +1

Items composite longbow (20 arrows), moderate healing potions (2), hide armor, +1 longsword

AC 23; **Fort** +15, **Ref** +11, **Will** +13

HP 112

Attack of Opportunity ↗

Speed 20 feet

Melee ♦ longsword +15 (magical, versatile P), **Damage** 1d8+8 slashing

Ranged ♦ composite longbow +14 (deadly d10, propulsive, range increment 100 feet, reload 0, volley 30 feet), **Damage** 1d8+6 piercing

Hunt Prey ♦ (concentrate) Shaldar Falls-Far designates a single creature she can see and hear, or one that she's Tracking, as her prey. She gains a +2 circumstance bonus to Perception checks to Seek the prey and to Survival checks to Track the prey. The first time she hits the designated prey in a round, she deals an additional 1d8 precision damage. She also ignores the penalty for making ranged attacks within her second range increment. These effects last until Shaldar Falls-Far uses Hunt Prey again.

Hunter's Aim ♦♦ (concentrate) Shaldar Falls-Far makes a ranged weapon Strike against her hunted prey. On this Strike, she gains a +2 circumstance bonus to the attack roll and ignores the prey's concealed condition.

SHOANTI SCOUTS (9)

CREATURE 3

Human trackers (*Gamemastery Guide* 219)

Initiative Perception +13

XP Award: If the PCs speak peacefully with the Shoanti, award them 30 XP. Grant them an additional 60 XP for gaining *The Locksmith*.

FEATHER TOKENS

All of the Band of Blades mercenaries carry a bird feather token. Beyond serving as a badge of membership, the mercenaries are expected to use these tokens to inform Arodeth of significant developments. While the tokens aren't that expensive to replace, over time, the mercenaries have grown hesitant to use them after one too many unjustified activations. As a result, a mercenary faced with the PCs won't immediately activate their token to send a warning to Arodeth, but if a combat lasts more than 1 round, one mercenary in the group does so. If the resulting sparrow makes its way to warn Arodeth (flying through narrow windows in ceilings if needed), she prepares for a confrontation.

STORVAL STAIRS FEATURES

While the Storval Stairs (areas **H1–H3**) are open to the air, the remaining areas are all indoors or underground, either built into the cliff itself or housed within side buildings. The exact approach the PCs take is left to them, as there are multiple entrances to these indoor areas, not all of which are accessible to each other. Many of these areas have potential entrances and exits in the form of high, narrow windows near the ceilings, in addition to the more traditional entrances via doors and passageways.

A character who scouts the Storval Stairs from the air might spot some of these narrow entrances—windows that allow light and airflow into the rooms below but aren't meant to serve as means of access. Areas **H9**, **H12**, **H13**, **H14**, and **H17** all feature narrow windows along rooftops protruding from the cliffside. A PC must succeed at a DC 30 Perception check to spot them from the outside. All of these windows are approximately halfway up the cliffside of the Storval Rise—an average distance of 250 feet above the ground below. A character who succeeds at a DC 25 Athletics check can scale the cliffside and the smooth walls of protruding structures, while entering through one of the one-foot-wide windows requires a Medium character to succeed at a DC 30 Acrobatics check to Squeeze through (or DC 20 for a Small character).

The entrances to areas **H9** and **H14** from area **H2** on the stairs themselves are obvious to anyone who observes the stairs from afar, as is the open colonnade providing access to area **H6**. The two towering statues of Karzoug that flank the lower stairs appear to be solid without any obvious openings, but an airborne character scouting the statues who succeeds at a DC

30 Perception check notes entrances at the nape of the neck that lead into areas **H4** and **H5**. A character at areas **H2** or **H3** or at a higher elevation can spot these obscured entrances from the ground by achieving a critical success at this Perception check.

Note that unless flying PCs take pains to be stealthy, any fly-over of the Storval Stairs is likely to attract the notice of those in areas **H1–H3** as well as the harpies who dwell in area **H5**. See those areas for the reactions the occupants might take in response to spotting adventurers flying around in the skies above the Storval Stairs.

Locations within the Storval Stairs are illuminated in a variety of ways—if no illumination is mentioned, assume the chamber is unlit. Ceiling heights are lofty unless noted otherwise, with most areas having a minimum of 20-foot-high ceilings and many having much higher ceilings. Doors are made of stone and, while quite oversized, are cunningly counterweighted so that they aren't difficult to open for Medium creatures.

The map of the indoor regions of the Storval Stairs appears on the inside back cover of this book, while an aerial view of the site appears on page 66.

H1. LOWER CHECKPOINT

MODERATE 13

The stairs descend a further 50 feet to the west beyond the border of the map down to the Varisian lowlands where Shoanti scouts led by Shaldar Falls-Far keep their campsite.

A row of boulders and a barricade of logs blocks the western end of this forty-foot-wide landing on the stairs. To either side, stone platforms look out over the landing below from a height of ten feet. Towering statues of the infamous runelord Karzoug loom just beyond these platforms, while the stairs themselves lead east, further upward to a larger landing.

The Band of Blades set up a blockade of boulders and timbers here to create a checkpoint for travelers seeking to use the stairs, taking tolls and then moving the wooden barricade between the boulders aside to allow passage. The toll for passage along the stairs is typically 50 gp per creature per one-way trip, up or down, but as detailed below, this charge can vary.

A character must succeed at a DC 20 Athletics check to climb up to the platforms to the north or south.

Creatures: The leader of this checkpoint team is a solid brute of a dwarf named Endlo Kiver. Endlo is a devout (if particularly cruel) follower of Gorum who likes to pick fights with anyone he thinks might be as strong as he is. He also has a habit of shouting rather than speaking most of the time, further enhancing

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an already abrasive personality. Endlo has made an unlikely friend in Jargikka, a stone giant who has traveled the Storval Stairs many times and, rather than pay tribute to the mercenaries that now control it, offered to join them. Jargikka is smart enough to compliment Endlo's physique frequently, insisting (however falsely) that he's at least as strong as other stone giants she has known. For her part, Jargikka doesn't mind assuaging Endlo's ego to ensure she gets a cut of the band's profits. If the PCs claim to simply be seeking passage through the stairs, Endlo sizes them up and decides they look like folks who can pay the "premium" price of 200 gp per person—a tactic he uses now and then on particularly wealthy-looking groups. The tolls are placed in a nearby chest, the contents of which are transferred every evening to the group's treasury in area **H15**. When a group pays the toll, Jargikka moves the central barrier aside to allow passage before sliding it back in place.

Endlo recently had a strange card appear amid his possessions: *The Publican*. He doesn't know anything about the harrow or what the card might mean, but he's delighted by the card's alcohol-themed imagery. The image on the card looks nothing like him, but he's certain it's some sort of metaphysical self-portrait. He has made no secret of showing off his "surprising likeness" to everyone around. He has no idea that other magical cards have been found by two fellow Band of Blades members—and neither of them have been forthcoming about their discovery to him.

Endlo and Jargikka traditionally watch over this checkpoint during daylight hours, supported by four Band of Blades mercenaries (named Alucius, Grevery, Lodd, and Tamrin) who keep position in pairs on the platforms to the north and south. After dark, they all retreat to area **H14** to relax while a fresh quartet of Band of Blades mercenaries from area **H14** take up duty in their stead.

Endlo's initial attitude is hostile, but if he's made at least friendly, he'll agree to escort any who request an audience with his commander to Arodeth. A pair of mercenaries accompany him, and those they meet along the way (likely at area **H9** and **H12**) fall in step as well, so that upon reaching Arodeth in area **H13**, there will be quite a group at hand to fight back should things turn violent.

