

5E

RUINS OF SYMBAROUM



The Throne of Thorns I

WRATH OF THE WARDEN | THE WITCH HAMMER



RUINS OF SYMBAROUM

The Throne of Thorns I

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THUS SPOKE AROALETA

"... and at the dawn of days was Wyrhta, the power that creates.
Where Nothing had reigned supreme, Wyrhta gave life to All;
shaped here and there, spawned now and then,
formed the one and in chorus the other.

And where attraction arose,
the wild thrived and multiplied...

... but out of the untamed Wielda appeared, the power that rules:
the power of willful violence, that bends here and there,
that curves now and then according to ideals and cravings;
that harvests the one and rejects the other.

With time, Wielda's appetite grew,
and the birth was inevitable...

... because violence begets hate begets Wratha, the power that reacts.
Born of Wielda's hunger for Wyrhta's design, Wratha is everywhere and nowhere,
always close where mother meets mother,
always mounting in strength with the force of the violence.

The arrival of the black fruit is fated,
as inescapable as terrible...

... and it happens, has happened, will happen again,
that Wratha grows boundless, furious, blind in her hunger.
It happens that the blackness grows flesh and spirit and the sharpest of claws,
that the fruit sheds seeds that poison the first,
in the aim to suppress the second.

Then dies All..."



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The Fight for...

... the Throne of Thorns begins in Thistle Hold, before moving on to Karvosti, the cliff of the High Chieftain and the Huldra.

It has been said that the town in the shadow of the great forest is like a shielded island located where a foaming ocean breaks against jagged rocks. Ambria, unruly and beset by growing pains, would be the ocean; the unforgiving horrors of Davokar the rocks, and the waves would be the flood of humans fleeing north from despair and misery. Similarly, Karvosti is often described using maritime terms – as a lonely island rising from an ocean of trees.

THESE ANALOGIES HAVE their merits, but also reflects a romantic idea that a wooden palisade, steep slopes, and strict regulations can function as an effective shield against the destructive forces of nature. Sure, Thistle Hold and Karvosti are in many ways both safer and less chaotic compared to their surroundings, and they offer comforts which one can only dream of in the wilderness or on the Ambrian countryside. But one should never be duped into believing that the safety and comforts benefit all residents and visitors to the settlements. And, above all, one should never feel confident that serenity is unthreatened.

In this book you will find the two first episodes in the adventure chronicle *The Throne of Thorns*, adapted for play with the 5e OGL ruleset and the *Ruins of Symbaroum* setting books – the *Player's Guide*, *Gamemaster's Guide*, and *Bestiary*. Having access to the supplement *The World of Symbaroum* is not a requirement but its descriptions of Thistle Hold and Karvosti can certainly help the GM make both settlements feel rich and deep. Also, the gaming experience when playing *Wrath of the Warden* and *The Witch Hammer*, will likely be more rewarding if one or two of the players have read parts of the setting book's opening section, *What You See...* This should make them feel more at home in Thistle Hold and on Karvosti, and ready to take the lead in problem-solving situations, without having to hold the Gamemaster's hand at every twist and turn.

The Throne of Thorns

THE BARBARIAN LEGEND recounted on the previous spread gives voice to an allegory describing the basic design of the world. The clanfolk have borne witness to battles between the three principles of the legend, and have again and again been victimized by the fallout of such conflicts. Wyrhta represents Creation, Wieldia the willful cultivation of Creation, and Wratha the furious force with which Creation reacts when cultivation extends into exploitation – a phenomenon known as Corruption among Ambrians.

In reality, these principles have no names, no more than they are bound to some bodies or physical forms – they are

Before moving on to the adventures, a few words should be said about the chronicle as a whole. Be warned: it will require quite a lot of reading and preparation, molding the adventures to fit your playstyle, and the goals and competence profile of the group's player characters. But if this does not scare, but rather enthuses, you, then you are in for a long, epic, and unforgettable ride!

Level Expectations

These adventures have been prepared with the expectation that characters embarking on *The Chronicle of the Throne of Thorns* are of 7th level. It is expected that characters will have explored Ambria and Davokar to some extent, by experiencing some of the adventures already released for *Ruins of Symbaroum* or in the companion to this volume: *The World of Symbaroum*. If this is not the case, we recommend that the group use that material to begin their journey and only turn to the Chronicle once they have some experience. Similarly, if the characters are of higher levels, the Gamemaster will have to adjust the adventures to keep the danger level appropriately high.

not gods. But the principles are none the less real, and over the years countless individuals and creatures have acted as their more or less distinct representations.

The Chronicle of the Throne of Thorns is an adventure campaign consisting of six episodes, set in a time and place where the power called Wieldia is growing in strength, threatening to stir its age-old antagonist, Wratha, into action. What happens in Ambria and Davokar has happened before, in ancient Symbaroum but also in the citystate Lindaros and in the realm of the Dark Lords, once known as Lyastra. One who can gaze even further back in time will find more examples of regions

where Wratha has been fed to the extent that its rage has affected not only the agents Wielda but also Wyrhta's creation, resulting in widespread death and destruction.

All episodes of the chronicle will touch upon what happens as Wielda (and thereby Wratha) mounts in strength, but it will take some time before the player characters understand how to interpret the signs. Even if a majority of the scenarios deal with situations related to the grander scale of events, the players will most likely perceive them as being rooted in conflicts about resources, knowledge, or fame and glory – in short: in the quest for power. It is only during the final episode that they will realize what is at stake and are given an opportunity to influence the course of history.

Another guideline when designing the chronicle has been that the episodes should be created as independent from each other, meaning that the players will not have to play the same characters from start to finish, and also that each episode will have radical but local consequences. Regarding the latter, the individual episodes will only have a marginal effect on the game world at large, so that existing campaign material will not become obsolete but may be of continued use after some small modifications. Of course, the sixth and final episode, aptly called *Davokar Awakens*, differs from the others in this respect: there, the outcome will be world-altering and the player characters' influence great.

Finally, it should be mentioned that *The Throne of Thorns* do not assume that all adventuring parties, or indeed player characters, have the same goals and motivations – there is no obvious arch enemy that must be vanquished, and no ideal or world order that they are required to protect. Instead, the setting of Symbaroum is full of conflicts, between peoples, factions, and individuals, and it is up to the characters to find their place in this world. During the course of the campaign, they will make friends and (in turn) enemies, deliberately or as an effect of the stances they take and what they choose to strive for. And before the end, they will have the knowledge and power to play an integral part in shaping the future of the Davokar region.

The lack of pre-determined incentives means that the chronicle is a bit more demanding for the gaming group, compared to adventures with a more clear-cut plotline. But hopefully the gaming experience will prove more intense and immersive, when the players get to decide what actual role to play in the epic and world-altering saga that is *The Throne of Thorns*.

WRATH OF THE WARDEN

Aside from a couple of tours into Davokar, the chronicle's first episode will be played in Thistle Hold. The player characters will struggle to identify and combat a cult of darkness worshippers, threatening to bring great suffering down on the town and its residents. As *Wrath of the Warden* is the start of it all, the main design principle has been that the adventure shall introduce the players and their characters to the basic conflicts of the game world; they are meant to get acquainted with the chronicle's main factions, and learn a thing or two about their goals, methods, and internal as well as external struggles. No matter if the characters act

on their own accord or are employed by a quest-giver, they will confront representatives from House Kohinoor, the Iron Pact, the various divisions of the Sun Church, and so on.

THE WITCH HAMMER

The second episode focuses on Karvosti and its surroundings. The player characters will enter the labyrinthine caverns inside the cliff, but not before they have traveled to several sites in the outer regions of the Forest of Davokar. The main theme of the adventure deals with the escalating conflict between various Ambrian factions, especially between House Kohinoor and the Church of Prios. Another important premise has to do with establishing the importance of the legendary city of Symbar and its equally mythical Throne of Thorns – a premise expressed in the plot of the adventure, designed as the hunt for a person who claims to know where the fabled capital city of Symbaroum can be found.

WHAT FOLLOWS

This book will be followed by two more, each featuring two episodes of the chronicle. The second one first takes the player characters from Yndaros to a stone ship in the Yonderworld where they will discover the true location of the ruined city of Symbar; then, in the forth episode, they will actually (hopefully) reach the legendary capital of the Symbarian empire, and get to explore it in competition with hunting parties from several other factions and organizations.

In the third and final book, the fifth episode will see the player characters (and some foul rivals) travel to the lost realm of Alberetor, in search of an artifact that can make it possible to wield the awesome power of the Symbarian high seat. As they return, they find that the final hunt for the Throne of Thorns will rage through an awakened Forest of Davokar, full of famished abominations and undead. During the journey, they must decide what to do if and when they make it back to Symbar – fight to claim the prize for themselves, help someone else ascend the throne, or try to destroy the high seat by cutting it off from its power source in the Yonderworld. Whatever they decide, whatever they do, their choices and actions will greatly impact the future of the region.

If you want a bit more information about the chronicle's episodes and main factions, you are welcome to download the PDF *Throne of Thorns – Campaign Overview* from the Free League Symbaroum page (www.freeleaguepublishing.com).

Gamemaster Material

Two documents entitled *GM resource – Wrath of the Warden* and *GM resource – the Witch Hammer* are available for free download at Free League's Symbaroum page (www.freeleaguepublishing.com). In them you will find all portraits, maps, and handouts included in this book – to be printed or, of course, viewed on electronic screens.



HE RAIN BEATS down on the Toad's Square and dawn comes creeping like a barely noticeable shift behind heavy skies. Autumn has arrived in Narugor and in Thistle Hold. It is a time for the successful to sit back and wait for more favorable traveling weather; a time for the families of the diseased to fear the hardships to come; a time for the desperate to make a

final attempt - in other words, a typical autumn among those living in the shadow of Davokar.

But despite everything being as usual, the past few days have been characterized by a strangely subdued, almost sinister atmosphere. Everyone feels it, even the successful ones who should have no worries in the world - a lump in the throat, a fiery ache in the belly. Most keep the feeling to themselves, thinking it is caused by the shifting weather. The rest say a few words to their neighbor, friend or lover but let it rest once they have been assured that everything is alright.

The only person who seems to take the sensation seriously is crazy Toruld, standing drenched outside the *Salons of Symbaroum*, raving about her nightly dream visions, about a recurring bellowing which is drowned out by the roar of the wind and the hammering rains. But just as the town starts to wake, she too is silenced, by four guards of the Town Watch dragging her away to the Penitentiary, accused of public disturbance.

All goes silent. All is still. Everyone awakes to a new day, with a lump in the throat and a fiery ache in the belly...





Wrath of the Warden

Introduction

With these words it begins – *The Chronicle of the Throne of Thorns*. Our hope is that it will offer a thrilling and engaging experience, but one which may differ a lot between different gaming groups in both structure and content. Sure, there is an overall intrigue and a theme that will be commonly experienced, also a number of scenes and sequences which most player characters will encounter. But large parts of the adventure are so open in structure and design that the players and their characters have the freedom to handle them in very different ways, depending on their individual goals and alliances.

THIS FIRST EPISODE, *Wrath of the Warden*, describes events which will have long term effects on the town of Thistle Hold. However, the idea behind the design and content is mainly to introduce the players and their characters to the chronicle's themes, areas of conflict, and prominent agents. Aside from partaking in and contributing to a dramatic, action-packed story, the players will get to learn about many power factions and begin to understand what they are striving for – for instance House Kohinoor's ambition to fulfill Sarkomal's prophecy, the Sun Church's aim to turn Ambria into a theocracy of the Sun, and the Templars' furious struggle to avenge their dead deity.

And if you for a second lower your eyes from the grander scale of events, you will see that *Wrath of the Warden* is a fairly straight forward adventure, primarily dealing with the hunt for the identity of a diseased quest-giver, and the subsequent showdown with a group of local cultists in Thistle Hold. Hence, the idea is that the insights mentioned in the

previous paragraph will be made while the player characters are occupied dealing with a series of very specific challenges in and outside of town – challenges related to the mutilation of a now dying forest god...

The adventure is made up of five chapters. The first accounts for the intrigue and its background; it also offers a general idea of how the adventure may play out and presents suggestions on how the characters may become involved in the story. After that are three chapters describing the acts of the adventure: a first act with scenes following more or less in sequence; a second act with a very open structure; and the third act including the culmination of the story.

The final chapter of *Wrath of the Warden* deals with what happens in the wake of the adventure and offers ideas on various interludes – that is, adventures and other activities which may occupy the characters before starting with the next episode.

Background

IN THISTLE HOLD there are a handful of groups that deserve to be called cults. The members of these may be more or less fanatical but are all of the conviction that Corruption is not all bad. On the contrary, they regard it as something to make use of instead of something to fear.

Wrath of the Warden is about what happens when one such cult is lured (or tricked) into contributing to exploring the darkness of the world. They call themselves the Midnight Cult, are led by the antique dealer Erlaber and include the ogre witch Manaloum, the wizard Desidera, the changelings Klagander and Sibela, and the youngling Gardai, Erlaber's servant. Aside from Erlaber, the cult members are described in the scenes in Act III where the player characters are likely to face them (pages 96–97).

The aim of the cult is naturally to grow in strength and gain greater influence thanks to their powerful benefactor.

But things will not turn out as they hoped, no matter whether the player characters thwart their plans or if they are forced to realize that what was presented to them as a gift instead was predestined to become their doom.

Erlaber Ambreagos

"The future is dark, and it is mine."

Erlaber is the sole survivor of a lesser but still noble house who ruled a barony bordering the realm of the Dark Lords. His father, Baron Oramei Haaras, saw the enemy mount in strength and eventually began to study the practices which gave them such power. When the attack came, Oramei immediately surrendered and was welcomed into the dark fellowship of the Lords. But when that happened, the six-year old Erlaber had already been forced to leave the residence, by his older brother Herek. They barely survived the war

as nameless vagabonds, Erlaber's hate for his brother and admiration for his father growing with each passing day.

Up until the death of his brother five years ago, Erlaber made an effort to hide his blackened soul. Together they built a successful business trading in items salvaged from old Alberetor and they both had families. But when Herek drank himself to death, the darkness of the younger brother bloomed. He sold the business for a good profit and moved his chastened family to Thistle Hold, to get closer to Davokar. He was bent on succeeding where his father had failed – to ally with the dark and gain strength enough to establish a brand new house of power, named after an ancient Symbarian bloodline: Ambreagos. The Midnight Cult and its members, as well as the partnership with the mysterious Prince, serves the same purpose as the blood he harvested when laying his wife and children to rest: they are means to employ in the hunt for power!

Tactics: Erlaber's sadistic tendencies make him prefer to use *larvae boil* in combat and interrogations. He stays away from melee as long as possible, preferring to use a group of loyal minions like a protective wall. Surrendering is never an option – he would rather end his own life before that happens.

Black Edge, ARTIFACT (UNIQUE)

The curved dagger Black Edge appears in legends as belonging to the traitor Arbusal, a witch who was corrupted and crafted the weapon with the aim to slay his lord – High Chieftain Maiesticar. The assassination attempt failed and Arbusal was buried with the dagger driven through his heart.

Exhaust

The master of the dagger can use it to weaken their opponents. When the weapon deals damage, its wielder can activate an effect that forces the victim to make a **Constitution saving throw** against 10 + the weapon's damage or become stunned until the end of their next turn.

Requires: Reaction

Corruption: 1d4 temporary Corruption when activated

Paralyze

Like Exhaust, but the victim becomes paralyzed until the end of their next turn.

Requires: Reaction

Corruption: 1d6 temporary Corruption when activated



Erlaber Ambreagos

Medium human

Armor Class 13 (witch gown)

Hit Points 65 (10d8 + 20)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	17 (+3)	11 (+0)	19 (+4)

Skills Arcana +6, Deception +7, History +6, Insight +4, Investigation +6, Perception +3

Senses passive Perception 13

Languages Ambrian, Symbaroum

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

Manner big gestures, burning gaze

Shadow black flakes on smoldering white, like liquid iron starting to cool (4/14)

Equipment The codex for exaltation (page 10), the dagger Black Edge (adjacent)

Spellcasting. Erlaber is a sorcerer (spell attack +7, save DC 15) and he knows the following spells:

Cantrips: *acid splash* (0), *dancing lights* (0), *fire bolt* (0), *mage hand* (0), *minor illusion* (0), *prestidigitation* (0)

1st-level spells: *burning hands* (1d4 + 1), *disguise self* (1), *mage armor* (1)

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

3rd-level spells: *clairvoyance* (1d4 + 3), *larvae boil* (3)

4th-level spells: *black tentacles* (1d4 + 4), *dominate beast* (4)

5th-level spells: *dominate person* (1d4 + 5), *wall of stone* (5)

Rituals: *comprehend languages*, *exaltation*, *mending*

ACTIONS

Black Edge. *Magical Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d4 + 4) piercing damage (see textbox).

Exaltation

The spell being studied by Erlaber Ambreagos was developed during the days of Symbaroum, at a time when primal blight beasts were revered as gods. By accelerating and strengthening the effect Corruption has on human flesh and spirit, the spell works as a "portal to elevation and god-like potency." The original text is safely stored away in the monastery of the Twilight Friars and the existence of the ritual is not known outside the monastic order.

EXALTATION

3rd-level transmutation (ritual)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Touch

Components: V, S, M (the skull of Eox)

Duration: 1 minute

If the recipient of this spell resists, they can make a **Constitution saving throw** to avoid its effects. However, if they fail the saving throw (or willingly accept the spell's effect) they become resistant to any nonmagical damage, and any temporary Corruption that they gain during its duration is doubled.