Endlo and Jargikka are quick to violence, especially if a group is disrespectful or attempts to bypass the barrier without paying the toll. This treatment extends to anyone they spot trying to fly above the barrier as well. Endlo prefers to fight up close in melee after casting *enlarge* on himself, while Jargikka prefers to

remain at a distance and fight with hurled rocks for as long as possible. The mercenaries on the platforms begin combat using their bows but effortlessly leap down to the platform to join in melee if more than two PCs make it past the blockade. The mercenaries fight to the death as long as Endlo is alive. Endlo and Jargikka retreat to area **H12** if either of them is brought below 30 Hit Points, ordering any surviving mercenaries to cover their retreat (which they do, but they panic and flee if brought below 20 Hit Points). Any fight that goes on for more than 3 rounds here also draws the attention of the harpies at area **H3**, who come to watch the fight but don't join unless they're attacked. The harpies in area **H5** might observe as well if the fight is particularly loud or flashy. If the PCs defeat Endlo and his allies, the harpies then swoop down to attack, hoping to pick off weakened adventurers.



Endlo Kiver

ENDLO KIVER

UNIQUE	CE	MEDIUM	DWARF	HUMANOID
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Male dwarf zealot of Gorum

Perception +22; darkvision**Languages** Common, Dwarven, Jotun**Skills** Athletics +25, Intimidation +21, Performance +21, Religion +22, Survival +22**Str** +5, **Dex** +1, **Con** +3, **Int** +0, **Wis** +4, **Cha** +3**Items** steel-colored bird feather token, +1 striking greatsword, +1 resilient half plate, *The Publican*, religious symbol of Gorum**AC** 33; **Fort** +22, **Ref** +18, **Will** +23**HP** 215; **Resistances** slashing 3**Juggernaut** When Endlo rolls a success at a Fortitude save, he gets a critical success instead.**Speed** 20 feet**Melee** ♦ greatsword +26 (magical, versatile P), **Damage** 3d12+11 slashing**Divine Spontaneous Spells** DC 30, attack +22; **6th** (3 slots) heroism, weapon storm, zealous conviction; **5th** (3 slots) flame strike, harm, heal; **4th** (3 slots) air walk, dimensional anchor, enlarge; **3rd** (3 slots) chilling darkness, harm, remove disease; **2nd** (3 slots) death knell, resist energy, see invisibility; **1st** (3 slots) command, ray of enfeeblement, true strike; **Cantrips (6th)** chill touch, daze, message, sigil, stabilize**Gorum's Hand** Endlo deals an additional die of damage with greatswords (included in his Strike above), which also adds an additional die to his weapon storm spell.**Replenishment of War** When Endlo damages a creature with a greatsword Strike, he gains 6 temporary Hit Points until the start of his next turn. If the Strike was a critical hit, he instead gains 12 temporary Hit Points.**Resolute Stance** ♦ (stance) Endlo draws upon the might of stone to bolster his defenses. While in this stance, he gains a +2 status bonus to his AC and increases his resistance to slashing damage to 15, but he reduces his Speeds by 5 feet.**JARGIKKA**

UNIQUE	NE	LARGE	EARTH	GIANT	HUMANOID
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Female elite stone giant mercenary (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 6, 170)**Initiative** Perception +18**CREATURE 9**

UNCOMMON	NE	MEDIUM	HUMAN	HUMANOID
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Human mercenaries

Perception +15**Languages** Common**Skills** Acrobatics +17, Athletics +20, Intimidation +16, Stealth +17, Survival +17**Str** +3, **Dex** +2, **Con** +4, **Int** +0, **Wis** +2, **Cha** +3**BLADE MERCENARIES (4)****CREATURE 9**

UNCOMMON	NE	MEDIUM	HUMAN	HUMANOID
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Human mercenaries

Perception +15**Languages** Common**Skills** Acrobatics +17, Athletics +20, Intimidation +16, Stealth +17, Survival +17**Str** +3, **Dex** +2, **Con** +4, **Int** +0, **Wis** +2, **Cha** +3**Items** steel-colored bird feather token, +1 chainmail, +1 composite longbow (20 arrows), +1 striking longsword, signal whistle, steel shield (Hardness 5, 20 HP, BT 10)**AC** 27; **Fort** +19, **Ref** +15, **Will** +17**HP** 165**Bravery** When the mercenary rolls a successful Will save against a fear effect, they get a critical success instead. When the mercenary gains the frightened condition, reduce its value by 1.**Attack of Opportunity** ↗**Shield Block** ↗**Speed** 25 feet**Melee** ♦ longsword +19 (magical, versatile P), **Damage** 2d8+9 slashing**Ranged** ♦ longbow +18 (deadly d10, magical, propulsive, range increment 100 feet, reload 0, volley 30 feet), **Damage** 2d8+9 piercing**Cat Fall** The mercenary treats falls as 25 feet shorter.**Power Attack** ♦♦ The mercenary makes a melee Strike.

This counts as two attacks when calculating the mercenary's multiple attack penalty. If this Strike hits, the mercenary deals an extra die of weapon damage.

Ready Armaments ♦ The mercenary Interacts to draw or stow a weapon, then Interacts to draw or stow a weapon. The mercenary can instead Raise a Shield instead of either Interact action.**XP Award:** Award the PCs 60 XP for recovering *The Publican*.**H2. COURTYARD****LOW 13**

The stairs cut deep into the cliff at this point, and walls tower fifty feet or more overhead on either side. A massive landing, fifty feet to a side, offers a respite from the climb. Several twenty-foot-tall doorways are set into the walls—three to the north and one to the south.

Bloodstains and scorch marks mar the ground and walls here, as though fights on the landing were both common and recent. Several dead pack horses loaded with supplies lie in a heap to the southeast. Several jars once held in packs tied to one of the horse's saddles have tumbled free and broken spilling a wide pile of coarse white crystals.

The latest trader to run afoul of the mercenaries was ostensibly delivering jars of salt from Xin-Shalast to Magnimar, but the salt was only a ruse and the trader was, in fact, a smuggler. In truth, most of the jars contain necromantic components—the coarse salt is itself a preservative for corpses. Among the cargo are multiple old skulls harvested from deep in Xin-Shalast's ruins.

When the trader refused to produce the toll the Band of Blades demanded, they attacked him and the

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three laborers who accompanied him, butchering them all. They took everything the trader had and left his dead horses and the cargo here to search it later; since the jar broke open to reveal coarse salt, they frankly don't have high expectations that the wagon contains anything of value. The harpies in area **H3** have since come down to take away the corpses to eat (leaving the horses behind), so no other bodies remain.

Creatures: The skulls in the jars contain the lingering essence of a powerful sorcerer from ancient Thassilon. They comprise a sorcerous skull swarm that had been quiescent for centuries, but the battle between the trader and mercenaries roused the swarm, and the harpies' plunder of the corpses awakened it further. Only chance has kept this swarm of animated skulls quiescent, but the first creatures to poke around the cart—likely the PCs (as the mercenaries and harpies don't see much value in the ruins)—cause the sorcerous skull swarm to burst out of several fragile clay jars and attack. The skull swarm fights until destroyed.

If this fight takes place before the PCs attract the attention of the mercenaries in area **H1** or the harpies in area **H3**, they're both drawn to this area to watch with amusement—the mercenaries then attack the PCs once this fight ends, followed in turn by the harpies.

SORCEROUS SKULL SWARM

Pathfinder Bestiary 3 245

Initiative Perception +24

CREATURE 14

Treasure: The wagon includes several crates of poor-quality salt used for corpse preservation, four jars of spoiled formaldehyde, and cleverly hidden in a secret compartment in one barrel's base (requiring a PC to succeed at a DC 30 Perception check to discover) is a *wand of vampiric exsanguination*. This wand appears to be made from a human rib, yet the bone appears smeared in dried blood that resists all attempts to clean. When the wand is used, this blood grows moist and drips, causing the wand's user to feel a brief and unsettling hunger for blood. This sensation is nothing more than a strange quirk, but at your discretion, excessive use of this wand could expose the user to the curse of vampirism.

H3. UPPER CHECKPOINT

LOW 13

A row of boulders and barricade of logs blocks the eastern end of this forty-foot-wide landing on the stairs, which continue up to the top of the Storval Rise to the east. Beyond that, the arid reaches of the badlands stretch out as far as the eye can see.

The Shoanti suspect that the harpies and mercenaries are working happily together, but this isn't entirely true. When the Band of Blades swept in to seize control of the Storval Stairs and turn it into a toll-collecting scheme, Queen Kawlinawk and several of her warbirds were already comfortably living in the ruin's upper reaches after the previous queen, Lareecan, was slain by Pathfinders. The harpies had little interest in bothering those who came and went along the stairs and, indeed, enjoyed periodic easy pickings of meals from some unlucky groups of travelers.

Arodeth contacted the harpies when she and her mercenaries arrived and offered them jobs—if the harpies would help watch over the stairs and support the Band of Blades, they would receive regular tithes of treasure from the tolls taken. At first, Queen Kawlinawk found this arrangement to her liking since she could simply relax in her nest in area **H5** while her warbirds did some idle guard duty, but as time went on, she and her warbirds have grown restless, believing that they should just take over the toll-taking operation for themselves. They haven't yet worked up the courage to betray the Band of Blades, but the PCs' arrival gives them a chance to watch, wait, and plot.

Creatures: During the day, three of Kawlinawk's warbirds stand guard here (at night, they swap out for the two warbirds found in area **H5**). These harpies do little more than order anyone who seeks passage down the stairs from the Storval Rise to stand and wait while they call up Endlo from area **H1** to take tolls, but they're also itching for a fight. Anyone they spot trying to break through the barricade or otherwise sneak in is fair game, and they attack at once. A harpy reduced to 30 or fewer Hit Points flees to area **H5**.

If a fight breaks out here and the mercenaries in area **H1** still live, they quickly move up the stairs to join the fight as soon as they notice trouble. Once they enter the fight, any remaining warbirds retreat to the cliffs above to watch and wait, curious to see if the mercenaries or PCs win, then swoop down to pick off the survivors.

HARPY WARBIRDS (3)

CREATURE 11

RARE CE MEDIUM HUMANOID

Variant harpy (*Pathfinder Bestiary 204*)

Perception +20; darkvision

Languages Common

Skills Acrobatics +21, Athletics +20, Intimidation +22, Performance +24

Str +5, **Dex** +5, **Con** +3, **Int** +0, **Wis** +3, **Cha** +5



Queen Kawlinawk

Items +1 striking halberd, +1 composite shortbow (20 arrows)

AC 30; **Fort** +18, **Ref** +22, **Will** +20

HP 200

Attack of Opportunity ♦

Speed 20 feet, fly 60 feet

Melee ♦ halberd +23 (magical, reach, versatile S), **Damage** 2d10+11 piercing

Melee ♦ talon +22 (agile, finesse), **Damage** 2d4+11 slashing

Ranged ♦ shortbow +23 (deadly d10, magical, propulsive, range increment 60 feet, reload 0), **Damage** 1d6+11 piercing

Captivating Song ♦ (auditory, concentrate, enchantment, incapacitation, mental, primal) As harpy, but DC 29.

War Formation A harpy warbird deals an extra 2d6 damage with its melee Strikes to any creature that's within reach of at least one of the harpy's allies.

H4. NORTH KARZOUG STATUE

The domed ceiling of this circular room reaches a height of twenty feet, while a single, strange niche framed in silvery metal sits in the otherwise featureless west wall, directly opposite the only entrance into the chamber from the east.

Runelord's Glare: The niche in the wall is framed with a layer of silvery skymetal known as siccattite. This patch of metal is exceedingly hot and inflicts 1 fire damage to anyone who touches it. The niche itself appears to be capable of holding a crystal-shaped object, and any of the smaller crystals from area **H8** can be slotted into the frame with ease as a two-action Interact activity with the manipulate trait.

The siccattite frame radiates transmutation and evocation magic and is essentially an immobile 13th-level magic item. With a successful DC 31 check to Identify Magic, a character can understand the function of the frame (although it doesn't reveal where the crystals required for its use are located, only that the frame requires some sort of crystal-shaped power supply). If a crystal from area **H8** is inserted into the frame, it flashes with orange light and then fuses into the frame. A moment later, the walls, ceiling, and floor of this chamber become transparent, providing a dramatic view of the Storval Stairs (and perhaps a moment of panic before those within the chamber realize it hasn't vanished). This view is one-way—the transmutation doesn't affect the exterior of the statue, which still appears solid and opaque. Only those inside this area can look through the transparent stone. The glowing orange gemstone is the only part of the room that remains visible, and a character adjacent to it can use the crystal to Activate Karzoug's Gaze.

ACTIVATE KARZOUG'S GLARE ♦

EVOCATION | **MANIPULATE** | **FIRE**

Requirement The siccattite frame has a charged crystal placed within it.

You touch the crystal within its siccattite frame and take 1 fire damage from the contact with the searing hot surface. You can then discharge the energy within the crystal (consuming the crystal in the process) to fire a beam of fiery energy from the tip of that statue's polearm, targeting any location aboveground on the Storval Stairs or within 400 feet of its bottommost step. An explosion of fire fills a 20-foot-burst at that location; all creatures in the area must attempt a DC 30 Reflex save. The transparency of the interior of the room ends at the end of your turn.

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Critical Success The creature is unaffected.

Success The creature takes 6d6 fire damage.

Failure The creature takes 12d6 fire damage and is knocked prone.

Critical Failure The creature takes 20d6 fire damage, takes 4d6 persistent fire damage, and is knocked prone.

H5. SOUTH KARZOUG STATUE

Moderate 13

This circular room contains a malodorous collection of filth and partially-gnawed bones. A single arched opening allows entrance and exit to the east, while the domed ceiling reaches a height of twenty feet. The walls of the room are also caked in mud, but a patch of filth directly opposite the entrance is also covered by a rime of frost.

Creatures: The current queen of the local harpies, a lanky creature with a perpetual scowl named Kawlinawk, has claimed the interior of this statue's head as her nest. She bullies the harpies out of the choicest bits of jewelry and murders those who express any dissatisfaction with her leadership, but always keeps at least two of her warbirds here as guards or, more often, targets for her cruel insults. At night, the two warbirds here swap duties with the three posted to area **H3**.

Queen Kawlinawk attacks any intruders on sight and fights to the death to defend her home. While she and her warbirds don't maintain a vigilant watch of the skies above, they might take note of particularly flashy or noisy flying PCs. If combat erupts in areas **H1–H3**, they'll notice and keep a more vigilant eye out for the rest of the day. If the mercenaries at area **H1** and the warbirds at area **H3** are defeated, Queen Kawlinawk immediately confronts any flying characters she spots.

With her hostile attitude, it's unlikely the PCs will be able to receive Queen Kawlinawk's aid unless they attempt to establish communication with her before entering her home. Alternately, if the PCs manage to capture her alive, she'll consider allying with them. If the PCs can convince her that they have no lasting interest in "clearing out" the Storval Stairs, she might agree to help defeat the Band of Blades, but her promises shouldn't be trusted to last for long.