HARVESTING A SKULL

A little less than a month ago, the sorcerer and cult leader Erlaber Ambreagos was contacted by a masked man who called himself the Prince. The man said he was impressed by Erlaber's work and persona, claiming to be well connected and to have vast resources at his disposal. The Prince was pondering the possibility of a deeper cooperation with the Midnight Cult, but wanted to test its leader first – with a test that, if successful, would make Erlaber into an even more valuable and capable companion.

Initially, Erlaber agreed to the offer mainly to learn what the shady figure had in mind. But the more questions were answered, the more doubts were put to rest. And in the end, there were no reasons to hesitate.

The Prince informed him of where he could find one of Davokar's mighty forest gods, a powerful spirit who had guarded its territory for centuries. Then Erlaber was presented with an ancient codex, containing a ritual that according to the Prince could elevate him into a "*co-existence with the powers of the Eternal Night*." The skull of the forest god was needed as a source of power during the ritual.

As if this was not enough, Erlaber was given resources to stage an expedition to the territory of the forest spirit. Beheading the peaceful ox-god proved to be easy, but killing

is was an entirely different matter. The cultists and the contracted mercenaries tried piercing it with their spears but the heart kept on beating; they hauled the headless carcass onto a flaming bonfire but it would not burn.

Finally they gave up and returned home with the sometimes ruminating, sometimes mooing skull in an iron chest. Thanks to a number of well-placed bribes they were able to enter Thistle Hold, where the chest was hidden from the world by casting *secret chest*.

When the adventure starts, two days have passed since the skull reached its new resting place and Erlaber Ambreagos is studying the codex he received from the Prince to learn the ritual. What neither he, nor his shady ally realizes, is that the effect which comes from performing the ritual is of a very particular nature. If performed according to the ancient instructions, combined with the power from Eox's skull, Erlaber will be reborn – as a very powerful, ravenously famished and not least furiously raging abomination.

THE IRON PACT REACTS

The autumn elf Teara-Téana counts among the more tempered members of the Iron Pact. She has reached the conclusion that the only chance there is to live up to the aim of the pact, "Nevermore!" is to convince the Ambrians of the dangers in violating the world at large, and Davokar in particular. She is also one of the elves who have assumed the responsibility of caring for the spirits roaming the region, among them the mighty Eox.

When Eox was beheaded she was involved in an argument with the increasingly erratic elf prince Eneáno. And as she later that day went to seek comfort and rest in Eox's presence, she found him butchered. With tears running in a vain attempt to cool her flaming hot cheeks, she spoke to the ashes in the coal bed of the dying creature. The impressions told her where the skull had been taken, and the sound of Eox's heart said that it must be recovered before long, if the proud ox was to have any chance to survive.

Her previous contact in the Hold, the tutor Master Vernam, was dead and her new agent was untested in critical situations. But as time was short, she had no alternatives, especially since the news of Eox's mutilation could make the more aggressive members of the Iron Pact do something really foolish and dangerous – as for instance staging an attack on the walled town of Mayor Nighthpitch.

She activated the agent Anadea and tasked her with assembling a group of trustworthy and capable individuals. The idea was that she and these people would track down and somehow manage to return with the skull of Eox. The overzealous human did what she was told, but in her eagerness to prove herself qualified she made a grave and fatal error: she took the initiative and went alone to

have a look at some of the places where she knew cultists might be hiding.

Unfortunately, the followers of Erlaber discovered the curious scout, so when Anadea meets with her potential

assistants at the start of the adventure, she and the player characters are watched by the cultists – something which will adversely affect their chances of safely moving around in Thistle Hold.

The Structure of the Adventure

WRATH OF THE WARDEN is divided into three clear and structurally different acts. The first act may very well be described as a lengthy and action packed prologue, while the rest of the adventure mainly unfolds in accordance with choices made by the player characters.

ACT I: THE BELL TOLLS

The opening of the game is meant to appear classic: the characters receive a message from a person who claims to be in need of help, asking them to hurriedly head for *The Fern*, a tavern at the center of town. Upon arriving they meet a woman who wants to be anonymous but who claims that she can fulfill their wildest dreams if they assist her in a highly dangerous but also critically important errand.

They are interrupted by the palisade's alarm bell, chiming for the first time in four years. The woman will not visit a place full of soldiers and town guards, but she asks the characters to find out what is going on. Loud creaks and crashes can be heard from outside the wall, as two witches riding on colossi approaches. The witch Gadramon asks guard captain Marvello if "the well has spoken." When he does not receive a meaningful answer, both witches retreat to the forest edge.

The player characters start their walk back to *The Fern* – then the well speaks!

A tremendous reverberating clang hits the town and the ground trembles. Screams of panic and pain are heard from where the characters are headed. A sinkhole has swallowed a whole block, and along with the buildings their mission giver has vanished, down into the Abyss.

On their way towards the sinkhole the characters confront several waves of monstrous, blight-marked humans who have emerged from the Underworld. They get to fight side-by-side with town guards and other capable residents who try their best to drive the blight beasts back. Among these individuals, several representatives of the power factions in town will present themselves.

Once the beastly barbarians have finally been forced back down the hole, barricades must be built around its edge and captain Marvello takes command – no one does anything until Nightpitch has been consulted. Any and all who try to force their way past the blockade will forever be banned from town!

And there the characters stand, not knowing the fate of the woman who promised to make their dreams come true...

The Part of The Prince

Agramai Kalfas (*The World of Symbaroum*, page 93) plays a very obscure role in this adventure, even if it was he who set the chain of events in motion. The player characters may come across the name The Prince on one single occasion, and then in a context where it is not clear that such a figure even exists. The fight of the characters is solely against Erlaber and his Midnight Cult – an encounter and a possible clash with Agramai will have to wait until future episodes of the adventure chronicle.

The codex given to Erlaber by The Prince contains the transcript of an ancient tome, found in the depths of Davokar and transported to the monastery of the Black Cloaks for study and safe storage. The same member of the Sacred of the Old Blood who copied the text and gave it to the leaders of the cult also gained information on the whereabouts of the spirit Eox, in conversations with a blight-marked explorer in the monastery dungeons. The task of verifying the information and testing the effects

of the ritual were awarded to Agramai Kalfas, who in turn passed it on to Erlaber. And he did so for a number of reasons:

First and foremost, he is glad to see someone other than himself as the first one to perform the ritual in practice, since its actual effects are shrouded in mystery. Secondly, he truly hopes that Erlaber will prove to be up to the task and that he will turn into a useful tool after having performed the ritual. And if anything should go horribly wrong, if Erlaber cannot control the power he is about to awaken, much will still be accomplished. Like most humans seduced by the corrupt powers of the world, Agramai is of the opinion that everything which causes chaos and destruction in the Ambrian realm is welcomed; he would argue that such events are helping people reach the conclusion that the powers of corruption cannot be destroyed – they have to become something the Ambrians command rather than combats!

ACT II: LAW OF NECESSITY

Given the situation, the player characters will likely try to establish the identity of the anonymous woman and learn who she worked for, if only in the hope of getting a chance to earn the objects, thaler, or services they were promised. Should they need other incentives, maybe the woman's speech about a threat to Thistle Hold can make them take action.

In any case, it is now up to the players and their characters to assume control and decide how the second act progresses. They have the whole town at their disposal. The chapter describing Act II is divided into sections that account for the other agents moving in and around the Hold – how they react to what has happened, what help they may be able to give the player characters, and what they want in return for information or services. Most space is devoted to Ordo Magica, the Sun Church and the Queen's Legation.

If the characters want to head down into the sinkhole, they will soon learn that Ordo Magica has been asked to examine the deep. Should they play their cards right it is possible for them to become the order's vanguard. During a dramatic and perilous journey down into the dark, they will come across the blight-marked witch Bayela, but most importantly: they will find the remains of their anonymous quest-giver and gain clues regarding her identity, maybe even learn her name – Anadea.

Up until a few months ago, Anadea was studying to become a priest of Prios, but she was kicked out after having had the audacity to question the validity in appointing the elves as the main enemy of the Sun God. She left the temple in a rage and her austere bedchamber has not been touched since then. In the trunk by the foot of her bed there are a couple of clues indicating who Anadea worked for. Deseba the Old can give the characters access to the chamber, provided that they perform a favor for her – they must eliminate the threat against Father Sarvola and his Mission House.

Also, in the archives of the Queen's Legation there is information to collect, so long as the characters are prepared to make an effort. The copper tablet on which Sarkomal's prophecy is inscribed is in town, carried by a trio of templars. Queen Korinthia regards herself as the rightful owner of the tablet but does not want to risk an open conflict with the Sun Church over it. For the characters to gain the information at hand, the agents of the Queen demand that they must lay claim to the copper tablet on Korinthia's behalf.

Aside from these three, five more factions that the characters can interact with are described – the witches outside the palisade, Mayor Nighthpitch and his administration, three sun knights that were seen fighting at the edge of the sinkhole, the nobles in the Hall of Knights and the Iron Pact cell led by Lysindra Goldengrasp. Also, even if they do not realize it themselves, the characters will soon become aware that their investigations make them into hunted quarries – the Midnight Cult will send everything from brutish thugs to skilled assassins in the hope of punishing their curiosity.

The act ends once the characters have enough information to be able to move on and contact Anadea's superior, Teara-Téana. They will have learnt that this person can be found at a place called The Halls of a Thousand Tears, and most likely that the one they seek is an autumn elf of the Iron Pact. Hence, the opening questions for the upcoming act are: where are these Halls of a Thousand Tears and how do we get there?

ACT III: MIDNIGHT IN THISTLE HOLD

The final act of the adventure is of a more linear structure. The first challenge is about finding someone in town who can help them reach the halls of the elves, and to convince one of these (Mayor Nighthpitch or the autumn elf Mearoel) to give them the information they need. After that, they must get a hold of a tame beast, because they require one as a guide on the journey.

Once they reach their destination, after a dramatic trek through Davokar, they will get a glimpse of the elven world, or more correctly of the only permanent elven settlement in the region. They arrive at a forechamber where they are greeted by the very old gatekeeper and two weepers. The rest of the halls are closed to them, but if they ask for Teara-Téana she appears after a lengthy wait.

Teara-Téana explains Anadea's mission and offers the player characters the chance to undertake it in her stead, although the reward cannot be as opulent as the human agent may have promised. Should the characters respond in the negative, the adventure comes to its end and someone else will have to deal with Erlaber and his cultists. But if they accept the offer, they are told that Anadea believed that she knew the skull's hiding place – it is high time to return to Thistle Hold and deal with the threat!

Back in town they first have to make sure that the information they have is correct and gain an idea of what they are up against. After having done that, the player characters are likely to conclude that they will have a hard time handling the enemy by themselves. Presumably, they will contemplate the possibility of joining up with one or more of the town's powerful factions. But which ones? Do they really dare take the risk of inviting one ally or another, who very well may decide to claim they skull for themselves?

After a thunderous final battle down in the sinkhole, where the cult leader has fled to make use of the dark powers of the bedrock, the first part of the *Chronicle of the Throne of Thorns* is all but over. Still undecided is what to do with the skull of Eox. If the players choose to reunite it with the rest of Eox's body, the epilogue entails a journey out into Davokar, possibly together with the witches Gadramon and Eferneya, to a meeting with the autumn elf Teara-Téana. Should they instead want to slay the forest god it can be done; perhaps that is the only valid choice for characters who are loyal to the Queen and her endeavor – the creature obviously represents a force which opposes the Ambrian realm's intrusions into Davokar.

The Player Characters

IN PRINCIPLE, *WRATH* of the Warden can be played with any kind of characters. The only actual requirements are as follows:

- ◆ They have adventured enough to be about 7th level.
- ◆ They are (right or wrong) moderately known for being capable and daring.
- ◆ They are (right or wrong) moderately known for having confronted and battled the corrupt powers of Davokar.

If the players start with completely new characters, it is suggested that they make characters of the expected level and are equipped with a background similar to the list above. However, the smoothest startup can be achieved by using characters who have played *The Mark of the Beast*, featured in the *Ruins of Symbaroum Adventure Compendium*, and been involved in finding Master Vernam's killer. *Wrath of the Warden* kicks off with the player characters being approached by Vernam's successor as the contact person of the Iron Pact member Teara-Téana; hence, if the player characters were engaged in the hunt for the tutor's murderer, it is quite natural that his successor reaches out to them when she needs help.

Since *Wrath of the Warden* is the first episode of the *Chronicle* and it is too early for the players to really know what conflicts and possible rewards are in play, you have to carefully consider the incentives of the player characters – that is, the motives they have for wanting to engage in the adventure and take on its challenges.

With the items listed below we hope that all characters will find the incentives they need. But since all gaming groups have different preferences, the Gamemaster must be prepared to modify the opening of the adventure. There is nothing more harmful to the gaming experience than players finding it incomprehensible that their player characters are forced to engage in situations that they really do not care about.

THE PROMISES OF ANADEA

When the characters speak to Anadea she claims to represent a very resourceful organization and encourages them to "name their price." It is important that the players really take the chance to spell out what their respective characters need to come closer to their ultimate goals. Anadea is desperate and will agree to almost anything – a large sum of thaler, a powerful artifact, arcane knowledge, access to a specific resource, leverage over or information on some other faction, and so forth. In this way, the players

themselves will manufacture the incentives for wanting to establish the identity of Anadea and learn who she worked for.

A SERIOUS THREAT

Even if Anadea never has time to explain the details of her mission, there will hardly be any question regarding the seriousness of the task. Thistle Hold is threatened, that much is clear. It will also be obvious that time is short and that Anadea is the only one in town who knows about the threat. For players/characters with the ambition to win fame and glory, that type of motivation can be just as important as ready rewards!

FRIENDS AND FAMILY

If the Gamemaster thinks that the goals and dreams of the characters are not incentives enough, help from outside can be employed. The player characters and their relations live in a tough world, and it is likely that they sometimes find themselves in a tight spot. Someone may have amassed a huge gambling debt and now live under threat; someone has been accused of a crime and is on the run; someone may be afflicted by a serious disease or suffer from blight-marks; someone may have gone missing after a failed expedition into Davokar.

Whatever the characters need Anadea, promises that her organization can help them deal with the situation. It may not be the absolute truth, even if she fully believes that the elves in the Halls of a Thousand Tears are capable and willing to do whatever it takes.

MOVING UP THE LADDER

Superiors within Ordo Magica, the Sun Church, the Army and other organizations may be in a position to give orders to characters involved in, or wanting to be involved in, their faction. There are many people in Thistle Hold who want the situation to be dealt with, one way or another. In other words, for characters wanting to move up the ladder this is a great opportunity to prove themselves, or conversely – a bad time to put other interests ahead of the faction's.

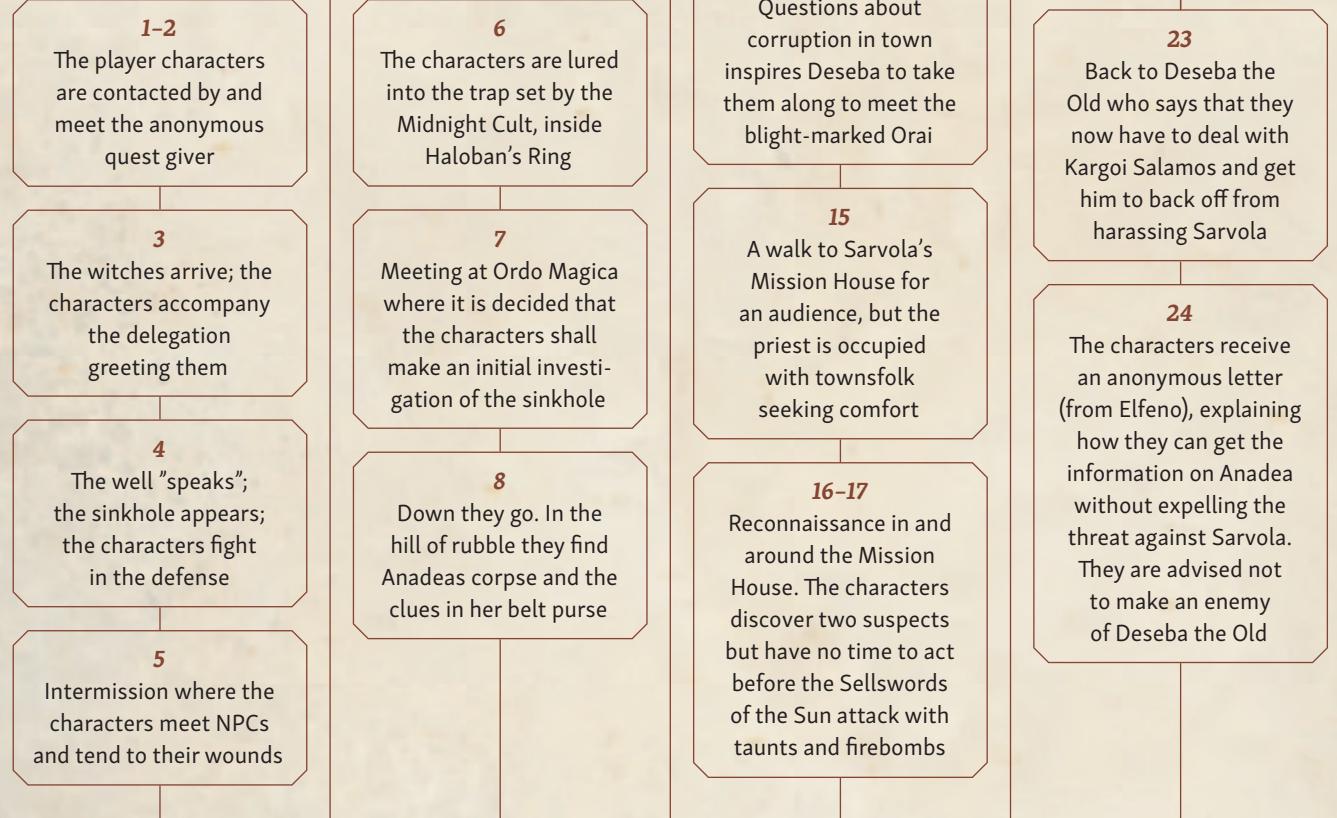
Note that the relationship between the characters and any superiors offer a perfect opening for highlighting conflicts in town and in the world at large. The commands made will likely force the characters to partake in a dirty game of intrigues, even when it obviously is played at the expense of the common good.