QUEEN KAWLINAWK

CREATURE 13

UNIQUE NE MEDIUM HUMANOID

Female harpy (*Pathfinder Bestiary 204*)

Perception +23; darkvision

Languages Common

Skills Acrobatics +24, Athletics +25, Deception +26, Intimidation +26, Performance +26

Str +6, Dex +5, Con +4, Int +0, Wis +4, Cha +7

Items +1 striking composite shortbow (20 arrows), +1 striking falchion, jewelry worth 150 gp

AC 34; Fort +21, Ref +25, Will +23

HP 240

Attack of Opportunity ↗

Speed 20 feet, fly 60 feet

Melee ♦ falchion +26 (forceful, magical, sweep), **Damage** 2d10+12 slashing

Melee ♦ talon +25 (agile, finesse), **Damage** 3d4+12 slashing
Ranged ♦ shortbow +25 (deadly d10, magical, propulsive, range increment 60 feet, reload 0), **Damage** 2d6+12 piercing

Captivating Song ♦ [auditory, concentrate, enchantment, incapacitation, mental, primal] As harpy, but DC 33.

Dread Cry ♦♦ [auditory, concentrate, primal, sonic] Queen Kawlinawk utters a screech in a 60-foot cone that harms her enemies but heartens her allies. The screech deals 14d6 sonic damage to non-harpy creatures in the area (DC 33 basic Fortitude save). Harpies in the area can instead use a reaction to Fly, Step, or Stride; one harpy in the area, of Queen Kawlinawk's choice, can instead use a reaction to Strike. Queen Kawlinawk can't use Dread Cry for 1d4 rounds.

War Formation Queen Kawlinawk deals an extra 2d6 damage with her melee Strikes to any creature that's within reach of at least one of her allies.

HARPY WARBIRDS (2)

CREATURE 11

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Initiative Perception +20

Runelord's Glare: A siccatic frame similar to the one in area **H4** sits in the west wall opposite this room's entrance, but this frame is caked over with filth covered by a thin layer of frost. If the frame is cleaned (a three-action Interact activity with the manipulate trait that causes 1 cold damage), it can be used in the same way as the one in area **H4**, except this frame is freezing cold to the touch and inflicts cold damage when used and activated.

Treasure: Although sifting through the pile of harpy waste is an unpleasant affair, a *major ring of cold resistance* adorned with a snowflake design is hidden beneath the old bones and rotting feathers.

H6. GUARDIAN MURAL

Moderate 13

This section of the ruins isn't directly accessible from the stairs themselves, and unless the PCs take note of the open colonnade providing access to this area while scouting the site out, they're unlikely to have their attention drawn here until they decipher the information about Karzoug's Glare in the records.

room (area H13). The area into which the colonnade's arches open into is a precipitous drop of about 200 feet. During Thassilon's height, visitors to these chambers used flight or teleportation to come and go—PCs who lack these options can Climb instead (DC 25 Athletics).

The inner walls of a colonnade look out to the west across the Varisian lowlands, a two-hundred-foot drop just a step away through the arches. Within the room, carvings on the inner walls have almost completely eroded away save for a vivid mural on the east that depicts three writhing centipede-like creatures marching toward an oversized door to the northeast. Several old bloodstains spatter the floors and walls of the eastern portion of the chamber.

A PC who succeeds at a DC 34 Occultism check realizes that the squirming “centipedes” depicted in the mural are representations of mukradis on the march. With a successful DC 20 Medicine check, a PC confirms that the bloodstains are at least several weeks, even months, old. Characters who think to look on the rocks 200 feet below the archways find additional similar bloodstains. These stains are all that remain of the mercenaries whom Arodeth ordered to explore the area—they triggered the trap (as have so many others over the ages) and were swiftly slaughtered. The remains of the dead were cremated, as is the way for the Band of Blades to prevent corpses from telling tales.

The door to area H7 is sealed with an ancient *lock* spell (heightened to 7th level). A character can Force Open the door with a DC 36 Athletics check or unlock it with a DC 36 Thievery check to Pick the Lock.

Hazard: The mural is more than a decoration—it's a trap containing a dangerous guardian, as PCs who read the research in the records room should know.

GUARDIAN MURAL

HAZARD 15

UNIQUE | MAGICAL | TRAP

Stealth DC 40

Description One of the carvings on the mural suddenly animates and clammers out of the painting to become a real creature in the middle of the chamber.

Disable DC 35 Thievery (to deface the mural in precisely the right way to render it inoperable), or *dispel magic* (7th level; counteract DC 34) to counteract the mural

Summon Mukradi  **Trigger** A creature attempts to open the door to area H7; **Effect** A living mukradi manifests in the 20-foot-square space indicated by the dotted outline on the map. Any other creatures in this area are knocked prone and pushed out of this square—those who succeed at a DC 40 Reflex save can choose to be

pushed north or south, while those who fail are pushed west, out of the room entirely down a 200-foot fall. These creatures can Grab the Edge with a successful DC 36 Reflex save. The mukradi then rolls initiative but vanishes completely after 1 minute.

Reset 24 hours

MUKRADI

CREATURE 15

Pathfinder Bestiary 239

Initiative Perception +24

H7. LOOK UPON LENG

MODERATE 13

Cobweb-shrouded murals on the walls of this high chamber depict a strangely unnerving landscape of a barren tundra. Ragged mountains loom in the distance, while the spires of barely visible ruins appear amidst the hazy foothills, all under a night sky that features an unusually large full moon. Stone doors lead out to the east and west.

This room chronicles some of the distant places the architect of the Storval Stairs hoped to explore once their conquest of the area was complete. A PC who succeeds at a DC 25 Religion check recognizes these murals as depicting the nightmare dimension of Leng, a realm within which the Runelord Karzoug and his followers brokered many an alliance. Originally intended to be a room used to commune with that plane's unpleasant but brilliant minds, the chamber is now little more than a dangerous place to linger.

The PCs feel a strange sensation of peace and relaxation as they enter this room, as if their minds and bodies instinctively identify it as a safe place to rest. While they're unlikely to be bothered by the Band of Blades or harpies here, the feeling of lassitude is false—a side effect of many centuries of proximity to the nightmares of Leng.

The door to area H8 is sealed with an ancient *lock* spell (heightened to 7th level). A character can Force Open the door with a DC 36 Athletics check or unlock it with a DC 36 Thievery check to Pick the Lock.

Creatures: At the end of any round in which at least one creature remains in this room, attempt a DC 11 flat check. On a success, the murals on the walls change—several circular trapdoors open in the painting foreground. A character who succeeds at a DC 30 Perception check noted what might be the tip of a spiny fingertip or perhaps leg brushing against some of the openings. Continue to attempt DC 11 flat checks at the end of any round in which at least one creature remains in the room. The second time you roll a success, the murals suddenly take on a lifelike

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quality, and the room itself plunges in temperature to incredible cold (*Core Rulebook* 518) as Leng alters the reality within the chamber. The murals reset to their normal state as soon as any round ends in which no creatures remain in the room.

If any creatures remain in the room after the second successful flat check, two elephant-sized Leng spiders clamber out from the two nearest trap doors to scuttle into area **H7**. The spiders regard any characters within the room but don't attack—instead they speak in unsettling voices to offer an opportunity for “unbridled wonders and endless discovery.” Those who wish to accept the offer, the spiders claim, need only set aside their weapons, approach, and bow before one of the spiders. This offer is, of course, a blatant lie—the Leng spiders are attempting to Lie to the PCs. Any character who falls for the offer feels Leng itself reach out and attempt to transport them into the nightmare realm. A PC can resist this effect with a DC 33 Will save—on a failure, they're transported to Leng, and a static image of the PC appears somewhere in the mural. This image remains until the PC escapes Leng or is slain. What adventures and dangers await PCs who are brought to Leng are subject to the GM's imagination—wise PCs decline the offer.

Of course, the Leng spiders don't suffer rejection well—they attack if no one in the room accepts their offer. A Leng spider reduced to fewer than 30 Hit Points attempts to escape back to Leng—to do so, it can merely “walk through” any of the walls in this room back into Leng, whereupon it vanishes.

At your discretion, a PC trapped in Leng can see through into this room, as if looking through a violent snowstorm—returning to area **H7** from Leng is possible with a successful DC 33 Will save, but on a failure, the creature takes 14d6 mental damage.

LENG SPIDERS (2)

Pathfinder Bestiary 2 157

Initiative Deception +22

CREATURE 13

H8. CRYSTAL REPOSITORY

MODERATE 13

Pale crystals the size of human arms grow in clusters along the walls and domed ceiling of this room. At the center, a half-dozen taller crystals protrude from the floor, their jagged tips arching outward like tusks—or ribs. The tip of each of these curving crystals flickers with an entrancing glow, while a spherical crystal bulb sits on the floor at the center of these growths.

A character who examines the crystals in this room and succeeds at a DC 30 Arcana or Occultism check

identifies them as quasi-magical growths extending into this reality from the Astral Plane and notes in particular that the glowing tips of the six central crystals seem to be infused with magical power. The original creator of this chamber cultivated these growths, as the glowing tips could be harvested to power a number of deadly defenses along the Storval Stairs. Today, only two of those defenses remain active (areas **H4** and **H5**).

Creatures: The original architects of the Storval Stairs didn't leave this crystal repository untended and bound a trio of shining children into the walls of this room. The presence of these creatures helps to maintain the link to the Astral Plane—as long as at least three of them remain here, the crystals remain healthy and, over time, regrow after harvesting (see “Treasure” below). The shining children also serve as guardians, though, and anyone who enters the room without proclaiming their allegiance to Karzoug reveals themselves to be an intruder and thus subject to immediate attack.

The shining children prefer to box in enemies with *wall of force* and unleashing *sunbeams* on them. While they fight, the shining children telepathically moan in Aklo about how “the architect shall come to reclaim their throne.” The shining children fight until destroyed.

SHINING CHILDREN (3)

Pathfinder Bestiary 292

Initiative Perception +23

CREATURE 12

Treasure: The bulk of the crystals here are unusual but relatively worthless, being the equivalent of low-quality quartz once harvested and taken from this chamber. The six glowing tips from the curving crystals in the center of the room are quite useful, for they can be used to power the defenses in areas **H4–H5**. An examination of a shimmering crystal tip reveals a delicate set of indentations that could damage the crystal if it's not harvested correctly. To remove a crystal intact, a PC must succeed at a DC 35 Crafting check or a DC 30 Disable Device check attempted as a three-action Interact activity with the manipulate trait. On a failure, the crystal is destroyed, but on a success, that crystal can be used to power one of the two defenses in the Karzoug statues. There are six crystals in all that can potentially be harvested—new ones won't grow as long as no shining children tend to them (and even when they're tended, it takes months for them to regrow).

The “crystal bulb” is a potent side effect of the many centuries of magical radiation within this

chamber. It can be retrieved with ease from the middle of the room, and functions identically to a *clear quartz crystal ball*.

H9. MESS HALL

LOW 12

The ceiling of this long hall reaches up thirty feet. A ring of stones surrounds a large campfire in the center of the room, while a cauldron set over the fire bubbles and emits a savory aroma. Three jury-rigged tables with equally shabby chairs stand elsewhere in the room, while to the east, several crates, bags, and barrels of foodstuffs are stacked against the walls.

The supplies to the east consist of several weeks of food and water. The mercenaries haven't noticed the secret door to area **H10**. If the crates and barrels are



cleared aside, it can be spotted by a character who succeeds at a DC 32 Perception check, but as long as the supplies remain in place, only a critical success at this check reveals the door's presence. Until recently, a long-lasting illusion hid the door to the west, but Arodeth dispelled this illusion soon after discovering it during her first visit to the Storval Stairs.

Creatures: The mercenaries eat in this room, taking turns preparing food. During the day, four Band of Blades mercenaries (named Thasker, Urwynn, Yoskun, and Zednaki) can be found here, relaxing with bowls of stew while they play (poorly) a game that uses a well-worn Harrow deck and complicated rules that the mercenaries are prone to revising and rebuilding every few games. If combat breaks out in area **H2**, the mercenaries are ready to face the PCs, otherwise they suffer a -2 circumstance penalty to Perception checks until they're aware the PCs have arrived. They fight until at least one of their number has fallen, at which point the survivors make a fighting retreat to area **H12** to join their allies there.

This room is empty after dark, and the four mercenaries found here are instead in area **H14**.

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Initiative Perception +15

CREATURE 9

H10. SECRET ROOM

A thick layer of dust coats the floor of this room, and three of its corners are filled with heaps of indeterminate rubble. The air smells stale and clammy. The walls are thick and solid, and almost no sound can be heard beyond them.

This room, long forgotten by the occupants of the Storval Stairs (including its current inhabitants) was once an office used by a Thassilonian interrogator. The rubble in the corners is all that remains of the cages once used to detain suspicious travelers and of the interrogator's desk.

Treasure: A search of the rubble in the southeast corner, where the interrogator's desk once stood, reveals a potent treasure left behind from long ago—a *major Endless Grimoire (Secrets of Magic 162)* with a cover emblazoned with runes in Thassilonian that read, “The Book of Beautiful Truths.” Tucked into the back of the grimoire are two folded scrolls. The first contains the formula for a *rune of sin (Secrets of Magic 165)*. The second scroll is a *scroll of demon form (Secrets of Magic 99)*.

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H11. TRAPPED ATRIUM

The ceiling in this oval chamber rises forty feet and consists of dark stone embedded with crystal flecks that glitter like stars in the night sky. Exits lead out to the west and north. The floor of the room is swept clean, revealing a pattern of lines and rings.

This room is designed to mimic the night sky in the days of ancient Thassilon, with the floor patterns showing how the stars and planets move through the heavens. The flecks in the ceiling resemble stars, but dozens of the more brilliant sparkles are actually the crystalline points of long metal spikes retracted into the stone above.

Hazard: The trap in this room claimed the lives of four Band of Blades mercenaries soon after they first arrived at the Storval Stairs and impressed upon Arodeth the wisdom of proceeding carefully in exploring further—it's why she has been so deliberate in her investigations of areas H6–H8. The bodies of those slain by the trap were disposed of and the evidence cleared, and now the mercenaries know where to step in the room without triggering the trap's numerous pressure plates, leaving the defense in place to work against intruders.

If the PCs are being led by mercenaries to meet with Arodeth, they'll either show them the safe route through the room (if the mercenaries are at least friendly or magically controlled), or they'll try to trick the PCs into stepping into the room first to trigger the trap and use the chance to escape if they're assisting the PCs against their will but still capable of deception.

If a character knows where the pressure plates are located (as do the Band of Blades mercenaries), they can move through this room without triggering the trap, but the number of side steps, twists, and turns means that to do so, they treat this chamber as if it were greater difficult terrain.

FALLING STARS TRAP

UNCOMMON MAGICAL TRAP

Stealth DC 40 (master)

Description Pressure plates in the floor cause crystal-tipped spikes to rain down into the room and explode.

Disable DC 40 Thievery (master) to disable enough pressure plates so the trap won't trigger

Rain of Stars  **Trigger** Each time a non-flying creature enters a square in this room, roll a secret DC 6 flat check. On a failure, the trap triggers as the character steps on a pressure plate—the trap automatically triggers if a creature steps on either square just west of the hallway

HAZARD 15

leading to **H12: Effect** The trap makes a crystal spike Strike against all creatures in the room, then each creature in the room takes 6d10 piercing damage as the spikes explode (DC 36 basic Reflex save).

Melee  crystal spike +34, **Damage** 2d12+26 piercing

Reset The trap's supply of spikes magically replenishes, and the trap resets after 1 hour.

H12. SPARRING HALL

MODERATE 13

The ceiling of this enormous chamber rises sixty feet high. Ragged banners of colored cloth hang from the walls, obscuring faded, ancient frescoes that appear to depict comets, meteors, and other astronomical phenomena. The room stinks of sweat and blood.