Adventure Timeline

Should the players in your group have a hard time taking the initiative, or if you as Gamemaster wish to have more control of the story, it is suggested that the characters are rapidly offered a quest-giver – one or more persons to guide them, help them analyze information, and tell them what to do next. This way, there is less risk of the story grinding to a halt, and preparations between gaming sessions should be quicker and more straightforward.

There are lots of people who may act as quest-givers in and around Thistle Hold. One example is the witches outside the palisade, but if the characters have already made contact with agents in town, there is nothing stopping them from finding some other guide. Lasifor Nighthpitch is one suitable candidate, Chapter Master Cornelio another, not least since both of these are relatively neutral when it comes to the dealings of other factions. Characters with a background as Pansars, wizards, theurges and so on have other obvious entrances into the adventure, through their contacts within the factions.

What follows shows a possible order in which the scenes of the adventure may play out, provided that the characters choose to adhere to the commands of an outside quest-giver. The Gamemaster is prompted to return to this flow chart after having read through the adventure text.





The Factions

LASIFOR NIGHTPITCH IS the unthreatened ruler of Thistle Hold. As Prince of the Realm, he has the authority of a duke over all who live and work in his walled domain, meaning that he literally has power over life, death, and all things in-between. The only external power he formally has to take into account is Queen Korinthia, who can decide to revoke all his authority whenever she likes. But as long as he does not give her any reason to do so, and as long as he is protected by the secrets he holds over the House of Kohinoor, Mayor Nightpitch is the town's undisputed ruler.

That is the formal side of things. On the other hand, if you take the kingdom's complicated power relations into account it may not appear so simple. The realm of Ambria is made up of many strong factions, that to some degree want very different things and that are all plagued by internal struggles. This means that the Queen has got more than her own mind and desires to consider and; furthermore, persons like Lasifor Nightpitch must be careful not to provoke other factions to the point where Korinthia needs to take sides. In the end, it all falls back on a fragile balance between different interests, and he who does not mind his manners may very well lose the protection of House Kohinoor or even become the target of its direct reprisals.

This part of the book presents six powerful factions working in Thistle Hold. The focus is on the factions' leading representatives, goals, internal struggles, and relation to each other. Aside from being a foundation on which to build homebrew adventures, the text is important for understanding the background of some of the challenges encountered during *Wrath of the Warden*.

NIGHTPITCH

Lasifor Nightpitch is not after power, nor does he crave more wealth than he already has. All that the war-weary veteran really longs for is safety and comfort, not only for himself but for all people in the region. On the other hand, he is a realist who understands that such a dream can never come true. All he can ever hope for is to ease the effects of the clash between Ambria and Davokar, and possibly to have some kind of influence on the strategies of the Queen and the High Chieftain thanks to the location of his town. In the end, it is all about getting the Ambrians to respect the taboos of the clanfolk. Lasifor has lived in Davokar long enough to see the correlation between human interference and growing Corruption. And he cannot believe that Queen Korinthia will not also be able to grasp the truth of the matter.

Both Yagaba and Ader Gorinder, Lasifor's right-hand-man at the Town Seat, know the Mayor's mind. There are no real tensions between the three, even if they do not always see eye to eye. The witch wants to do more to get the Ambrians to understand, but Lasifor says that his compatriots cannot be persuaded; that they must reach the right

conclusions by themselves. Ader wants to stop the trade in Symbarian artifacts and introduce a prohibition against visiting ruins in the Explorer's License, hoping to reduce the harm Ambrians do to Davokar. Lasifor basically agrees, but maintains that it is better that expeditions are planned and artifacts sold in the Hold under their supervision, than having such business relocated to Kastor or Blackmoor.

Nightpitch is careful not to antagonize the other factions – he wants to come off as allied to all and no one. The only things he cannot accept are sorcerers and others who welcome Corruption and use it to gain advantages for themselves. To such individuals he shows no mercy!

HOUSE KOHINOOR

The Queen's most important confidants in Thistle Hold are her legate, Suria Argona, the Law Commissioner Asmerda, and one of the captains of the Town Watch, called Dekamedo. Obviously, Suria is far from being so weak and incapable as people believe – she lets her father rant and misbehave while she devotes all her energy to carry out the Queen's commands. Asmerda was recruited already in year 13 to be the eyes and ears of the Crown in the Mayor's administration, although she is not always aware of Korinthia's true ambitions. One who knows everything is Dekamedo, in truth Akman Kohinoor who became orphaned as his father, Korinthia's cousin, and the rest of the family were attacked by robbers when crossing the Titans. He and a group of well-paid companions in the Town Watch act as the faction's extended arm when something needs to be dealt with.

The long-term goal of House Kohinoor is to use the abundance of Davokar to make Ambria so grand that it will make all legends of Symbaroum pale in comparison. But regarding Thistle Hold there are two primary aims: first, Korinthia needs to figure out where in Davokar the Twilight Thistle grows; once that is done Lasifor Nightpitch must die – partly because he knows that Queen Mother Abesina is actually undead, and partly because Korinthia wants to gain direct control over his town.

Asmerda is deeply involved in the search for the Thistle's growing place but knows nothing of the second part of the plan. She reveres Nightpitch and is already plagued by doubts making her put less effort than she could into the espionage mission. But if she learned that the very life of the Mayor is at risk things would go from bad to worse. The risk is that she would consider warning the intended victim and even side with him against the Queen.

Regarding the relations to other factions, Korinthia and her subordinates try to appear as friends and allies to everyone but the Iron Pact. However, in reality Korinthia regards all influential groups in the region as tools to employ in the endeavor to build a powerful and prosperous Ambria. If any faction starts to grow worryingly strong, she tries to

weaken it by cooperating with the internal opposition to its leaders – as for instance in the case of the Sun Church. But when it comes to the specific situation in Thistle Hold, House Kohinoor strives to keep a low profile, and will do so all the way until the town's mayor has passed on to the life hereafter.

THE NOBLES

Traditionally, the houses Argona, Vearra and Brigo are the ones closest in rank behind Kohinoor. House Brigo has always had good relations with the Queen's family, while Argona and Vearra have tried to seize the crown on numerous occasions throughout history.

With age, Alkantor Argona grows more and more desperate, but he is a skilled diplomat that seldom lets his feelings show. Lesena Vearra is more or less the same. Officially she is in town trying to satisfy her unquenchable thirst for adventure; in reality she has traveled to the border region in the hope of building new, and strengthening old, alliances and eventually putting a Vearra on the throne. Ana Herengol, the ruthless daughter of Field Marshal Beremo's sister, is secretly Alesaro Kohinoor's agent in the Hold. Her task is of course to promote the hero king Ynedar's brother as a more worthy monarch than Korinthia. Finally, Keroldo Erebus usually makes a huge impression when the nobles convene, though not in a very positive way. He is really not much more than a pleasure-seeking and lazy drunkard, scorned by the more prominent nobles.

When it comes to long-term goals, the nobles of the Hold are not nearly in agreement. Most, especially the ones with power, want to see Korinthia dethroned but have different ideas on who should succeed her – which is the main reason why they have not acted. On the other hand, several representatives of the smaller houses, not least Keroldo Erebus, love their Queen and ascribe to her almost godlike characteristics. In the end, there is only one thing they all can agree on: that Nightpitch has to attribute greater value to noble blood and make sure that Narugor's duke, the pretender Junio Berakka, keeps focusing on the threat from Davokar instead of meddling in the affairs of the true nobles.

The biggest internal conflict is about who is going to sit on the throne once its current owner has been pushed aside – will it be an Argona or a Vearra? Or will it be another Kohinoor; one who really knows the value of noble blood? To make things even more complicated, Count Edogai Brigo is trying to get his son Iasogoi to enter into play. So far the treasure hunter legend steers clear of the Hall of Knights, but he is not a youngster anymore and maybe he will soon be mature enough to abandon the path of the explorer and dive headlong into the intrigues.

On other conflicts, there are the tensions between House Erebus and the families who have their estates close to Thisle Hold. According to the latter, it is a shame that Korinthia allows Blackmoor to exist, and that view grows clearer and



Keroldo Erebus, not charming or nice but efficient as bailiff of Blackmoor and according to rumors a very skilled dancer.

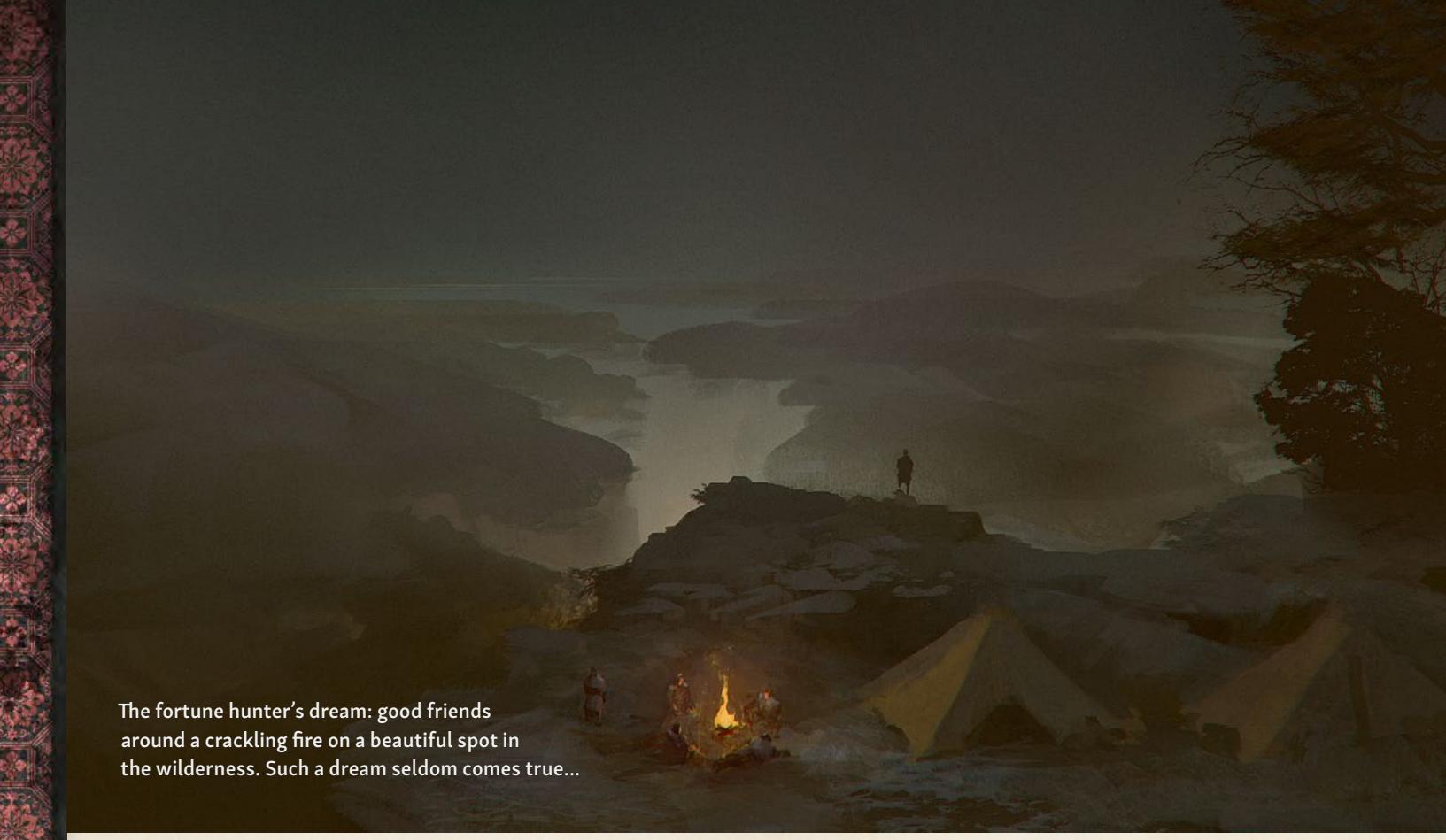
clearer every time its bailiff behaves like a scoundrel in the Hall of Knights.

Religion permeates the assemblies in the Hall of Knights and all nobles are keen to show themselves being true to Prios' commandments. They are also cautious not to offend House Kohinoor; they profess their allegiance to the Crown on a daily basis and all discussions suggesting anything else are held behind closed doors with trustworthy companions – excluding the likes of Keroldo Erebus and Duke Junio's representative in the Hold, his son Davidos Berakka.

According to the official stands of the nobles, only the Iron Pact is to be seen as an unambiguous enemy. Off the record, all other factions, including the elves, are nothing more than potential pawns in the play for power and wealth. In that spirit, House Vearra has for instance initiated a close collaboration with the First Father, promising that the Sun God's influence would increase if anyone of their House sat on the throne.

THE PRIESTHOOD

Despite the troublesome Sarvola, the Sun Church has got a firm hold on the town residents. First Theurg Elfeno is rightly both admired and feared, not least for his whole-hearted love for Prios and the force he puts behind his words. Prior Emundi of the Twilight Friars is also liked, even if he is seldom seen on the streets of town. When he entered through the South Gate for the very first time, he exclaimed that he had come to the place that best exemplifies Prios' determination to subdue and cultivate the wilds – words still proudly remembered by the populace. However, it should be clarified that none of the aforementioned is the strongest representative of the church in town. In the copper dome of the Sun Temple lives Deseba the Old



The fortune hunter's dream: good friends around a crackling fire on a beautiful spot in the wilderness. Such a dream seldom comes true...

- the only person ever to be appointed Lightbringer before death, after having miraculously healed both Korinthia and Jeseebegai right after the Queen was rescued from the fortress of the Dark Lords.

The Sun Church's representatives in Thistle Hold have no political goals in common. They work hard to spread the word of Prios, to help the people in their ambition to explore Davokar, and to keep the town free from Corruption. Regarding Sarvola, Deseba has ordered her subordinates to ignore him, under the pretext of wanting to avoid conflicts with Mayor Nightpitch - an edict that both Elfeno and Emundi have reluctantly accepted. Hence, the misdeeds that now and then affect the apostate are not orchestrated by the temple or the monastery, but by radicals among the commoners.

The most serious conflict within the church has to do with the interpretation of Prios' commands. The current reading, which grew dominant during The Great War, describes Prios as strict, merciless and bellicose. According to older interpretations, from whence Prios was but one of many Gods, he is loving, compassionate and peaceful. Those who speak for the latter reading are growing in numbers, but aside from the impatient Sarvola they bide their time until the Queen can give them her full support. In Thistle Hold, Elfeno suspects that Deseba is not completely loyal to the First Father. The Theurg wants to be freed from the influence of the Old but will not take part in any conspiracies, especially since Jeseebegai trusts the Lightbringer completely.

About relations to other factions, there is no doubt that the priests of the Sun Church owe their allegiance to Prios.

The other factions' quarrels and intrigues belong to the mundane; the duty of the priests is to make everyone accept the commands of the Lawgiver. But then again, it is far from unlikely that when two mundane factions clash, the priests are going to support the party whose ambitions best serve the aims of Prios. It should also be said, that for the majority represented by the First Father, the Iron Pact embody the power of evil. The elves and their conspirators must be captured and set on fire!

THE IRON PACT

The Iron Pact is run from a secret location in the Underworld called the Halls of a Thousand Tears, the only permanent Elven settlement in Davokar. For centuries they only had the clans and some single, spontaneously awakened abominations to worry about. But with the arrival of the Ambrians they are up against a superior power that does not realize the gravity of the problems it causes, for themselves and others. Faced with this threat, the leaders of the pact have reacted in different ways. The most peaceable ones claim that their only chance is to help the Ambrians understand; others stress that the battle is already lost and aim to cause the enemy as much harm as possible before the end.

The experiences of the former treasure hunter Lysindra Goldengrasp (page 75) have led her to the conclusion that the elves and the witches are correct - the woods must be left in peace or else Ambria will end up as the realm of the Dark Lords. She does not trust Korinthia or anyone else to be able to accept the truth, and she is prepared to do anything in her

power to sabotage the projects of both treasure hunters and explorers. To aid her she has the autumn elf Mearoel and a group carefully chosen, previous explorer colleagues that have reached the same conclusion. The elf and the human agents are hidden in a warehouse close to the palisade where she used to store her exploration gear.

Aside from the continuous interference with the Hold's trade in Symbarian artifacts, Lysindra and Mearoel have two main goals. First, they aim to burn the town to the ground, something they have already started to prepare by hiding barrels of flammable liquids in the district surrounding the Queen's Square. When that has been accomplished, they need the Iron Pact to agree on a more aggressive strategy – together with human collaborators in the border region, the elves and their allies could gain information about and stop all expeditions journeying out into the woods. And if that would make the Queen send her army into Davokar, then maybe also the clans could be persuaded to rally behind the High Chieftain and engage in the battle.

Up until the first part of the plan has been implemented, they leave the authorities in town alone. But as soon as Thistle Hold is on fire, neither Nightpitch, nor Suria Argona or the venerable Prior Emundi goes safe!