Blade Magi

Although contemplative astronomers once debated the movement of itinerant celestial bodies in this hall, the Band of Blades now uses this area for sparring practice. The banners are a ranking system to show which mercenaries have recently won bouts against the others.

Creatures: While this chamber is empty at night, during the day, six mercenaries are encountered here. Two are participating in a (nonlethal) grudge match against a third over a disagreement about kitchen duty. A fourth mercenary watches the fight with great amusement, as do a pair of magi who study under Arodeth. The mercenaries are named Orbenth, Palkri, Velber, and Vondo (Vondo is the one sitting out). The magi are siblings, Carbelda Omberran and her younger brother Tymost. Their sibling rivalry has driven them both to excellence in their studies, and each considers themselves to be Arodeth's successor as well as top apprentice.

The two magi are supposed to be watching the courtyard from the mess hall and know that they're shirking their duties; if they see intruders, they're quick to attack because they realize they'll be blamed for trespassers getting this far. The mercenaries happily put aside their rivalries in the face of danger. They try to flank foes when possible.

These mercenaries know that Arodeth will punish them harshly for failing to stop intruders right at her doorstep, so they fight to the death. However, as soon as this group is reduced to a single mercenary, that mercenary surrenders and offers to exchange information about Arodeth or even introduce them to her in exchange for their freedom.

If the PCs are accompanied by other mercenaries, they'll either be joined by those here as they head east to meet Arodeth or (if their guides are unwilling) move to rescue captured mercenaries by attacking.

BLADE MAGI (2)

UNCOMMON	LE	MEDIUM	HUMAN	HUMANOID
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Human magus (*Pathfinder Secrets of Magic* 35)

Perception +18

Languages Common, Draconic, Thassilonian

Skills Arcana +23, Athletics +22, Society +21, Survival +20

Str +5, **Dex** +2, **Con** +2, **Int** +4, **Wis** +3, **Cha** +0

Items steel-colored *bird feather token*, +1 *striking halberd*, *moderate healing potion*, +1 *scale mail*, *spellbook* (contains all prepared spells)

AC 31; **Fort** +17, **Ref** +17, **Will** +20

HP 195

Attack of Opportunity ↗

Capture Magic ↗ **Trigger** The Blade magi succeeds at a save against a foe's harmful spell, or a foe fails a spell

CREATURE 11

attack roll against the Blade magi with a harmful spell;

Effect The Blade magi enters their Arcane Cascade. If the Blade magi is already in Arcane Cascade, they gain a +2 status bonus to damage from Arcane Cascade until the end of their next turn.

Speed 25 feet

Melee ♦ *halberd* +23 (magical, reach, versatile S), **Damage** 2d10+11 piercing

Arcane Prepared Spells DC 30, attack +22; **6th** *baleful polymorph*, *chain lightning*; **5th** *dispel magic*, *vampiric touch*; **3rd** *haste*, *true strike*; **Cantrips** (**6th**) *acid splash*, *mage hand*, *prestidigitation*, *ray of frost*, *shield*

Magus Focus Spells DC 30, 1 Focus Point; **6th** *thunderous strike*

Arcane Cascade ♦ (concentrate, stance) **Requirement**

The Blade magi can enter this stance if their most recent action was to Cast a Spell or make a Spellstrike, but the Blade magi can remain in the stance even if they no longer meet the requirements; **Effect** When the Blade magi enters this stance and at the beginning of each of their turns while in it, the Blade magi gains 5 temporary Hit Points. While in this stance, the Blade magi's melee Strikes gain the arcane trait, deal an extra 2 force damage, and deal 4 splash force damage to foes adjacent to the target.

Spellstrike ♦♦ The Blade magi channels a spell into a melee Strike to deliver a magically charged attack. The Blade magi casts *acid splash*, *ray of frost*, or *vampiric touch*. The effects of the spell don't occur immediately but are imbued into the Blade magi's attack instead. The Blade magi makes a melee Strike, which gains the arcane trait. The spell is coupled with the attack, using the Blade magi's attack roll to determine the effects of both the Strike and the spell. This counts as two attacks for their multiple attack penalty, but the penalty isn't applied until after the magus has completed the Spellstrike. After using Spellstrike, the Blade magi can't do so again until they recharge this ability as a single action, which has the concentrate trait. The Blade magi also recharges their Spellstrike when they cast *thunderous strike*.

BLADE MERCENARIES (4)

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Initiative Perception +15

H13. RECORDS ROOM

CREATURE 9

This T-shaped room is lined with bookshelves. Rather than books, the shelves are instead filled with rows upon rows of narrow plates of stone or steel, stacked atop each other in messy piles. A table in the middle of the room holds stacks of these tablets, along with several notebooks and writing implements.

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Arodeth

This room contains the knowledge of the now-forgotten architect of the Storval Stairs. The architect took many of their cues from learned astronomers of the day, aligning the direction of the stairs with certain cosmological portents. They expected to use the chambers they built around the Storval Stairs to rule the area afterwards, but Karzoug had other plans—he murdered them once their great architectural work was finished and eliminated their name and identity from all records.

The architect's knowledge—preserved here on hundreds of durable tablets of stone and metal—is mostly a jumbled collection of building plans, architectural truths, and half-formed prophecies about astronomical events and what they portend for Thassilon.

Creatures: Arodeth has been intrigued by the documents found here ever since she first discovered the chamber. It was also here that she first noticed that *The Rakshasa* had appeared in her possession—an event she swiftly interpreted as evidence that her new purpose could be found here at the Storval Stairs. Since settling in, Arodeth has spent nearly all her time here, sorting through the tablets. She has been dismayed to find that so many contain building plans, but she remains diligent and hopes to find something to tie the disparate prophecies together in a useful way. She jotted some of these clues in her notebooks, but they remain frustratingly sparse.

When the PCs first arrive here (regardless of time of day or night), Arodeth is at the end of the room furthest from the door, reading some of the tablets. Her bodyguard, Raflin Dorrum, and his pet aurumvorax relax near the room's entrance.

If the PCs are spoiling for a fight, the inhabitants of this room all work together. Arodeth and Raflin attempt to make a fighting retreat toward area H16, hoping to recruit any allies they encounter along the way. The sound of fighting in area H12 does little to alert them, though, as the regular sparring in that chamber often gets a bit loud.

Arodeth isn't looking for a fight, and even if the PCs arrive without an escort of guards, she's interested in speaking with them and invites them to join her at the table in the middle of the room. See Talking with Arodeth on page 62 for details on this conversation.

Note that a likely complication to any discussion with Arodeth is the fact that her favorite apprentice, Raflin, a man who has served as her personal

bodyguard for many months, is also currently dominated by the popobawa Ndede (area H16)—something Arodeth hasn't even suspected, much less discovered. Ndede's control over Raflin is particularly insidious, as he has convinced the Blade magi that Arodeth is unhinged and that Raflin would be a much better leader of the Band of Blades, should Arodeth continue to prove unfit for her leadership role.

Ndede's trickery has convinced Raflin to visit the disguised popobawa every night to take part in a repeating ritual that Raflin believes bolsters his courage and health; in fact, this "ritual" is merely another casting of *dominate* that Raflin willingly submits to. Among the many conspiracies Ndede has infected Raflin with is a belief that Arodeth intends to disband the Band of Blades to join a more successful organization, and when she does so, she'll take all of the group's funds and resources with her.