ORDO MAGICA

Even though its magisters and masters do not like to admit it, Ordo Magica is a powerful faction. Grand Master Seldonio is loyal to the Queen and demands of his subordinates that they work for the glory and enrichment of the realm – a stance fully adopted by Chapter Master Cornelio. However, among the members of the order there are also many who put their own betterment and development above all else. Among these are, for instance, the order masters Eufrynda and the newly arrived Kullinan Furia (page 38). The latter is at least as old and powerful as the Grand Master himself; he belongs to a group of wizards who survived the War and who want to return to an arrangement where Ordo Magica is more independent of the Crown. Kullinan has come to Thistle Hold to study Corruption and its effects, and to examine its potential as a source of power.

The aim of the order is to generate knowledge, and to do so focusing on that which benefits the grand civilization project of Korinthia. In the new and promised land there is still much to learn – knowledge which is of the utmost importance if the Ambrians are to gain mastery over Davokar. The Symbarian ruins are secondary, at least according to the strategy established by Chapter Master Cornelio; the primary aim must be to make sense of the vegetation and inhabitants of the forest!

Eufrynda fumes and calls this the strategy of a coward. And she has both Master Goncai and the newcomer Kullinan on her side – the former because he is seriously infatuated with her, the latter since he wants to seek out any and all



Eufrynda is said to have the sharpest mind in town, but whomever meets her at the Salons of Symbaroum after dark has reasons to doubt it.

sources of Corruption. But when the strategy of the Chapter Master is based on the commands of Seldonio, Eufrynda must go behind Cornelio's back when diverting from the plan. Not that she minds, but it certainly makes everything much more strenuous. Her only comfort is that the arrival of Kullinan has made it easier for her to handle Cornelio when he finds her out.

As a faction and organization, Ordo Magica can collaborate with anyone, provided that it renders knowledge which is beneficial to the kingdom. They obviously cannot enter into public ventures with the Iron Pact, but agreements can actually be reached if they promote the interests of both parties – like when the order temporarily teamed up with an Elven warband to battle the Abomination at Clear Water. And when it comes to the so far secretive cult The Sacred of the Old Blood (see page 118), three Masters and a handful of novices are already initiated, but none of those can be found in Thistle Hold. However, Kullinan Furia's curiosity on the dark powers of Davokar may very well mean that he will eventually be met with an offer...

Kullinan's Future

Note that Kullinan Furia will reappear in episode three of the chronicle, then as the main antagonist of the player characters. For that purpose, it would be appropriate for the characters to meet him during their time in Thistle Hold, but without them becoming very closely acquainted. For more on this, see *Ordo Magica*, page 38.

ACT I:

The Bell Tolls

The opening act of the adventure can rightly be described as “railroaded.” The term means that the developing events are directed by a number of predetermined scenes, trailing each other like stations along a railroad track. Exactly what happens between the stations is not decided beforehand, nor is the time it will take to travel from station to station. But basically, everyone playing the adventure will experience the same situations in roughly the same sequence, provided that you as a Gamemaster do not decide to alter or add to what is written below.

Game Opening

IT IS ADVISED that the player characters are in Thistle Hold when the game begins. Blackmoor is also an alternative, as are other villages and sites close to the Hold, provided that they have been stationary for a while and that they are not trying to hide or make themselves unapproachable.

It is early morning when there is a knock on the door, or doors if the player characters are scattered. When opening they see a tiny goblin girl outside, literally with her hat in hand – a filthy, red and grey cap. She makes an awkward attempt at being courteous, then hands over a leather-dressed, tube-shaped capsule and extends her palm with a grin. She knows nothing of the one who offered her the delivery job, aside from it being a human woman with her face obscured by the deep hood of a cape.

There is a letter in the tube:

*Dear soon to be friend,
Meet me with haste at the Fern Tavern in the district northwest
of the intersection Ynedar's Road/The Promenade. My errand is
urgent and of a nature best discussed eye to eye. Of you and your*

*friends I ask only that you take a leap of faith and that you listen
to my proposal. In return, I promise to not disappoint. I and the
people I represent have vast resources and are prepared to offer
a royal compensation for your services.*

Optional Intro

The seemingly classical intro (the mysterious letter) may not suit all gaming groups, even if it is followed by a twist (the quest-giver's death). If this is the case, you can start the adventure with the ringing of the alarm bell and then have the leader of some faction (Mayor Nightpitch, Master Cornelio or Father Elfeno, for example) ask the characters to find Anadea down in the sinkhole. The quest-giver knows nothing about her, except that they were supposed to meet to talk about an alarming threat to the town.

Whispers for Breakfast

THE FERN TAVERN lays at the center of the block north of Ynedar's Road, west of the Promenade. It is located in the bottom floor of a three-story building and is just about big enough to house six round tables with four chairs each. The interior decoration is plain – the only items standing out are the bronze candlesticks on the tables, shaped like meandering snakes with candles in their maws.

As the characters arrive, the door is ajar. Through the crack they can see a lone figure, sitting by a table at the back of the tavern, illuminated by a flickering candle flame. It is a woman in her thirties, dressed in a simple bone-white wool

tunic and a dark brown cloak. She spends the wait picking her fingernails with a sturdy knife.

When the characters make themselves known she stands up, with a wordless gesture asking them to come closer. She smiles but a successful **DC 13 Wisdom (Insight)** check reveals that she seems to be very nervous – drops of sweat gleam on her forehead despite the tavern being just as chilly as the street outside.

How the conversation proceeds mainly depends on the characters' demeanor. If they act hostile or suspicious Anadea starts doubting that they are suited to be her assistants,



**With anxious eyes but a steady voice
she awaits at the Fern Tavern.**

but she will not leave the place until she really feels threatened. She is not willing to answer any questions about herself or the nature of the mission until she is more or less convinced that it will be possible to reach an agreement. Before then she says nothing more than the following:

- ◆ The reason why she contacted them is that credible sources have assured her that they are skilled and hold no love for the dark aspects of Davokar. She would like them to both confirm and exemplify this assumption.
- ◆ What she needs assistance with is highly dangerous and related to Davokar's darkness.
- ◆ The situation is dire and requires haste. She estimates that she has less than five days to sort out the mess. Failure will result in hundreds of dead in and around Thistle Hold, and quite probably doom the entire town.
- ◆ So far, she is the only one in town who knows about the threat, and so it must remain because of the particular nature of the crisis.

- ◆ In order to assure herself that she has got the right persons in front of her, she poses a question to the player characters, disguised as an offer. Before saying anything else about the task she asks them to “name their price,” in other words to tell her what they want in exchange for their help.

In reality, the invitation is an attempt to learn what kind of persons she is dealing with, but as long as no one in the party wishes for something implying that he or she is attracted by sorcery or nourishes a burning hatred for elves she will respond with phrases like “that should be possible to arrange” or “no problem, we have that covered.” Should any character ask her for an item or a service which makes Anadea suspicious, she wrinkles her forehead and says “yes, maybe...” intent on returning to that person with follow-up questions later. But she will never have time to do that.

Once the final character is stating his or her demands, a lone bell is heard chiming. Anadea raises her head and if none of the characters have lived in Thistle Hold for long she can inform them that it is the alarm bell by the North Gate that tolls – for the first time in more than four years! Shouting voices are heard from outside. People are moving towards the Promenade. The woman at the table goes pale and whispers to herself: “The elves...”

Of course, Anadea believes that the news of Eox’s death has reached one or more bellicose sections within the Iron Pact and that they have come to make war. If the characters do not take the initiative, she will ask them to head for the palisade and see what is going on – she will speak nothing more of the task until the situation becomes clearer, but she promises to wait for them by the table. For her part, she says she would do best to avoid places swarming with guards and soldiers...

Once out on the street, the characters hear the hurried clanking of armored boots. The Town Watch and a part of the garrison in the Hold are heading for the North Gate.

To the Rescue

THE RESIDENTS IN a town like Thistle Hold are a hardy bunch, which now becomes apparent. Instead of being intimidated by the alarm bell, they are drawn north like a flock of vioings towards a carcass.

By the northern gate house stands Captain Marvello, ordering a growing number of town guards to push people away from the closed gates. The only ones to be let through are the few Queen’s rangers who currently have Thistle Hold as their base of operations. The bystanders reluctantly back away, and many among them are not content standing down on the Toad’s Square but try to reach the battlement of the palisade or the roof of one of the buildings that are high enough to compete with the thirty-foot-high wall.

Depending on the attribute values of the characters there are different ways to get a good view of what is happening. A character can make a **DC 15 Strength (Athletics)** check to make way so the party can move through the crowd and reach the battlements; a character might make a **DC 15 Dexterity (Acrobatics)** check to climb to a roof and throw down a rope for the others to use. However they do it, the Gamemaster should allow them to get a clear view of the area north of the town.

Shortly after the characters have found their spot, loud creaking and crashing is heard from the forest edge, about two hundred paces away. The silence that settles among the assembled quickly turns into a collective inhalation when the

1 WRATH OF THE WARDEN

The witches Gadramon and Eferneya arrive riding on their colossi – a sight that both frightens and upsets the residents of town.



cause of the alarm emerges – two colossi, at least the height of three men, like enormous oxen but with bodies made from plant fibers instead of from flesh and muscles. Standing on their backs are two barbarian witches, dressed in multicolored felt dresses and with primitive masks covering their faces.

The colossal mounts come to a halt about fifty paces from the palisade. Down in the square, the captain has watched the whole thing through a gate hatch and reached the conclusion that this is not an assault. Instead he starts putting together a delegation to walk out and meet with the witches. The player characters have a chance to join the group if they wish.

Marvello roars that aside from an escort of ten town guards he needs companions with the following characteristics or traits:

- ◆ A scholar or local who knows the barbarian tongue
- ◆ A representative of Ordo Magica
- ◆ A representative of the Sun Church
- ◆ A representative of the town or the Ambrian realm

Since the situation has evolved so suddenly and because far from everyone present in or by the Toad's Square feels tempted to participate in the delegation, there are not many volunteering for the task. But should one or more of the player characters step forward and offer their services they still have to convince Marvello that they are learned and/or prominent enough to represent the people of the Hold. To

succeed, a character must make a **DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check**. A character with the Loremaster feature or the appropriate contacts has advantage on the check.

It is enough for one person to succeed for the whole group to be invited to tag along, if that is what they truly want. Should all of them fail the check or if they refrain from trying, they are simply left to observe the meeting between the witches and the delegation from afar.

As soon as the welcoming committee is assembled, the North Gate opens and Captain Marvello starts walking. The witches remain still, waiting on the backs of their colossi. The procession stops a few paces away and Marvello turns to his interpreter. If this is one of the player characters, they are left to handle the conversation with the witches – Marvello seems to understand what is said but is unable to converse in the barbarian tongue.

The interpreter is ordered to welcome them to the Ambrian realm, whereby one of the witches nods in response and presents himself as Gadramon, sent by Yeleta, the Huldra of Karvosti (a character with the Loremaster feature knows that one of the Huldra's closest helpers bears that same name). After that, the interpreter is asked to learn why they have come. Gadramon responds with a counter-question: "*Has the well spoken?*" When no one seems to comprehend what the witch refers to, he sternly comments: "No answer is answer enough."

The witch then asks for passage into the town and when asked why he says that they are here to help and that “*the Huldra fears that a very potent source of corruption dwells at the heart of Thistle Hold.*” More he cannot say. Gadramon claims that time is short and when Marvello states that he is not able to give representatives of the Huldra passage without the express permission of Mayor Nighthpitch, the witch stresses that such permission must be granted right now. In the meantime, he and Eferneya will return to the forest edge and wait.

The meeting is over and Marvello orders the procession back to the palisade. When inside, the gates slam shut and the captain leaves a sergeant in command as he bolts off towards Nighthome and an audience with the Mayor.

The Well Speaks

SHORTLY AFTER THE delegation’s meeting with the witches, that which Gadramon asked about happens. The bronze well of Thistle Hold is actually a mystical warning device from the days of Symbaroum. When a powerful source of Corruption is in the vicinity (as, in this case, the skull of a savagely decapitated forest spirit), the inflow of the well is cut off and the water level starts to descend. When the level is low enough, two metal spheres attached to the outside of the well-pipe are released, and falls like two giant clappers towards the metal pipe. The reason why it has taken a couple of days for the bell to chime is two-fold – first, the ancient device is not totally watertight which means that the water level descends slower than intended; secondly, the mystical powers once instilled in the well have become unpredictable with time.

When the spheres hit the bronze pipe of the well it generates a sound which makes the ground shake and the area resound with a clangor so powerful that many who are on or close to the Antique Plaza are hurt by the blast. Even those standing further away are at risk of suffering damage. If the player characters are within the Hold’s palisade, they all have to make a **DC 15 Constitution saving throw**. A failure means that they suffer 1d8 bludgeoning damage, from burst eardrums, gushing nose bleeds, and bloodshot eyes. The worst cases start coughing up blood due to internal bleedings.

And just when the residents start coming to their senses, the next sinister sound is heard: First a mighty crack, as if the ground was twisting in pain, and shortly thereafter a cacophony of bangs, rumbles, and panicked screams. Wherever the characters may be, they will soon see a dust cloud rise from the center of Thistle Hold – more precisely from the district housing the *Fern* Tavern.

It is assumed that the characters will start running towards the area and meet the series of challenges described below. Should they instead do something else (for instance

The Law of Compliance

When playing railroaded sections there is a risk that the Gamemaster feels a need to force the players’ movements. This is not the case. It is the scenes and the overall events of the adventure that are railroaded, not the actions of the characters. If the players, for instance, want to visit the witches before returning to the *Fern*, let them do so – the sounding of the well (see below) will in that case occur once they have arrived at the forest edge and greeted Gadramon. And should the characters at an earlier stage decide to remain at the tavern when the alarm bell chimes, that should also be allowed and turned into a challenge. Maybe you will make them roll a **Perception** or **Nature check** to realize that a sinkhole is about to appear where they are standing? Maybe they will have time to run far enough to be able to save themselves with a successful **Dexterity saving throw**, or at least so far that a similar saving throw will let them grab onto the sloping side of the hole? The players should never feel that their characters are unable to follow their own minds, so long as you make sure that the major events take place and that the characters do not miss out on any essential information!

make a run for it or stay hidden) they are of course allowed to do so – nothing of what happens on the way to the sinkhole must be experienced directly; it can be retold by others at a later time. However, this would mean that the characters miss the opportunity to meet and acquaint themselves with some key figures of the adventure, which may make things more difficult later on.

CHILDREN OF THE ABYSS

When the characters close in on the place where the *Fern* used to be, they meet hundreds of people running in the opposite direction, all of them terrified. Many are crying, most are covered in dust; some are limping or applying pressure to open wounds, others are bleeding from their nose and/or eyes.

The destruction is monumental. Deeper into the dust they can even notice fights between survivors, desperate people climbing over each other to get away. A successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check** reveals that the fights are something other than desperate residents struggling to survive. The survivors are under attack, from something unnatural!

If the characters do not state that they will try to avoid all places where fights are being fought, they will be introduced in two waves to the horror unleashed by the sinkhole:

Dawdling Energies

The mystical power infused in the alarm contraption has not lost any of its potency. However, it is afflicted by a phenomenon also observed at other locations in the Davokar region – it seems as if the power has become unpredictable, some might even say indolent or lazy. In short: if a powerful source of Corruption would have appeared shortly after the contraption was created, it would have reacted immediately. Now, over a thousand years later, it is not as quick to respond.

The First Wave: On their way through the dust-filled air, the characters will witness how the residents of the Hold are attacked by beastly abominations. At each encounter they get a round to prepare for combat – or, if they prefer another strategy, to turn onto a side-street and avoid the fight while continuing forth.

- ◆ From a distance, the characters see two youngsters surrounded by monsters. One of them is caught and dragged away. The other is tackled to the ground and a **clan beast** jumps onto his chest, stabbing him again and again. The characters cannot reach the fight in time to save his life.
- ◆ Two **clan beasts** are approaching an Ambrian woman wielding nothing but a broomstick, standing legs apart over what could be her mother. The old one has fallen to the ground; a man tries to get her up but is effectively hindered by four terrified children clinging on to his arms and legs. The woman with the broomstick seems intent on fighting, for the life of herself, her family and her town. But there is no doubt that these people will suffer a horrible death if the player characters do not hurry to the rescue.
- ◆ A man comes staggering out of an alley and seeks shelter behind the characters. After him comes two **clan beasts**, hopefully quickly dealt with by the player characters. When the fight is over, the man thanks them with a wheezing voice and asks: “*You are fortune hunters?*” Whatever they answer he continues: “*If you ever have artifacts for sale, ask for Master Erlaber at the Antique Plaza and I will give you a nice price.*” After a short nod he limps away and vanishes into the dust.

After these skirmishes, the characters encounter the biggest challenge of the first wave. The onrushing enemies are monstrous **clan beasts** that show no mercy, and **Beast Clan warriors** (next page) who primarily are trying to provide the clan with able-bodied slaves. The group is made up of two **clan beasts** for each character and a **Beast Clan warrior** for each.

Clan Beasts

Sniffs the air, gurgling greedily

The raging creatures called clan beasts are all human beings corrupted and twisted by the use of the *flesh craft* spell (next page). All of them are wearing iron slave collars and are more or less physically deformed. All display damning blight-marks of a beastly kind – fur-like hair growth, predatory jaws, yellow cat or snake eyes. Also, they suffer from a hunger for lukewarm flesh.

Tactics: Attacks the closest target they see and takes no prisoners.

Clan Beast

Medium abomination

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 34 (4d8 + 16)

Speed 30 ft

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	17 (+3)	18 (+4)	10 (+0)	13 (+1)	9 (-1)

Saving Throws Constitution +4, Wisdom +3

Skills Athletics +4, Perception +3

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened

Senses passive Perception 13

Languages those it knew in life

Challenge 1 (200 XP, proficiency bonus +2)

Manner growling, sniffing, clawing

Shadow black as night (thoroughly corrupt)

Equipment Slave collar (causes intense pain if the wearer attacks members of the Beast Clan.)

Rage (3/day). As a bonus action, the clan beast can enter a rage that lasts for 1 minute. While in the rage, the clan beast has advantage on Strength checks and saving throws. When it makes a melee weapon attack it adds 2 bonus damage. The flagellant has resistance to bludgeoning, piercing and slashing damage while in the rage. The rage ends early if the clan beast ends its turn without having attacked a hostile creature since its last turn or taken damage since then. It can also use a bonus action to end the rage.

ACTIONS

Bone Blade or Club. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) slashing or bludgeoning damage and 2 (1d4) temporary Corruption.

REACTIONS

Retaliate. When a creature within its reach does damage to the clan beast, it can make a single melee attack in response.

Beast Clan Warriors

"For Haloban, for Helionor, revenge tastes of human flesh!"

The warriors of the Beast Clan are fleshcrafted humans who have undergone the spell without becoming thoroughly corrupt. They look very much like their beastly companions, but carry armor, stand more erect and are more tactical in their actions. Unlike the clan beasts they also have the ability to speak.

Tactics: The warriors let the clan beasts move in first. After having applied poison to their natural weapons they join the fight in places where they have the possibility to flank the enemy.

Beast Clan Warrior

Medium human

Armor Class 16 (crown armor)

Hit Points 45 (6d8 + 18)

Speed 30 ft.

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

Skills Athletics +6, Perception +4, Stealth +4,

Survival +4

Senses passive Perception 14

Languages Barbarian

Challenge 2 (450 XP, proficiency bonus +2)

Manner raging and roaring

Shadow dark purple streaked by black, pulsating veins (3/4)

Equipment 2 doses poison (weak)

Apply Poison (2/day). The clan warrior can use its bonus action to coat its natural weapon with poison. This adds 1d6 poison damage to a successful attack. The poison effect lasts for 1 minute or until the weapon does damage once, whichever occurs first.

Cumbersome Armor. The clan warrior has disadvantage on Dexterity checks.

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

ACTIONS

Bone Blade or Club. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 4) slashing or bludgeoning damage.

REACTIONS

Parry. The clan warrior can use its natural weapons to defend itself. It can add +2 to its armor class against one attack.

Accepting the Offer

During the events at the sinkhole, the player characters may happen to save the life of Erlaber Ambreagos (see item 3 under *The First Wave*, previous page). At this stage, Erlaber has no idea who the characters are and is in the area only in the hope to get a glimpse of the sinkhole. Should the characters accept his offer and ask for him at the Antique Plaza sometime during the adventure, the one they are talking to (for example the barbarian Elda, *Gamemaster's Guide*, page 28) can tell them where he lives. If they ask for more information he will be described as "*an ambitious and educated loremaster with an interest in the grotesque.*" At his house they find that no one is home and a neighbor can inform them that Erlaber has not been seen since the sinkhole appeared. Maybe the poor antique dealer happened upon more predatory Clan Beasts after he said thanks and goodbye to the characters...

Flesh Craft

This forbidden spell is known to only a few sorcerers who typically use it on their slaves or other unfortunate subjects.

FLESH CRAFT*

4th-level transmutation

Casting Time: 1 minute

Range: Touch

Components: V, S

Duration: Until dispelled

This spell twists the recipient into a new shape chosen by the caster, which must be roughly of the same size. It is often used to transform forearms into bone blades or spiked bone clubs, and, as a side effect, cause one or more horn-like outgrowths on the cranium and tufts of bestial hair to grow on the skin. If the recipient fails a **Wisdom saving throw**, it also becomes charmed by the caster while the spell is in effect. No matter what, the recipient gains 1d8 temporary Corruption. If this causes the recipient to exceed its Corruption Threshold with permanent Corruption then it gains the Blight-born Template (*Bestiary*, page 120) but it does not increase in size, instead gaining the Rage feature (*Bestiary*, page 218).



Serex Attio launches at the enemies with his head booming from a terrible hangover. Poor, poor Clan Beast!

The Second Wave: During the final turn of the fight described above, a larger gathering of enemies arrives. Fortunately, reinforcements appear when the situation is about to overwhelm the characters – in the form of the brothers **Leohan, Hen-Loan** and **Venhal Mekele** (page 68). The three templars enter combat, their weapons burning with holy rage and voices echoing with the power of Prios.

The second wave consists of **clan beasts** (as many as the PCs) and (half the number of PCs) **Beast Clan warriors**. The characters must handle half of them, rounded up; the rest are dealt with by the templars.

After the battle, the brothers accompany the characters to the sinkhole. However, should the characters stay to examine the fallen enemies, the knights will move on, not bothering with the details: “abominations are abominations, and there are more to kill.”

A character that succeeds at a **DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) check** can reach a terrifying conclusion from studying the fallen clan beasts: There seems to be a purpose behind the monstrous deformations of these human bodies, as if they have been blight-born in a conscious and controlled manner.

A mystic that succeeds at a **DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana) check** can provide further insight. There exist obscure references to spells said to channel corruption and its effects into living bodies. Such flesh-craft belongs to the worst kind of sorcery.

AT THE RIM OF THE SINKHOLE

A terrifying sight awaits the characters. A sinkhole, just about eighty paces across, has opened up and swallowed almost the whole block (page 31). Aside from a growing number of town guards, the wizards **Kullinan Furia** and **Eufrynda** are

there (page 38 and 19). A dozen town guards lay on the ground along with a couple of Beast Clan warriors.

It is worryingly quiet and calm around the gaping hole. An energetic guard sergeant has ordered his troops to start building a barricade along the rim. The work entails blocking off all streets, alleys, windows, and doors facing the sinkhole, but it is far from completed. The characters can hear guards murmuring to each other:

“Honestly, do you think this will help? If they return, those... well, whatever they are, those creatures...”

“Never mind what they are! I say, keep building and kill all that show up!”

“Did you see? What they did!? They... dragged people down; didn’t even kill them, they just took them!”

The wizards are standing at one side, next to a fallen Beast Clan warrior, conversing in whispers. If the characters come closer the pair looks up. Eufrynda speaks for the two but has not much more to add to what the characters can figure out by themselves. The wizards have had about the same experiences that the characters had while moving through the dust, except that they reached the site in time to see how the beastly enemy hauled kidnapped residents down into the Abyss.

The conversation does not last long before Kullinan Furia silences anyone present with a solemn “shush!” First nothing but the occasional sounds of rubble falling is heard from the deep, accompanied by creaks from the bedrock. However, anyone standing by the rim and who has a **passive Perception of 13 or higher** will soon hear the sound of clicking and scraping, as if something is clawing up the walls of the

hole. A round later, each character should make a **DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check** (those who heard the earlier noises have advantage on the check); success is enough to register the oncoming danger – a hoard of humanoid but horribly twisted creatures that rush towards the surface with the aid of their long bone-claws. Those who fail this check are surprised.

The next round they reach the top. A careless town guard standing at the shadow side of the hole becomes the first victim, as she is pulled by the leg and falls into the dark screaming.

The enemy appears all along the rim. The combat of the player characters is handled separately, in concert with all other fights around them. The combat is over once the characters either win or make a run for it.

The enemies the characters must deal with during the fight at the sinkhole consist of a **clan beast** for each character, a **Beast Clan warrior** for each character along with a leader in the form of a **Beast Clan guardian** (below). First up the wall are the **Beast Clan guardian**, two **Beast Clan warriors** and two **clan beasts**. The following turn they are joined by two **beasts** and two **warriors**. Any remaining **warriors** arrive in the third round and remaining **beasts** at the start of the fourth.

Note that the members of the Beast Clan never stop to deal any killing blows, so even if the player characters should fall they have a chance to crawl to safety. There are two panicked priest initiates that will stabilize the character and provide a Herbal Cure (*Player's Guide*, page 182) to each character. For what happens next, this outcome counts as if the characters escaped or lost.

Beast Clan Guardian

Medium human

Armor Class 20 (hard skin, see below)

Hit Points 104 (11d8 + 55)

Speed 30 ft

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	15 (+2)	20 (+5)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)	13 (+1)

Skills Athletics +9, Intimidation +4, Perception +6,

Stealth +5, Survival +6

Senses passive Perception 16

Languages Ambrian, Barbarian

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

Manner proud, indifferent, superior

Shadow scaly and greasy like a blackish green snake-skin (6/7)

Equipment

Acidic Blood. Another creature that attacks the guardian with a melee weapon takes 4 (1d8) acid damage and 2 (1d4) temporary Corruption from its blood spattering onto their body.

Hard Skin. The guardians are flesh-crafted to have natural armor. Their armor class includes this effect.

The Goal of the Beast Clan

When the sinkhole appeared, a path was opened between the surface and the underground halls where the Beast Clan has been hiding for over a decade. The clan's leader, Helionor, immediately realized that she and her people had to flee, which is why she chose to thwart an (in her mind inevitable) attack from above by sending her horde to push the enemy back from the rim of the sinkhole. In that way she hopes to gain time enough for the clan to pack their belongings and begin the long walk towards a safer location inside Davokar. If/when the attack on the surface turns in their favor, she orders her troops to plunder the area and to take slaves and provisions from the hated town of the hated Ambrians.

Beast Clan Guardians

"Spare their lives! They will slave for Helionor or be eaten!"

The most prominent flesh-crafts of the clan are given the title *guardian* and act as chieftain Helionor's officers in combat. They have all proven to withstand the Corruption of the sculpting and are therefore blessed with multiple traits, which they have developed and refined. Unlike beasts and warriors they have weapons: great swords, axes or mauls. They wear no armor, instead trusting in their speed and their flesh-crafted, hardened skin.

Tactics: Willingly seeks out the strongest opponent, intent on taking it on singlehandedly. The beast or warrior who tries to grab a piece of the honor will not live much longer than the enemy.

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

Terrible Aspect. The guardian can use its bonus action to challenge a creature within 30 feet of it. The guardian makes a contested Charisma (Intimidation) check against the creature's Wisdom (Insight). If it succeeds the creature becomes frightened of the guardian until the end of its next turn.

ACTIONS

Multiaction. The guardian makes two melee weapon attacks with its chosen weapon.

Double-axe. Melee Weapon Attack: +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 12 (1d12 + 6) slashing damage.

Greatsword. Melee Weapon Attack: +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 13 (2d6 + 6) slashing damage.

Maul. Melee Weapon Attack: +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 13 (2d6 + 6) bludgeoning damage.

REACTIONS

Retaliate. When a creature comes within reach, the guardian can make a melee attack.

Depending on how the characters handle their opponents, the battle at the sinkhole will end in different ways.

Should the characters be victorious in their part of the battle, it means that the whole enemy force is beaten and driven back into the hole. In other words, the attack is repelled – for the moment. The work with building the barricade can resume and before long all major openings are blocked by barrels, confiscated wagons, and furniture from surrounding houses. In this case, the next scene will be *Beasts Behind the Barricade*.

Should the characters instead lose their fight (that is, if they are beaten down or make a run for it) events develop in another direction. The defense collapses and the monsters from below push the champions of the city back to the main streets that surround the block.

There the major part of the enemy force makes a halt, even if smaller bands of **warriors** penetrate the defense line through houses and cellars to hit targets in the city. Almost everyone remaining in the block is killed or disappears down the sinkhole. Valuables and useful items also disappear – the Beast Clan is salvaging everything they can get their hands on for the journey into Davokar. In this case, the next scene is *Reclaiming the Barricade*.

BEASTS BEHIND THE BARRICADE

Suddenly panicked screams are heard from a street on the defenders' side of the barricade, and soon residents are seen running in all directions, hunted by **clan beasts**: the enemy has broken through a cellar wall and reached the surface!

The characters are close to the break and are free to choose their actions. Should they for some reason decide not to engage, others will; but with lower odds of success. If so, the outcome will automatically be the same as if the characters lose the fight.

Whatever happens, the player characters are not first to arrive. The very hungover war veteran **Serex Attio** (page 59) is already standing in the middle of the street, hacking away at enemies – it is unclear if he is fighting for the good cause, for enjoyment, or because the enemy's clamor is worsening his headache.

The foes welling up from the basement are many and the characters must face them in two waves: the first consisting of nothing but **clan beasts** (twice as many as the characters); the second arriving five rounds later and made up of **Beast Clan warriors** (one for every 2 characters) and a **Beast Clan mystic**, led by a **Beast Clan guardian**.

Beast Clan Mystics

"The dusk of the soul is the dawn of the spirit."

The Jezites have a strong tradition of Witchcraft, but nowadays the witches have the company of *darmans* – mystics influenced by the raw power of the Crystal Isle (page 40 for further information). Among the darmans are both the flesh-crafters

Beast Clan Mystic

Medium human (Barbarian)

Armor Class 15 (enchanted robes)

Hit Points 65 (10d8 + 20)

Speed 30 ft.

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

Saving Throws Intelligence +3, Wisdom +3

Skills Arcana +7, Perception +3

Senses passive Perception 13

Languages Ambrian, Barbarian

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

Manner crooked and intense

Shadow gleaming and shimmering black, as a moonlit waterfall (Corruption: 4/16)

Equipment —

Spellcasting. The mystic's spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell attack +8, save DC 16) and it knows the following spells:

Cantrips: *accurate strike* (0), *chill touch* (0), *eldritch blast* (0), *light* (0), *message* (0), *ray of frost* (0)

1st-level spells: *black bolt* (1d4 + 1), *expeditious retreat* (1d4 + 1), *thunderwave* (1)

2nd-level spells: *black breath* (1d4 + 2), *blur* (2)

3rd-level spells: *haste* (3), *lightning bolt* (1d4 + 3)

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

5th-level spells: *hold monster* (1d4 + 5), *telekinesis* (5), *teleportation circle* (5)

Rituals: *animate dead*, *comprehend languages*, *detect magic*

ACTIONS

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

and the combat-oriented mystics of the clan, functioning as support for warriors and guardians in battle. Their philosophy is all about gaining power through suffering, which is why they are often malnourished and covered in self-inflicted wounds. The amount of scar tissue on visible parts of the body often coincides with the age and strength of the darman.

Tactics: The darmans keep to the background, protected by their guardians. They defend themselves by casting *blur* and then support the clan beasts with their *black breath* (healing) and the guardians by casting *haste* on them or making it so that they get to fight one enemy at a time (*telekinesis* or *hold monster*) – though without pacifying the main opponent of the guardian.

If the characters win their part of the fight, they, **Serex Attio** and a group of **town guards** manage to push the surviving enemies back into the house, where they with joint force can shut the cellar door and bolt it with what is at hand. Then the house is set on fire by the Town Guard, abolishing the threat from that passage. In this case the next scene will be *Anticlimax at the Sinkhole*.

Arriving Enemies per Round

Round 1:

- ◆ **Beasts**, one for every character
- ◆ One **warrior**

Round 4:

- ◆ **Beasts**, one for every two characters
- ◆ **Warriors**, one for every two characters

Round 8:

- ◆ **Warriors**, one for every character
- ◆ One **guardian**

Round 12:

- ◆ **Beasts**, one for every two characters
- ◆ **Warriors**, one for every two characters
- ◆ **Guardians**, one for every three characters
- ◆ One **mystic**

Should the characters flee or lose the fight, the enemies will breach the line of defense and the champions of Thistle Hold must leave the barricade for postings further away from the hole, behind the main streets surrounding the block. The Beast Clan heads out on raids in all directions, robbing and kidnapping. Next scene will be *Reclaiming the Barricade*.

RECLAIMING THE BARRICADE

If the defense by the sinkhole breaks down, the enemy will take control of the entire district. The leading figures of the town do not know that the attack primarily is aimed at gaining time for the clan to head out into Davokar, and consequently fear that the beastly warriors are rallying and organizing for a massive attack on the Hold.

Any person who knows anything about strategy understands that such an attack could have a devastating outcome: while the defenders must be posted in all directions, the enemy may opt to send their full force against a certain posting, which then will have a very hard time holding the line. In such a scenario there is an imminent risk that the whole town will be opened up for the attacker. In short: this is a decisive moment for the town of Thistle Hold, likely worse than anything its residents have ever been forced to endure.

Lasifor Nightpitch has joined the defenders, along with the First Theurg of the Sun Temple, **Father Elfeno**. Both of them have climbed a cart close to where the characters are, and the Mayor is giving a fiery speech about why the barricade by the sinkhole must be reclaimed. As soon as he goes silent, the leaders of the assembled factions give the order to attack, and the champions of town start to move.

The characters can choose to join the counterattack (in the first line or as support) or they may decide to sit this one out and save their strength. The Gamemaster should ask the players to select one of the strategies detailed below and tell them what the options entail.

- ◆ **Attack in the Front Line:** To join the first line of the attack means that the characters will take the same risk as other named heroes, and be recognized for it! However, this is of course much more dangerous than other options.
- ◆ **Provide Support:** If the characters choose to move with the second line, they will be able to support other heroes in the front – which is less honorable but also less dangerous.
- ◆ **Save Their Strength:** To not partake in the attack will be regarded as cowardly by most other factions, making future dealings with them a bit more difficult, but not impossible.

Whatever the characters decide, the barricade will be reclaimed in a bloody battle. The enemy withdraws down into the sinkhole and a tense calm settles among the defenders. Next scene is *Anticlimax at the Sinkhole*.

Attack in the Front Line: Side by side with the leaders of other factions (for example the **Mekele brothers**, **Kullinan**

Furia, **Father Elfeno**, **Serex Attio** and the **Guard Captain Marvello**) the player characters storm the enemy line. The Gamemaster should describe at least two fights close to the characters, involving named heroes – this is an epic moment that will be remembered forever, and the characters will be part of the legend.

In order to break through the line, the characters have to best the enemy groups described above. They have four rounds to deal with each group; after that the next group of enemies will approach them and will add to the still living and fighting members of the previous group (or groups).