As a result, Raflin is immediately suspicious of the PCs once they arrive and grows more so if they accept Arodeth's invitation to speak. If Raflin is still under the effects of the popobawa's *dominate* spell, the Blade magi accuses Arodeth of betraying the Band of Blades and attacks as soon as the conversation with Arodeth gets around to Ndede or if any PC proposes anything that he might interpret as an offer of an alliance. If he's no longer *dominated* (as will be the case if it's past 9:00 in the evening and they've killed or defeated Ndede already) but doesn't realize that Ndede is gone, he still accuses Arodeth of betrayal but stops short of attacking unless the PCs start a fight—in this case, the PCs might be able to coax the truth out of the hostile bodyguard. If Ndede has been defeated and Raflin learns of it, he quietly abandons the Band of Brothers and will be encountered at the end of the adventure, having joined forces with Drustan, no longer loyal to Ndede but doubly disappointed, ashamed, and suspicious of Arodeth for allowing a monster like Ndede to infiltrate the group.

If he attacks, Raflin's first action is to cast *baleful polymorph* on Arodeth to try to transform her into a newt, after which he focuses his attacks on the PCs. While this spell won't permanently transform her (since it's an incapacitation effect and Arodeth is higher level than Raflin), he hopes that she'll be at least distracted or temporarily transformed so he can

focus on the PCs. As long as she remains transformed or sickened from this spell, Arodeth does nothing but sputter in rage and (ineffectually) order Raflin to stand down; once she's no longer affected by the spell, she'll join the fight against the treacherous bodyguard on the PCs' side.

If reduced to fewer than 80 Hit Points, Raflin flees to area **H16** to warn Ndede (who rewards the bodyguard by killing him—his body can be found in area **H16** thereafter) or deeper into the Storval Rise to join Drustan if he knows Ndede is dead.

Raflin's pet aurumvoraxes are loyal to him, not to the Band of Blades. Once Raflin starts a fight, the aurumvoraxes gleefully attack whoever seems to be Raflin's enemies and fight to the death unless Raflin calls them off.

ARODETH

CREATURE 14

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Initiative Perception +22

RAFLIN DORRUM

CREATURE 11

UNIQUE	CE	MEDIUM	HUMAN	HUMANOID
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Male human Blade magi (page 60)

Initiative Perception +18

AURUMVORAX

CREATURE 9

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Initiative Perception +18

Treasure: A character Searching the table in the middle of the room turns up a pair of metal plates that function as scrolls: a *scroll of flesh to stone* and a *scroll of magnificent mansion*. Additionally, a character who Searches the room finds one collection of bronze plates on which the formula for *ward domain* (*Advanced Player's Guide* 245) has been inscribed as well as a collection of blank mithral plates that, while they contain no information, are the equivalent of two mithral chunks.

Arodeth has collected several plates and tablets on the central table, finding them particularly interesting. A character who can read Thassilonian can spend an hour studying these tablets to learn that the two enormous statues of Runelord Karzoug on either side of the stairs are powerful weapons. The tablets describe special crystals—grown in a hidden chamber on the other side of the stairs—that, when socketed in place behind the statue's eyes, allow the statue to direct “beams of fire and ice to strike at foes below,” along with the following information.

- The route to the crystal repository lies beyond the locked doors in areas **H6** and **H7**; the notes

indicate that the mural in area **H6** is a trap and that the walls of area **H7** represent a thinning in the boundary between this world and Leng—these notes give the PCs a +4 item bonus to all attempted checks to discover and disable the trap in area **H6** and warns them against lingering too long in area **H7** lest they become lost in Leng.

- The crystals within the repository are attended by the “shining gardeners,” but the notes neglect to give any information about how to placate these creatures.
- The notes give the exact mechanics of how to Activate Karzoug's Glare in areas **H4–H5**.

If the PCs ally with Arodeth, she can explain this information to the PCs much more quickly but also warns them that she hasn't quite figured out how to safely investigate the chambers beyond.

Talking with Arodeth

Arodeth is an elderly woman whose once-imperious presence has almost entirely faded due to the many recent setbacks. She's willing to fight if necessary, but she would rather find out why the PCs have come here. Arodeth waves away suggestions that her Band of Blades must leave the Storval Stairs, as the location is both an ideal place for research and a lucrative opportunity. She's much more interested in the subjects of harrow cards, the Band of Blades, and Lord Drustan. She does her best to tease out what the PCs know and is as honest as necessary to get them to open up about these subjects.

Harrow Cards: Arodeth discovered *The Rakshasa* (which she knows indicates domination and mental control) among her gear soon after entering area **H13**. She knows that Ndede and Endlo recently discovered cards among their possessions as well—although Ndede hasn't yet told her which card he owns, she knows that Endlo has been bragging about *The Publican* recently. Arodeth can explain all these clues to the PCs if they're forthright with her. Otherwise, they can discover a page with these suppositions in her notes.

The Band of Blades: Arodeth admits that the Band of Blades is a large organization. Most of their powerful members are here at the Storval Stairs, but they have others operating across Avistan on various sanctioned missions. She has also heard reports that one of her mercenaries might have faced off against people matching the PCs' descriptions in Absalom, but she hasn't authorized any actions in Absalom. She hopes the PCs can shed some light on their encounter. If the PCs describe devils fighting alongside the mercenaries, or describe Vharnev the

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Queen of the Storval Stairs

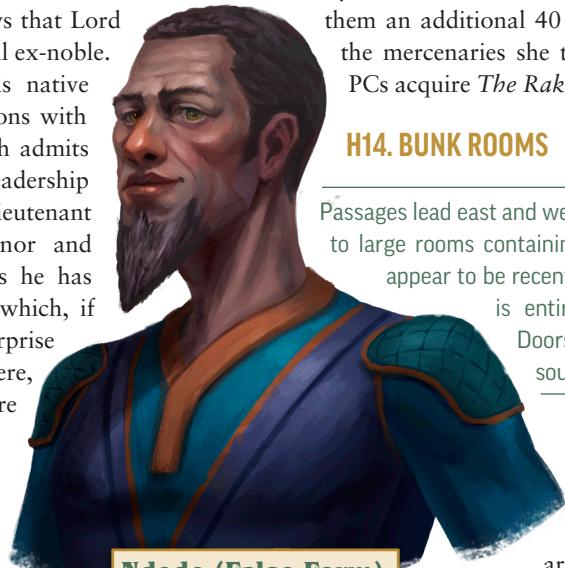
The Harrow Court

Adventure Toolbox

Butcher specifically (who Arodeth knows does Lord Drustan's dirty work), she realizes that Drustan has been pursuing his own unsanctioned goals. This plainly makes her angry, as the organization is only hanging by a thread already, and rogue actions impair the group's survivability.

Lord Drustan: Arodeth knows that Lord Drustan is an angry and vengeful ex-noble. Although he has eschewed his native Cheliax, he maintains connections with several powerful devils. Arodeth admits that his undeniable might and leadership ability made him a valuable lieutenant despite his unpleasant demeanor and unsavory associations. It seems he has been pursuing his own goals, which, if she's being honest, doesn't surprise Arodeth much. Drustan isn't here, and Arodeth doesn't know where he is. The last she remembers, Drustan talked about some "like-minded seekers" who were looking for parts of some extraordinarily powerful artifact. Arodeth hasn't yet realized that this artifact refers to the *Deck of Destiny*; the characters can probably make this connection for her. If she realizes it, she opines that Lord Drustan is probably interested in securing the cards that have recently been found near the Storval Stairs. Arodeth is right; she warns the PCs that she expects Drustan to return from his travels at any moment—see "Drustan's Return" on page 66 for more details. At this point, she'll propose an alliance with the PCs. If they help her to confront Drustan, she'll give them *The Rakshasa* as payment. (Note that, if he hasn't already, this is the point at which Raflin accuses Arodeth of betrayal, as detailed on page 61.)