Provide Support: **Lysindra Goldengrasp** (an agent for the Iron Pact, page 75) and other “concerned citizens” are in trouble and the player characters are in the best position to offer them aid. Goldengrasp has assembled a rapidly declining number of residents, fighting desperately against an enemy that surrounds them. Goldengrasp and the others can **Help** on their turns, providing advantage for the characters. There are two **clan beasts** for each character. When Goldengrasp and her companions are rescued the battle is over and the barricade reclaimed.

Save Their Strength: The characters lick their wounds or hunker down like cowardly wimps, while the champions of town push the enemy back into the Abyss. This counts as taking a short rest.

ANTICLIMAX AT THE SINKHOLE

When the characters return to the barricade, everyone is preparing for another attack. Prayers are whispered, weapons cleaned and the moderately damaged are patched up while the seriously wounded are carried away.

Reinforcements arrive at a steady pace: **town guards**, **temple guards**, private **bodyguards** and single **residents** with weapons drawn (there are many of the latter in a town like Thistle Hold). Then... nothing happens...

Aside from a few rock slides, there is absolute silence from the sinkhole. However, when the anxiety has started to fade and tired smiles can be seen on the defenders’ lips, a sudden and worrying sound is heard from the sinkhole – a rustling, shuffling sound, as if a giant serpent was moving about down in the dark. The sound grows stronger; everyone grows tense.

Then the sound diminishes again, as if its source has moved on, away from the sinkhole, deeper down into the Abyss. Suddenly, a warrior steps out into the dim light that reaches the top of the rubble hill at the bottom of the hole.

Her visage is dominated by predatory jaws and the skin on her naked forearms seems gray, crackled and leathery, as if it is unnaturally thick and rough. She stares with black eyes towards the defenders on the surface before letting out a hateful falsetto howl and diving down into the dark on widespread bat wings.

Then all goes silent, and this time the silence continues...

Captain Marvello immediately orders his troops to spread out in a ring along the rim of the hole and shouts with a booming voice that everyone must leave the site. Carpenters and other artisans are called upon to build a sturdy palisade around the sinkhole and to close off all cellars opening towards the hole.

All who approach the sinkhole without having a proper permit (that is, a signed document where the town authorities state that the person may do so) will be forever banned from the town of Thistle Hold. This is the case until Mayor Nighthpitch decides differently, whenever that may be.

Helionor

The woman who led the Beast Clan's blitz on the surface is named Helionor, and she will appear in future episodes of the chronicle. She has no further role to play in *Wrath of the Warden*, but for the future it does not hurt if the players remember her wings and jaws.

Time for Reflections

WHEN THE DUST settles and the ones still present by the sinkhole start to relax a bit, the characters have the opportunity to gain an overview of what has happened.

They can listen to eye-witness statements regarding what happened on the Antique Plaza when "the well spoke" – people fell to the ground, screaming in panic or mute from the terror, and some never stood up again. Others can tell of what happened when the sinkhole appeared, how already shocked residents disappeared into darkness along with buildings, wagons and draft animals.

It is likely that the player characters will try to have a chat with some of the prominent individuals who fought in defense of the town. None of these are very talkative right now, but can spare a moment or two for the player characters, especially if they are previously acquainted or if they at some point fought side by side against the horrors of the Beast Clan.

Captain Marvello

Facton: The Town Watch

The Guard Captain is totally focused on getting the palisade in place. Getting him to spare a moment will require a **DC 20**

Charisma (Persuasion) check. Someone connected to the Ambrian army or Thistle Hold's Town Watch the appropriate contacts, or if they have had dealings with him before they have advantage on the check. If the check fails, they get to talk to one of his sergeants, who takes notes for a report on the events. But that report will not be read by anyone until much later.

The orders of Captain Marvello are clear and he aims to carry them out to the letter: no one approaches the sinkhole without the express permission of Mayor Nighthpitch. Aside from that he cannot be of much help – he knows nothing of the hole or of the thundering clang that caused it, and he is not one to speculate.

The Templars

Facton: Knights of the Dying Sun

The Mekele brothers are not in a very sunny mood since Leohan has suffered a deep cut across the side of his abdomen. They know nothing about what is behind the recent events, but mumble that nothing less can be expected in a town so full of blind sinners. Regarding themselves and their mission in town they answer ambiguously – they claim to be passing through, on their way from Karvosti to Templewall.

Father Elfeno

Facton: The Sun Church

Father Elfeno has few words to offer at the moment. One of the priests was wounded in a leg fighting a Clan Guardian, and was later hauled down the sinkhole. When the characters approach, Elfeno is explaining to his followers the folly in defying the Captain's orders. Such reckless behavior would damage the relationship between the temple and the Guard, and by extension with the Queen herself!

The Wizards

Facton: Ordo Magica

Out of the two wizards, Master Eufrynda is the most talkative. Not that she knows much about what has happened, but she claims to be confident that Lasifor Nighthpitch will turn to the order's tower for help in figuring out the truth behind the events and maybe also in arranging a descent down the sinkhole. She cannot promise the characters that they can come along, but if they did well in the fight against the Beast Clan, she recommends that they should contact Chapter Master Cornelio.



◆ TAVERNS

1. Afadir's Triumph Tavern
2. Brew
3. The Dump
4. Odovakar
5. Blackbrew
6. The Salons of Symbaroum
7. The Slaughterhouse

◆ INNS

8. The Court and the Harp
9. The Winged Ladle
10. The Witch and Familiar
11. Arkerio's Guest House
12. The Rosegarden
13. The Ruin
14. The Barracks
15. The Seamstress' Rest

◆ ENTERTAINMENT

16. Spectacle
17. Benego's
18. Legends
19. The Hangman's Pole
20. The Abomitorium

◆ TRADE

21. Marvalom's
22. The Rope and Axe
23. Big-Basher's Smithy
24. The Thaler's Drugstore
25. The Treasury
26. Faraldo's Novelty Store

◆ OTHER

27. The Town Seat
28. Nighthome

◆ ADVENTURE LOCATIONS

- A. The Fern/Sinkhole
- B. Kalegra's Alley
- C. Sellwords of the Sun
- D. Kargoi Salamos
- E. Serex Attio
- F. Roia Garlaka
- G. The Sun Temple's annex
- H. Belora
- I. Anadea's Storage
- J. Erlaber's Home
- K. The Tannery

◆ SQUARES AND PARKS

29. The Sun Temple
30. The Queen's Legation
31. Ordo Magica
32. The Mission House
33. Mother Mehira's
34. The Town Watch
35. The Beacon
36. The Merchants' House
37. Monastery
38. The High Chieftain's Envoy
39. The Penitentiary
40. The Antique Plaza
41. The Queen's Square
42. The Toad's Square
43. The Eastern Square
44. Park of the Elders

ACT II:

Law of Necessity

Somewhere far below lays the remains of a woman who not more than a couple of hours ago promised the characters grand and much coveted rewards; a woman who also, according to her own statements, was the only one in town to know about a threat to the very existence of Thistle Hold. So, what now?

DURING THE SECOND act of the adventure the player characters are free to use their contacts and features in order to reach their goal: to establish the identity of the mysterious woman, and by extension get in touch with her superiors and/or identify that which threatens the town of Mayor Nightpitch. Further incentives appear when the characters themselves are threatened, pursued and later also attacked.

At their disposal the characters have the representatives of a number of factions, some of which have access to valuable information – information that they are not willing to share other than in return for a considerable favor. It is up to the players to decide if the need for knowledge is great enough to balance the risks posed by the demands. Is it really

worth making an enemy out of one faction in the aim to gain information from another? Who must be handled with care and who can they afford to antagonize?

As previously stated, if the players in your group for some reason have a hard time taking initiative some outside mission giver may guide their steps. But the experience will most likely be both more intense and more engaging if they are forced to make their own choices and also suffer the consequences of the foolish ones. Should they at some point get stuck, there are lots of chances for the Gamemaster to give them a nudge in the right direction – namely every time the player characters speak to their friends and contacts in Thistle Hold.

Structure

THIS SECOND ACT goes on until the characters have found enough information to understand that the answers to their questions can be found in a place called The Halls of a Thousand Tears. The most important clues are summarized below and how to analyze them is further detailed on page 78, under the header *The Clues*:

- ◆ Down in the sinkhole is the battered body of Anadea, possible to dig out from the rubble. In her belt purse is a

pearl of gold, a crude key, a sun symbol, and a carefully folded letter, written in Ambrian but with letters similar to cuneiform writing. Entangled in the hair of her corpse is a broken necklace.

- ◆ In Anadea's abandoned bed chamber at the Sun Temple are both a hidden book and a wooden briefcase containing paper, crayons, and some drawings.
- ◆ Anadea's name is mentioned in a report kept at the archive of the Legation. It describes a brawl at the Salons of Symbaroum, which according to the statements started with an argument between two initiates, Anadea and Arkel, one of which claimed that the church is wrong about Davokar. Arkel can be found in the village Glimmervann.
- ◆ The secret storage space of Anadea is tricky to locate, but if the characters succeed they will find a number of informative items. In the cramped space are for instance a very sickly mare cat in an iron cage, and a strange truffle-like substance which a master alchemist can identify as related to Davokar's elves. Adding to that, there is a map sketch and a newly commenced journal to be found. The journal indicates that Lasifor Nightpitch and Lysindra Goldengrasp may have further information.

A First Sign

If the characters (or some of them) have a residence in Thistle Hold, they will quickly learn that someone is after them. As they return to the residence after the battle by the sinkhole, a neighbor or a landlord or someone else living nearby can tell them that a woman of middle age has been there asking for them. She never disclosed her errand but she did not seem to know their names, so the one they are talking to had to enlighten her on that point. If asked what the woman looked like the answer is: “*ordinary, fair-haired and dressed in a brown tunic and dark brown trousers*” – features that are of little use since Erlaber's agent is the changeling Sibela who used the Change Self feat.

Ruffian

Medium human

Armor Class 15 (chain shirt)

Hit Points 30 (4d8 + 12)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	15 (+2)	17 (+3)	10 (+0)	13 (+1)	11 (+0)

Skills Perception +3, Stealth +4

Senses passive Perception 13

Languages Ambrian

Challenge 1 (200 XP, proficiency bonus +2)

Manner appears cocky, scared underneath

Shadow shiny copper, like a newly made cauldron (0/4)

Equipment 2d6 orategs, 1d4 thaler

Fleet-footed. The ruffian can use its bonus action to take the Dash action.

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

ACTIONS

Spear. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60, one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage or 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage if used with two hands to make a melee attack.

Horseman's Bow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

ruffian companions appear, in total twice as many as the characters; some emerge behind her, others behind the characters and two lurk in the windows on the second floor of the house facing the alley.

If the characters are triumphant and manage to take one of the assailants alive, they may, of course, be interrogated. However, the captive cannot say much more than that a woman paid him/her two thaler to partake in the ambush, with the promise of eight more afterwards. The description (of the changeling Sibela) can be recognized from earlier: "ordinary, fair-haired, dressed in a brown tunic and dark brown trousers, perhaps in her thirties."

Ruffians

"Come on then! Taste this, and thi..."

A group of less fortunate folks who believe they have made a great deal, especially since their intended victims are much fewer than them. They regard themselves as fairly seasoned and capable, after having been on a couple of trips in Bright Davokar, but they are probably no match for the characters. Half of them are equipped with bows and the rest have spears. Each has a dagger for close work.

Tactics: The ruffians have no special tactics, besides the division between spear bearers and bowmen. When half of them have fallen, the rest turn to run.

The Midnight Cult

EVERYTHING WOULD HAVE run smoother for the characters if Anadea had not been so zealous and careless. She was seen by the changeling Klagander when she made a quick survey of the Midnight Cult's temporary headquarters in a closed-down tannery, prior to meeting the characters. Of course, Erlaber ordered that the woman should be kept under surveillance. And when he later learned of the meeting at the *Fern Tavern* – where the now dead woman was seen talking to a group of individuals known as enemies to the Dark of Davokar – his concerns were multiplied. He has no idea of how much or how little the characters know, but he will not take any chances.

During the second act of the adventure, the Midnight Cult will pose a hidden threat. The abandoned tannery where Erlaber stores the skull of Eox and where the ritual will take place is described in Act III, while the texts in this section focus on the challenges that the cult members will throw at the characters if they persist in trying to dig deeper in the story.

AN OFFER

Not more than a couple of hours after the fight at the sink-hole, the characters are approached by a courier, no matter if they are at home or at some public place like a tavern or inn. This time it is a tiny goblin boy who comes up to them with his dark brown crocheted hat in hand.

The delivery consists of a simple envelope, sealed with red wax but without any stamp. Should the characters force the goblin to describe the one who gave him the letter, they will likely be disappointed: a staggering, slurring human who stank of brutebrew and wore a beard – a description fitting lots and lots of people in the town of Thistle Hold.

The note is written in the ornate style of a noble and reads:

What you know can kill you. Meet me in Kalegra's Alley now. Maybe we can help each other.

The note is written by Erlaber Ambreagos, handed to the changeling Sibela (page 97), who in turn paid and instructed an old drunkard to give the task to the goblin boy. The idea behind the note is of course to lure the player characters into an ambush, thereby quickly disposing of a probable threat or scaring the characters into abandoning their quest.

Instead of risking the lives and limbs of the cult members, Sibela gathers a group of rough and desperate fortune hunters at the *Rosegarden*, and pays them to arrange the ambush in one of the alleys inside Haloban's Ring.

If the characters go to the meeting, they will hear a woman's muffled voice from the narrow alley: "Psst, in here, hurry!" If they hesitate the woman continues: "You have to leave the street. They are after me. Hurry!"

A woman dressed in a worn leather armor can be seen waving at them, from a nook about ten paces in. If the characters approach her the trap slams shut. The woman's

WANTED DEAD OR DEADER

If the characters survive the ambush, Erlaber's next step is to distribute their descriptions to two other cults in town. Aside from the characters numbers, looks and names, he claims that they are a group of witch hunters from Yndaros, employed by Mayor Nightpitch to clean up among the cultists of the Hold. To add further force behind his words, he signs the message with the signature "The Prince" and claims to be "very keen on seeing the witch hunters caught and killed before long."

One of the cults is active inside the palisade, the other in Blackmoor, and both are large enough to pose a serious threat. The first one is led by the reclusive, former treasure hunter Erok the Dark. The elderly, blight-marked man surrounds himself with about twenty young fortune hunters and has convinced them that the true treasure of Davokar is that which the Queen and the priests of Prios have chosen to condemn: the powers of Corruption.

In Blackmoor the information goes to Galamar, who reacts in force – the thought of what such a group would do to his blight-born mother (see *The World of Symbaroum*, page 94, for additional information) fills him with both fear and flaming hatred. The cultists of Red Eye are of course mainly active in the tent camp, but he will also try to smuggle some of his wretched followers into town, in order to search out the characters and keep track of their movements.

Both these groups of cultists will trail the characters as they are moving in and outside of the town. Most often they stay at a distance and cannot be noticed unless one of the characters expressly says that he or she stops to look for anyone following them – if so, let the character make an opposed check, the character's **Wisdom (Perception)** versus the trailing party's **Dexterity (Stealth)**. However, at some points during the adventure, the pursuers willfully come closer or are forced to do so in order to keep up with the characters' tempo. When that happens, the Gamemaster may encourage all players to make an opposed check with the characters gaining advantage.

Given that the characters have been described as a group of skilled witch hunters, the members of both cults act with great care. They will wait for a situation when the characters are unprepared (for example when they are sleeping) or when they are scattered. The group attacking outnumbers them by at least double.

Should the characters manage to capture a cultist, it is far from impossible to force them to disclose information about the cult they are part of. All it takes are credible threats and a successful **DC 11 Charisma (Intimidation) check**. If such an interrogation succeeds they will also learn that they are believed to be witch hunters hired by the Mayor, which probably means that someone has tricked the cult into attacking them.

The Mentioning of The Prince

Note that this is the only time during the adventure that The Prince is mentioned, and then in a context where the informant is not even sure that any "Prince" actually exists. Should the player characters ask other people in town (town guards, wizards, priests of the Sun Temple and so on) if they have heard about a "powerful and secretive sorcerer" by this name, they will all shake their heads.

How to handle the information is then up to the players. Attacking one of the cultist headquarters should come off as a demanding challenge, since both of the leaders surround themselves with at least a dozen followers. An option may be to inform the captains or the Commandant of the Town Watch, present persuasive evidence (for instance the captured cultist) and then join the guards in an attack on the headquarters.

Whatever happens, the characters will not learn very much. Even if they get hold of Erok the Dark or Red Eye, these cannot say more than that they received a letter in which the characters were described as "capable witch hunters from Yndaros" and which was signed with the name "The Prince." The cult leaders have heard that name being whispered before, linked to a powerful and mysterious sorcerer. But none of them have met or had any dealings with The Prince, and both are pretty sure that such a character actually does not exist – though not sure enough to risk anything, since the tall tales describes The Prince as immensely generous to his friends, but quick to anger. In any case, the unstamped letter has already been burnt on the express order of the writer.



Red Eye

Red Eye

"Bugger off! Leave us alone and you'll be safe!"

When Galamar's mother Ragama was stung by a swarm of deeply corrupted hornets she was faced with the choice of banishment or death, according to the traditions of Karohar. She welcomed death but her son wanted differently; he brought her to Ambria in the hope that the renowned Sun Priests would be able to help. But when they reached Blackmoor, Ragama was so ill that he dared not present her to the missionaries of Father Sarvola. Instead he desperately dug his cavern and there the swelling abomination has been trapped ever since.

Galamar was born hunch-backed, lump-footed and with red pupils – characteristics that likely have helped him establish himself as the leader of the growing cult. He would actually like to just run away and live out the remainder of his life in solitude, but as long as Ragama needs him that is out of the question. Without the aid and strength of his

mother he would never have survived his youth; now he must return the favor, no matter what!

Tactics: Galamar hides behind his cultists and only fires his crossbow if an enemy breaks through to him. As soon as he faces a capable adversary in close combat, he lifts his arms as a sign of surrender, with a mixture of relief and the deepest sorrow painted over his misshapen face.

Red Eye's Cultists

"Ragama! Ragama! Ragama!"

The wretched creatures who have gathered around Red Eye come from all over the region. But whether they are goblins, Ambrians or from some forest clan, they have much in common: they are malnourished, own absolutely nothing and have no reason to continue breathing except to serve the cult. The latter makes them prepared to do just about anything for the sake of their leader.

Tactics: The cultists of Red Eye are not afraid to die; on the contrary, many of them are longing for the great rest and are glad to face it in defense of Red Eye and Ragama. They will fight to the bittersweet end and die with a sigh of relief.

Galamar "Red Eye"

Medium human (Barbarian)

Armor Class 17 (laminated armor)

Hit Points 85 (10d8 + 40)

Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	17 (+3)	18 (+4)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Dex +5, Con +6

Skills Athletics +6, Perception +4, Stealth +5, Survival +4

Senses passive Perception 14

Languages Ambrian, Barbarian

Challenge 2 (450 XP, proficiency bonus +2)

Manner violent mood swings

Shadow segmented brown and gray, like the bark on a dying pine tree (0/4)

Equipment 2d6 shillings

Marksman. At the start of his turn, Galamar can aim.

His speed becomes 0 and he has advantage on his ranged weapon attacks.

ACTIONS

Quick Shot (Recharge 5–6). Galamar can make two ranged weapon attacks this turn.

Heavy Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 100/400 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d10 + 3) piercing damage. *Marksman:* this weapon scores a critical hit on a natural roll of 19 or 20.

Red Eye Cultist

Medium human (Ambrian) or humanoid (goblin)

Armor Class 13 (shield)

Hit Points 6 (1D8 + 2) or 5 (1D6 + 2)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	13 (+1)	11 (+0)

Skills Perception +3, Stealth +4

Senses passive Perception 13

Languages Ambrian

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP, proficiency bonus +2)

Manner staring, shaky, fanatical

Shadow bronze and/or brownish yellow (0–3/4)

Equipment —

Survival Instinct (Goblin Only). The goblin can take the Dodge or Disengage action as a bonus action.

ACTIONS

Improvised Weapons. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) bludgeoning, piercing or slashing damage.

Erok the Dark, Cult Leader

"You are misguided, not me. I see the truth!"

The former treasure hunter Erok is part of an exclusive crowd who has survived more than a dozen expeditions in Davokar. He has amassed a considerable fortune but also darkened his soul and hence developed a taste for the power of Corruption – something which in the end made him give up large parts of his wealth in payment for becoming the apprentice of a witch banned from clan Enoai.

When the witch finally became a blight born, Erok was forced to kill her. He then returned to Thistle Hold with the ambition of making as many of its explorers as possible see the truth: the true treasure of Davokar is not loot, but the pure and untamed power of corruption!

Tactics: Erok directs his followers at Theurges firstly, secondly towards other kinds of mystics, then at warrior

types. He does not mind sacrificing his cultists for the greater cause, but if he finds himself in a tight spot he will likely surrender. If he has no choice but to fight he will start by casting blindness/deafness on the enemy.

Erok's Disciples

"Come with us; see the truth in the blackest eye."

Calling the disciples of Erok stupid would be wrong, but they are definitely gullible. All who come to the Hold hoping to secure their future are looking for shortcuts and that something extra which will let them succeed where others have not. The idea that corruption is something that can be tamed and used has convinced about twenty young men and women of Ambrian heritage to put their trust in the famous and obviously successful Erok the Dark – if anyone knows how to make it in Davokar it must be him!

Erok the Dark

Medium human

Armor Class 14 (woven silk robes)

Hit Points 39 (6d8 + 12)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
3 (+1)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	13 (+1)	11 (+0)	18 (+4)

Skills Arcana +3, Nature +3, Deception +6, Perception +2

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages Ambrian

Challenge 1 (200 XP, proficiency bonus +2)

Manner gestures wildly

Shadow pulsating deep red with black veins, like a dying heart (7/12)

Equipment multicolored robes, face mask of rough bark, 2d10 thaler

Black Ring. Erok has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Spellcasting. Erok is a sorcerer (spell attack +6, save DC 14) and knows the following spells:

Cantrips: *chill touch* (0), *fire bolt* (0), *light* (0), *mending* (0), *message* (0), *prestidigitation* (0)

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

2nd-level spells: *blindness/deafness* (1d4 + 2), *see invisibility* (2)

3rd-level spells: *larvae boil* (1d4 + 3), *protection from energy* (3)

Rituals: *spirit walk*

ACTIONS

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

Disciple

Medium human

Armor Class 13 (studded leather)

Hit Points 22 (3d8 + 9)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	13 (+1)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	17 (+3)

Skills Arcana +3, Investigation +3, Perception +2, Stealth +3

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages Ambrian

Challenge 1 (200 XP, proficiency bonus +2)

Manner cocky and self-assured

Shadow partially blackened silver (1/10)

Equipment 3d6 shillings

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

Cantrips: *fire bolt* (0), *light* (1), *mage hand* (1), *minor illusion* (1), *poison spray* (0), *prestidigitation* (0)

1st-level spells: *burning hands* (1d4 +1), *thunderwave* (1)

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

Rituals: *mending*

Treasure Hunter Contacts. The disciple has advantage on the first Charisma check it makes each day with a treasure hunter.

ACTIONS

Quarterstaff. Melee Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. , one target. Hit: 6 (1d8 + 2) bludgeoning damage. Two-handed

Light Crossbow. Ranged Weapon Attack: +3 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. Hit: 5 (1d8 + 1) piercing damage.

THE NIGHT CAPE

When the characters have managed to defend themselves against the cultists for a day or two, Erlaber contacts an agent who is renowned in the underworld of Thistle Hold, famous for performing all kinds of dirty deeds for the right price. She is called The Night Cape and lives in the north-eastern district of Blackmoor.

The assassin has several strings on her deadly lyre. She is accomplished in the use of poisons and does not hesitate to sneak into public kitchens to spike their boiling stews, even if many more than the characters would be made to suffer. Ranged attacks with poisoned crossbow bolts is another option, a third to attack lone victims with the garrote or with poison dipped daggers.

The Night Cape will not let herself be caught alive. If such a risk is imminent, she will bite down on the suicide capsule hidden under her tongue and die instantly. If the player characters use rituals in trying to extract information from the deceased assassin, they will likely end up sighing in frustration – the one who gave her the mission was “an

ordinary, fair-haired woman, dressed in a brown tunic and dark brown trousers, perhaps in her thirties” (that is, Sibela).

The Night Cape

“You die, or I die, that’s all.”

At the end of The Great War, the soon to be thirty-year-old Karenia watched her parents die, rise as undead and try to slay her. That experience haunted her as she alone made it over the snow-clad Titans and finally ended up in Yndaros’ refugee camp, where she was taken in by the bandit queen Meranda. The career from maid, through pickpocket, to assassin went like a charm, until the aged Meranda became jealous of her protégé and drove her out of the capital. After a couple of minor jobs in Agrella and Kurun, Karenia settled down in the vicinity of Thistle Hold, where jobs are easy to come by.

Tactics: The Night Cape almost exclusively attacks lone victims from a distance. If bogged down in melee she tries to run, and if she has allies for support she tries to stay in the background. She is patient and if she has agreed to a mission she will see it through or take her own life trying.

The Night Cape

Medium human (Ambrian)

Armor Class 18 (mastercraft woven silk)

Hit Points 67 (9d8 + 27)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	20 (+5)	17 (+3)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	16 (+3)

Skills Acrobatics +7, Deception +5, Intimidation +5, Perception +4, Sleight of Hand +9, Stealth +7

Senses passive Perception 14

Languages Ambrian

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

Manner taciturn, watchful

Shadow flame-colored as polished copper (0/7)

Equipment 1d6 doses Poison (moderate), 1d4 Choking Spores, Suicide Ampoule (4d6 poison damage for 1 minute).

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

Criminal Contacts. The night cape has advantage on the first Charisma check she makes each day with a criminal.

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

Evasion. If the night cape is subjected to an effect that allows her to make a Dexterity saving throw to take only half damage, she instead takes no damage if

she succeeds on the saving throw, and only half damage if she fails.

Expert. The night cape doubles her proficiency bonus for Perception and Sleight of Hand checks (included above).

Feint. The night cape can use her bonus action to make a Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check against the opponent’s armor class. On a success, she has advantage on all attacks until the end of her turn.

ACTIONS

Two-weapon Attack. By using both her action and bonus action, the night cape can make two melee weapon attacks (one with each melee weapon).

Assassin’s Blade. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d6 + 5) piercing damage plus 3 (1d6) poison damage and must make a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for one minute. *Concealable:* the night cape can make a Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check to hide this weapon on herself.

Stiletto. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d4 + 5) piercing damage. *Deep Impact:* a critical hit with this weapon does a total of 20 (2d4 + 10) piercing damage (plus backstab damage if applicable).

Hand Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, range 30/130 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d6 + 5) piercing damage plus 3 (1d6) poison damage and must make a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for one minute.

REACTIONS

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

Ordo Magica

ORDO MAGICA'S ROLE in the adventure is decided by who the characters are. If none of them is a wizard or if they have not made themselves known as capable among the members of the local chapter, an alliance with the wizards of the tower is unlikely. In that case, the characters may pay for the ordinary services of the chapter, but will hardly gain a private audience.

However, it is expected that some of the characters live up to the criteria mentioned above – for example if they took part in the fight by the sinkhole alongside Eufrynda. If so, they can gain an audience with the Chapter Master, though not before five hours have passed after the battle at the sinkhole. Present at the reception are also Eufrynda and

the guest of the tower, the wizard Kullinan Furia. Master Eufrynda takes an active part in the talk, while Kullinan sits in the shadows, ogling the characters with his piercing gaze.

At an earlier meeting between the Chapter Master, Mayor Nightpitch and Prior Emundi of the Black Cloaks, it was decided that Ordo Magica hurriedly will try to reach the bottom of the sinkhole, to evaluate the threat level and make a quick survey of what is down there. If the characters successfully argue that they have the skills and experience needed to accomplish the task, Cornelio and Eufrynda can assign the initial examination of the sinkhole to them.

A successful **DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check** is needed to pull this off, with advantage if the characters were active in the battle by the sinkhole. Even if they pass this check, the wizards will require them to sign a contract stating that everything they find down there (be it information and/or items) belongs to the tower, and also that an adept of the order will join their expedition. Other than that, they seem happy to have someone else risk life and limb on their behalf.

Should the characters ask for additional support they first get the cold shoulder from the order masters. But if they stand their ground, and if the Gamemaster believes that they could use an extra hand, Kullinan Furia rises from his armchair. He says that he is willing to accompany them, but points out that he will not subject himself to their commands – he follows them only so long as their decisions are to his liking.

Ganderald

Medium changeling

Armor Class 11 (order cloak)

Hit Points 39 (6d8 + 12)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	10 (+0)	15 (+2)	18 (+4)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Int +6, Wis +2

Skills Arcana +6, Nature +6, Perception +2

Senses darkvision 60 feet, passive Perception 12

Languages Ambrian

Challenge 1 (200 XP, proficiency bonus +2)

Manner calm and quiet

Shadow deep green with thin silvery lines (Corruption: 2/12)

Equipment notebook, 2d4 thaler

Spellcasting. Ganderald's spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell attack +6, save DC 14) and he knows the following spells:

Cantrips: *firebolt* (0), *light* (0), *mending* (0), *message* (0), *prestidigitation* (0), *ray of frost* (0)

1st-level spells: *detect magic* (1d4 + 1), *mage armor* (1d4 + 1), *magic missile* (1d4 + 1), *sleep* (1)

2nd-level spells: *arcane lock* (1d4 + 2), *detect thoughts* (1d4 + 2), *invisibility* (2)

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

Rituals: *alarm*, *tale of ashes*

ACTIONS

Handaxe. Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack: +4 to hit,

reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. Hit: 5

(1d6 + 2) slashing damage.

Kullinan Furia

"You go first..."

Adept Ganderald is thoroughly described in the *Game-master's Guide*, page 27. In this case he will act as the eyes and ears of the masters. If it comes to combat he relies on the player characters to handle the fighting, while he stands back scribbling down what is happening in the notebook he carries.

Tactics: Ganderald will not enter into combat unless forced to, in which case he will focus on defending himself with his axe and his spells.

Kullinan Furia, Order Master

"I speak, you listen. Always."

Kullinan may be the most single-minded of all masters of Ordo Magica. He is hundreds of years old and did not take part in the war against the Dark Lords, with the argument that he had more important things to do – namely, to study the war prisoners captured and try to learn what kind of mystical powers controlled their will. Understanding the world is all that counts; affecting the world or its creatures are not nearly as important – "insight before intervention, knowledge before know-how," is a motto his adepts hear again and again.

However, sometimes it takes actions to provoke or gain access to knowledge. If he is around when the player characters meet the witch Bayela he will attack her, whatever the characters say or do, to test her capability and strength and also to gain mastery over the Crystal Isle.

Tactics: Kullinan has not reached his venerable age by needlessly placing himself in harm's way. If violence can be avoided it is for the best, but if he has to fight he often starts by shrouding himself in a *wall of fire* and then blasts any oncoming enemies with *fire bolt* or *magic missile*.

Kullinan Furia

Medium human (Ambrian)

Armor Class 11/20 (magical amulet, see below)

Hit Points 88 (16d8 + 16)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	13 (+1)	12 (+1)	20 (+5)	17 (+3)	9 (-1)

Saving Throws Int +8, Wis +6

Skills Arcana +8, Investigation +8, Nature +8, Perception +6

Senses passive Perception 16

Languages Ambrian

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

Manner arrogantly unscrupulous

Shadow shimmering silver with growing dark spots
(Corruption: 6/16)

Equipment Mystical Focus, Soul Stone, The Eye (see textbox), Bargalvax's Staff Head (see textbox)

Protective Amulet. Kullinan has a magical amulet that makes his armor class equal to 15 plus his Intelligence modifier when activated (1d6 temporary Corruption, effect lasts until the next sunrise/sunset).

Spellcasting. Kullinan's spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell attack +8, save DC 16) and he knows the following spells:

Cantrips: *accurate strike* (0), *chill touch* (0), *fire bolt* (0), *mage hand* (0), *prestidigitation* (0), *ray of frost* (0)

1st-level spells: *detect magic* (1d4 + 1), *magic missile* (1D4 + 1), *silent image* (1), *unseen servant* (1d4 + 1)

2nd-level spells: *invisibility* (2), *locate object* (1d4 + 2)

3rd-level spells: *counterspell* (1d4 + 3), *glyph of warding* (3)

4th-level spells: *black tentacles* (1d4 + 4), *wall of fire* (4)

5th-level spells: *arcane hand* (5), *hold monster* (1d4 + 5)

6th-level spells: *globe of invulnerability* (6), *flesh to stone* (1d4 + 6)

Rituals: *light*, *tale of ashes*, *telepathic bond*, *tiny hut*

ACTIONS

Dagger. Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack: +4 to hit,

reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. Hit: 3

(1d4 + 1) piercing damage.



Kullinan's Items

THE EYE

A signet ring shaped like the eye of a cat, costs 1 corruption to activate, provides a photographic memory of the specific situation.

BARGALVAX'S STAFF HEAD

During his travels in northern Davokar, Kullinan Furia spoke to many peculiar individuals. One of them was Bargalvax, living in a cave by the foot of the volcano called Eulia's Fire Mountain by Ambrian scholars. In exchange for a bundle of snow white hair strands and four happy childhood memories, the mystic was allowed to pose five questions, but when the queries were shown to be about the nature of corruption, the ancient troll mother just had to lie – the answers she had could not be given to a man with such hunger in his eyes.

Since Bargalvax never receives gifts without offering something true in return, she decided to end the meeting by giving him one of the many pendants she wore during her forth dormancy, without knowing or caring about what it actually was or where it came from. Later, when Kullinan had time to study the gift, he was most impressed.

Implanting

The master of the artifact may, in advance, implant three mystical powers into the staff head, in a procedure which takes one hour to complete. These powers may then be activated as a Free Action, instead of an Active one, but only one per turn and for a significant cost in corruption. The powers are not consumed by the activation, but can be used again the following turn. A new implanting is not needed until the master wishes to replace any of the stored powers.

Action: Free

Corruption: 1D6

INFORMATION

No matter if the characters become close allies with Ordo Magica or not, it is of course possible to turn to the tower for information; anyone can get access to the tower archive on the third floor for the price of 1 thaler per session. Note that the only one of the chapter's masters who is available for questioning is Goncai, always wine-sipping and dressed in his smoking jacket. For commoners, an interview with him costs 10 thaler per hour.

The following list details what answers the tower can provide on some of the questions which may become relevant at different stages during the second act.

Who is Anadea?

- ❖ **Direct question:** Asking the masters is fruitless, they have never heard of anyone by that name.
- ❖ **The Archives:** In the archives there are two scriptures that mention a woman called Anadea. She seems to have been the officer in a group of mounted scouts, active during The Great War and among other things involved in the defense of the town Berendoria. (Note that this is about a totally different Anadea.)

Who is Teara-Téana?

- ❖ **Direct question:** If you ask a wizard about this, he or she will only be able to confirm that the name is elvish, with the approximate meaning "rays of the sun."
- ❖ **The Archives:** That name is not mentioned anywhere.

What are "The Halls of Tears"?