The Storval Stairs: Convincing Arodeth to give up her efforts to control the Storval Stairs is more difficult since she feels it's necessary for her mercenary company's survival and is intrigued by the site's mysteries. Even if she knows the PCs have defeated some of her mercenaries, she has reinforcements she can call in from across the Inner Sea. Despite her willingness to speak to the PCs, her initial attitude is indifferent. She can be convinced to seek other opportunities for the Band of Blades if the PCs can successfully Request this with a successful DC 37 Diplomacy check or if the PCs Coerce her into abandoning the site with a successful DC 35 Intimidation check. If the PCs Coerce her, she leaves at once with any remaining mercenaries, and the PCs must deal with Drustan on their own. If the



Ndede (False Form)

PCs exposed Ndede's true nature, though, she'll decide to abandon the Storval Stairs on her own once the confrontation with Drustan resolves.

XP Award: If the PCs negotiate with Arodeth, award them 60 XP, as though they'd defeated her in combat. If they convince her to leave the Storval Stairs, award them an additional 40 XP as well as XP for all the mercenaries she takes with her. When the PCs acquire *The Rakshasa*, award them 60 XP.

H14. BUNK ROOMS

LOW 13

Passages lead east and west from this central corridor to large rooms containing several bunks. The beds appear to be recently slept-in. The central area is entirely empty of furnishings. Doors exit to the north and the south of the chamber.

Sleeping pallets crowd the areas to the east and west; the confines are cramped, but the pallets are thick and comfortable.

A few personal goods and changes of clothes are neatly packed into satchels and traveling chests among the pallets, but none contain anything of value.

Creatures: The Band of Blades use the east and west portions of this room as barracks. During daylight hours, only four Band of Blades mercenaries (named Calth, Enavi, Jex, and Sarough) are found here, dozing or otherwise relaxing. At night, these four mercenaries take up position at area H1 while the other mercenaries encountered throughout the complex return here to rest, making for a total of 12 mercenaries and two magi resting here. While resting, the mercenaries take a -4 penalty to initiative rolls to represent their grogginess. While a fight against a dozen mercenaries and a pair of magi all at once is technically an Extreme encounter, if the PCs surprise the mercenaries while they sleep, you should keep in mind that many of them won't be wearing armor—feel free to break the groups into more manageable encounters as you see fit, with the first one representing mercenaries who haven't yet undressed for bed and the second composed of those who join the fight after taking some time to wake up and don armor.

BLADE MAGI (0 OR 2)

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Initiative Perception +18

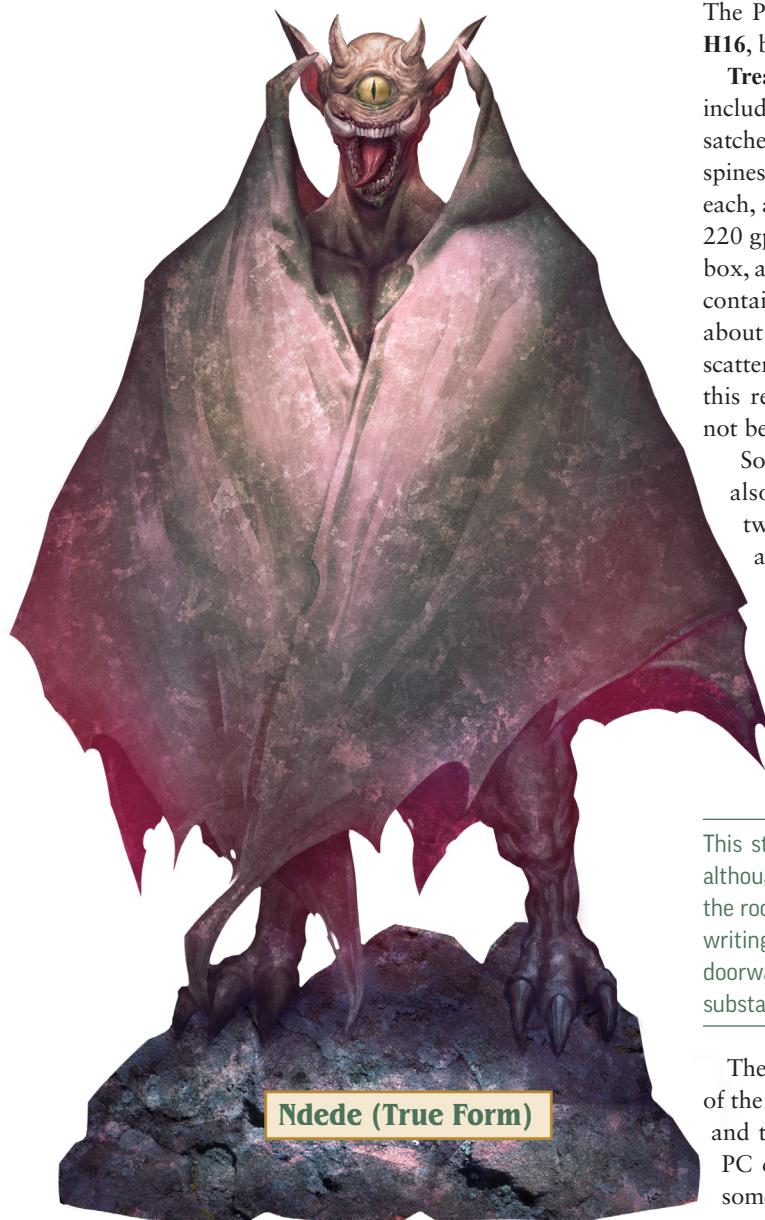
CREATURE 11

BLADE MERCENARIES (4 OR 12)**CREATURE 9**

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Initiative Perception +15**H15. STOLEN TREASURES**

The central chamber rises fifty feet to a cathedral ceiling. Three doorways provide exits from the room—one to the south and the others to the east and west. The door to the east is slightly ajar. The once-grand carvings decorating the walls of this room are blackened with thick layers of soot, and the worked stone tiles of the floor are chipped and covered with various carts, boxes, and barrels. All sorts of other loose trade goods lie haphazardly on the floor.



This is where the Band of Blades keeps the tolls and trade goods they extort from travelers. The containers are filled with things that the mercenaries think they might be able to use, such as whetstones or spare armor, but mostly goods they believe they can later sell. Any coins they take are stored here until the band's accountant, Ndede, gets around to tallying them storing the currency in a chest he keeps in his room. The mercenaries have a rule by mutual agreement that none of them can enter this room alone, so no one can be accused of stealing from the hoard.

Any significant sound in this chamber is likely to draw Ndede's attention from area **H16**; if he comes to investigate, he opens the door and, with surprising politeness, asks the PCs what they think they're doing. The PCs' encounter with Ndede is described in area **H16**, but he doesn't mind having it here.

Treasure: The mercenary company's treasure includes a *greater explosive arrow*, a neatly-packaged satchel containing all the components for a bleeding spines snare, four bolts of fine cloth worth 120 gp each, an ornate stool made of ebony and jasper worth 220 gp, nine boxes of gilt parchment worth 90 gp per box, and (spread through dozens of small pouches and containers) 458 gp and 3,390 sp. In addition, there's about 50 gp of miscellaneous trade goods and gear scattered throughout the area, but transporting all of this relatively mundane gear out of the room might not be worth the effort to the PCs.

Some of the chests filled with straw or paper also contain vials of alchemist's fire; there are two greater alchemist's fire and six moderate alchemist's fire. A character who finds these vials and succeeds at a DC 30 Crafting check realizes that they aren't part of the goods originally packed here but have been added later in a way that makes immolating the entire pile suspiciously easy.

H16. NDEDÉ'S ROOM**MODERATE 13**

This stone chamber has been converted into a bedroom, although the heap of blankets sprawled at the far end of the room looks more like a nest than a bed. A mismatched writing desk and dresser stand on opposite sides of the doorway. The desk contains a variety of alchemical substances. A faint, unpleasant stink fills the air.

The bed, not the alchemical supplies, is the source of the stink, as Ndede likes to rest in his natural form, and the blankets have soaked up his stench aura. A PC can identify this lingering smell as evidence of some natural defense of a powerful creature with