- ❖ **Direct question:** The adept of Master Goncai, Ganderald (*Gamemaster's Guide*, page 27) is specialized in the lore of Davokar's elves. According to him there is a legend attributed to the witch Aroaleta that mentions a place called The Halls of a Thousand Tears, and which according to the clanfolk is or was a place where the elves of the forest convened (*Player's Guide*, page 161).
- ❖ **The Archives:** In the archive there is no information of a place with that name – the closest one gets is a war epic entitled The Well of Tears, written by the dead court poet Eraklon about thirty years ago.

Where does the gold pearl come from?

- ❖ **Direct question:** If the characters show the ordained gold pearl found in Anadea's belt purse (page 43) to anyone knowledgeable about elves, that person will recognize the pattern's meandering style as typically elvish. If the characters have not analyzed the artifact, they can learn about its characteristics and powers, and also that it would earn about 120 thaler if sold at the Antique Plaza.
- ❖ **The Archives:** So called Mind Stones are mentioned in numerous documents, though not in a form matching the characters' find. However, there is a legend speaking

about two lovers from different barbarian clans, who used smooth river rocks to communicate with each other, but one of them was corrupted since "he did not know the secrets of the stone" – something implying that there might be a way to limit the corruptive powers of the artifact.

Corruption in Thistle Hold?

- ❖ **Direct question:** Whoever gets the question confirms that there are both corrupted items and people in Thistle Hold. If the characters have not visited or heard about the dungeons beneath the Sun Temple they are told about these (page 51), also about the Town Watch regularly turning to the tower of the order to gain information in connection with crimes somehow related to the "dark powers of the world." Finally, they can learn about the extent to which it is possible to conceal corruption – with spells like *private sanctum* or *exchange shadow*.
- ❖ **The Archives:** A search in the tower archives lets the characters find multiple texts describing incidents during the eight year long history of town, for instance those found in the section *Memorable Events* in the book *The World of Symbaroum* (page 10) and possibly the events taking place during the adventure *The Mark of the Beast* from the *Ruins of Symbaroum Adventure Compendium* (the Flayer and his victims). Then again, any information relevant for this particular adventure cannot be found.

HISTORY OF THE CRYSTAL ISLE

The natural caves beneath Thistle Hold came to be as a result of the underground lake found down there, and the waterways running into it. The water has receded since many centuries past and left a system of tunnels and caves, created when more porous rocks eroded or washed away with the streams. Far to the west, the lake still remains, and in it is an island consisting of something which looks much like black, volcanic glass.

Long ago, the location Thistle Hold occupies today was one of the most coveted in the region. Before the Symbarian Empire was born, the area was dominated by a number of clan societies, whose greedy kings fought each other in endless wars. Many of them wanted to conquer the land above the legendary underground lake, because in its depths was a rare power, a power making it possible to manipulate the mystical forces of the world without suffering the repercussions of corruption – something which was in high demand at a time before the traditions of today had evolved and when every use of mystical powers meant taking a considerable risk.

The renowned Crystal Isle had many masters over the years, among them King Hurian Lo-Apak who can be encountered in the adventure *Tomb of Dying Dreams* (*Adventure Compendium*, page 48). And all of them performed their darkest and most potent rituals on the island. The transformation occurred gradually; the rock darkened and finally it was turned into something else (see textbox, page 41)...

DOWN THE SINKHOLE

The climb down the steeply sloping sides of the sinkhole is done with two long, sturdy ropes, anchored in the buildings by the upper rim. The characters decide in which order they climb. It is about 120 feet down to the opening in the ceiling of the cave underneath, an opening that has a diameter of about sixty paces, and while they are climbing they move past lots of smaller cracks which branch off in different directions.

The climb itself would not have been very difficult if not for the darkness. Even if the characters get to borrow special helmets with a small oil lantern in the front, it is a challenge to see where they put their feet. They all have to make a **DC 13 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check** during the descent. A failure means that they put their weight on a loose stone and are at risk of falling. They must succeed at a **DC 15 Dexterity saving throw** or fall from their present height. The damage taken from the fall is reduced by half, because of the sloping sides and since they also land on a slanted surface. If a character falls, any creatures below that character must make a **DC 15 Strength saving throw** to avoid being knocked off the rock wall.

Where the hole ends awaits a hill of rubble and debris, whose peak is crowned by humans and Beast Clan members who have fallen to their death, or been killed by cuts or projectiles prior to the fall. Closest beneath the corpses, the hill consists of debris and furnishings from what once was a central block of Thistle Hold. Characters cannot see the floor and walls of the cave from the top of the hill, but judging by the soundscape it must be huge.

Those with Shadow-sight can make a **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check** to reveal that the air in the cave is soaked in Corruption, though not strong enough that it would be risky to move around down there for short periods.

THE CAVES

When the characters' expedition reaches the caves, the Beast Clan have already left through the tunnels leading north, up and out into Davokar. What remains of the Jezites may be blighted but they are not stupid – they realized that their only chance to survive was to run and find themselves some other shelter, further into the woods. The only ones left are the clan's "pets," the witch Bayela who refused to leave her black crystal island, and all the dead Jezites who never found peace because of the corrupting effect of the crystal.

The natural caves have a height of between thirty and fifty paces. The floors are mostly smooth, from erosion and the water that still runs in shallow trenches through several of the halls and tunnels. The water is perfectly drinkable, if with a taint of minerals. Both of the caves furthest to the east are heated and humid because of a hot spring – their rocky walls glitter softly from fluorescent algae and the floors are covered by a thin layer of moss-clad dirt that sprouts a profusion of edible mushrooms.

The Crystal Isle

The nowadays matte black crystal was once blue-white like ice, but that was before it was discovered by the mystics of old who started using it as a site for performing mystical rituals and spells. It attracted the Corruption which otherwise would have affected the mystics, at the cost of accumulating the darkness inside. Finally it transformed and was brought to life.

Now, the Crystal Isle in part functions as an extra power source when performing all kinds of mystical powers and rituals, in part like it did before (if the Mystic is within 30 feet of the isle it absorbs half of any temporary Corruption due to casting a spell). In order to make use of the extra powers, the mystic has to attune to the isle, which is done by taking a short rest on the isle and focusing on its power and gaining 2 permanent Corruption (the permanent Corruption remains while the Mystic is attuned to the Isle); the attunement process works like an artifact except that an unlimited number of individuals may be bound to the isle simultaneously. Attunement to the Crystal Isle allows the mystic to use their bonus action and gain 1d4 additional temporary Corruption to choose one of the following effects:

- ◆ the Mystic has advantage on their next spell attack
- ◆ choose a creature that the Mystic can see within 60 feet; that creature has disadvantage on their next saving throw
- ◆ choose a creature that the Mystic can see within 60 feet; the creature is vulnerable to a damage type of the Mystic's choice until the end of its next turn.
- ◆ recover 2d8 hit points.
- ◆ improve the Mystic's armor class by 1d4 until the end of their next turn.

EXAMPLE: A Mystic with 2 permanent Corruption (due to attuning to the Isle) stands on the Isle intent on defending it from a group of onrushing enemies. In the first round, the Mystic opts to increase their armor class – they accept 3 points of temporary Corruption and gains a +3 bonus to their armor class until the end of their next turn. During the second round they accept 2 points in temporary Corruption to make the target of their polymorph spell have disadvantage on its saving throw. After having been wounded they choose to accept an additional 2 points in Corruption the third round to heal 2d8 hit points. The temporary Corruption pushes them beyond their Corruption Threshold. They must roll to see if they gain a mark of Corruption. This could end badly...

1 WRATH OF THE WARDEN



In the porous rock north of the sinkhole's cave, the Beast Clan have carved out a corridor, running to the Pool's Cave (#7). Between these halls they have made their home – eight large chambers where they have spent the last eleven years, brooding and longing for revenge that together with the corruptive atmosphere has driven them away from humanity, more and more towards the beastly.

Not much of value was left behind when the clan escaped. The eastern chamber (#6) was the place where the hunters stored their game, in the form of prey animals and loot from wanderers, barbarian camp sites and raided colonies of free settlers. By searching what is left, the characters can gather up 3d20 ortegs, 1d20 + 10 shillings and 2d10 thaler. Swords, axes, spears and various kinds of light armors are plentiful, though they are all in such a poor condition that they cannot

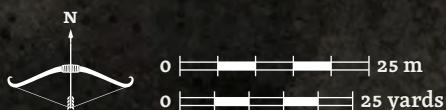
be sold for more than half their usual value. If someone succeeds at a **DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check**, they find the only item of real value – a gemstone adorned brooch, sewn into the lining of a fur coated mantle (value: 120 thaler).

THE BURIED WOMAN

Finding Anadea's body at the top of the hill requires first a **DC 16 Wisdom (Survival) check** to figure out approximately where in the rubble to search. A failure means that the characters start searching in the wrong place; a success lets them quickly manage to dig up the crumpled copper sign of the Fern (can be sold as copper scrap for 5 thaler, or even better as a memento of "the Tragedy of Thistle Hold" to someone fascinated by the catastrophe, then for 1d20 + 10 thaler). If it matters – for example if the characters are

CAVES BENEATH THISTLE HOLD

1. Hall of the Rubble Hill
2. Western Hall of Mosses
3. Eastern Hall of Mosses
4. The Hot Spring
5. Beast Clan Quarters
6. Storage
7. The Pool's Cave
8. Passage to Davokar
9. Guard Post
10. The Crystal Isle



hunted by a hoard of **wraiths** (see below) – each attempt to find the remains of the tavern takes one round.

Once they have found the sign, next up is finding the body. All characters present may make a **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check**, starting with the one who has the highest Wisdom value. A successful check leads to the discovery of the battered corpse and Anadea's belt purse.

If someone inspects the body, they will see that a broken necklace is tangled up in the woman's hair; a **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check** leads to the conclusion that a medallion fell off when it snapped. To find the medallion, someone who expressly is looking for it must succeed at a **DC 18 Intelligence (Investigation) check**.

The belt purse contains a coin bag (6 thaler, 13 shilling), a small key with an intricate set of teeth, a coin shaped sun

symbol of blacked silver, and a patterned gold pearl, about the size of an eye bulb. With a successful **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check**, a letter is also found, hidden in the lining of the belt purse. It is written on very thin paper, in Ambrian but with letters looking like cuneiform symbols. It reads (see handout, page 200):

*Friend in strife and sorrow
This offer is the only one you will receive.
Decline and mourn alone.
Accept and follow my confidant.
We will meet where no tear falls in vain.*

*I am waiting.
You are needed.
Teara-Téana*

The other items in the belt purse may be described as follows:

The Medallion: A pendant depicting the sinking sun of Prios in gold on a thin silver plate (value: 20 thaler). Most interesting are the words engraved on the back piece: “To Anadea, my beloved daughter.”

The Key: The key itself provides no clues as to the whereabouts of Anadeas storage, aside from the fact that she seems to own a home or estate. If taken to a lock smith, for example Lyrena who has her business close to the Eastern Gate, they can learn that it most likely is a key to a lock casing mounted in a door. Unfortunately for the player characters it is of a popular design, originally fashioned by the master smith Gunfas, and probably used in hundreds of doors in town.

The Gold Pearl: The function of the strangely patterned pearl can be determined by the identify spell or by succeeding at a **DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana) check**. A character with the Loremaster feature has advantage on the check. It is a Mind Stone (see textbox) and will likely allow a user to cast *send* to a carrier of another stone linked to this one. A character with Shadow-sight and a **passive Perception of 13 or higher** can sense that this particular stone is heavily permeated by Corruption and is likely to affect anyone trying to use the stone (page 44), though they cannot tell how.

Mind Stones

These pearl-like stones are enchanted by the elves and manufactured in sets of two or more. An attuned character can hold a stone and think of a carrier of a linked stone and then spend their action to cast *send*. Each use causes the caster to gain 1d4 temporary Corruption but simply being in possession of a stone does not cause any permanent Corruption.

THE VEARONS

Some ten years ago when the Beast Clan found shelter in the caves, they were already inhabited by a pack of huge lizards, named **vearons** (*Bestiary*, page 146) by the clan. The vearons kept to the Pool's Cave and the barbarians settled in the hall now covered in debris. Initially hostile encounters led to several deaths on both sides. But since the barbarians had to move through the lizards' turf to reach the surface, the animosity could not be allowed to persist. The skilled stockmen of the Jezites used part of the supplies to tame the beasts. Since then the two groups have lived side by side, the lizards functioning as the guard dogs of the humans on the path between their chambers and the surface.

As the members of the Beast Clan chose to leave the caves, the vearons first followed in their track. However, as the characters arrive they are on their way back, since they cannot live on the surface. The lizards immediately sense that there are intruders roaming about, and that is something they will not accept!

The Gamemaster is encouraged to use the predators in two steps. At first they keep to the shadows, watching and trailing the characters from afar. A character with a **passive Perception of 13 or higher** can hear something moving in the dark and maybe also notice a glint as some light source reflects off the glossy scales of a lizard. If the characters approach them, they retreat into the shadows.

Finally the lizards (one for every two characters) attack, preferably when in an open space where they can surround

the prey. Tentatively, the attack takes place in the Pool's Cave (#7), the Western Hall of Mosses (#2) or close to the hot spring (#3-4). Characters with a **passive Perception of 12 or lower** are surprised.

THE CRYSTAL ISLE

Out on the Crystal Isle sits the blight-marked witch Bayela, singing a sad song in sorrow over having been left behind by the rest of the clan, even if by choice. As soon as the characters enter the cave of the underground lake, the song can be heard by anyone with a **passive Perception of 11 or higher**.

If a character walks onto the peninsula reaching towards the isle, the humming is heard automatically and a **DC 15 Intelligence (History) check** allows the character to discern a few phrases in the otherwise word-less melody (see textbox). A character with the Loremaster feature or with the ability Loremaster or the barbarian culture have advantage on the check.

Standing at the tip of the peninsula with a light source in hand will make it possible to glimpse the outline and the matte gleam of the Crystal Isle, but the singer remains in darkness. However, with a successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check** when looking at the water it is possible to see something large passing by – something frighteningly similar to a naked human swimming beneath the surface.

A character with Shadow-sight and a **passive Perception of 15 or higher** is convinced that the island in the lake is the source of the Corruption permeating the cave system, and that it probably is hazardous just walking on it. Wading out to the isle is possible; the water is cold but never more than waist deep (for a Medium creature). In the lake swim about thirty **Beast Clan wraiths** (page 46), physically manifest in order to enjoy the lightly corrupted waters surrounding the Crystal Isle. The phantoms will stay away from waders until the witch Bayela orders them differently or until they are attacked.

Characters who venture out onto the island will immediately discover that it truly radiates Corruption. As soon as they set foot on the isle, they can feel goose bumps appear on their arms and neck, and if they continue forward they must make a **DC 15 Constitution saving throw**; a failure means that they gain 1d4 temporary Corruption. And should they stay on the isle, they must pass the saving throw each hour or gain 1d4 another temporary Corruption. The only way to escape this effect is to attune to the Isle (page 41).

The witch Bayela goes silent if they approach her. She emerges in the glow from their light source as a crooked, hooded crone who ogles them with distain written in her eyes. All she wants is to be left alone.

How the characters handle the meeting with Bayela will determine how and in what way they return to the surface.

Activate the Mind Stone

If the characters get the idea to activate the Mind Stone during the second act, the one bound to it will experience the following:

Contact is established with another Mind Stone. No one responds to the greeting but a feeling washes over the character, a cool skepticism bordering on hostility. Depending on what the character says, the feeling grows in strength and finally the contact is aborted. Repeated attempts to activate the stone are fruitless.

The explanation for this is that Teara-Téana suspects that Anadea has been killed and that the stone may have ended up in the hands of an antagonistic person or organization. She has no reason to take a chance on the opposite and hence regards the stone as lost.

Note that the particular Mind Stone carried by the characters is only linked to Teara-Téana's, and that activating it without knowing the correct procedure immediately inflicts 1d8 in temporary Corruption.

The blight-marked witch can be conversed with if they but behave in a reasonably courteous manner and have the ability Loremaster at novice level or are of barbarian heritage. The following is a summary of what she has to tell and what demands she will be making:

- ◆ She and her people are all that is left of the clan Jezora. They survived the Ambrarian attack as Chieftain Haloban's daughter, Helionor, led them to safety through tunnels which then were razed after their escape. Helionor has been their chieftain ever since.
- ◆ When the sinkhole, appeared the clan was about five hundred souls strong, half of which were toddlers and elders. All but her fled north through the Underworld to find a new home. Where she does not know...
- ◆ Questions about the Crystal Isle she answers in short and hissing terms, mostly in the hope to quickly get rid of them. She calls it a "blackened power node" and mutters that it long ago was linked to "*the pure magic*" but that it nowadays works as a "*pathway to the Eternal Night*."
- ◆ The characters must immediately return to the surface, but to gain her consent they must swear on their blood that no others will bother her in the future. She suggests that they claim that the caverns are soaked in Corruption and otherwise totally empty.

If the player characters talking to the witch show the slightest sign of doubt regarding her demands, her eyes flare up and she shouts into the darkness: "*Come my friends, come my dead!*" And instantly they emerge all around the Crystal Isle - naked, pale **Beast Clan wraiths** with hollow eyes. Some of them take a few steps forward, whereby the manifestation ceases and they adopt the semi-transparent appearance of their spirit form.

The smartest thing for the characters to do is of course to agree to Bayela's demands and swear that they will stop others from climbing down. If they persist in claiming that they cannot accomplish this, for example with reference to their lack of authority and influence in the matter, she quickly grows tired and decides to feed their blood to the crystal.

Bayela's Verses

*Fathers, mothers, young and old
left us here in the dark, in the cold*

*Running, fighting, all life ahead
I'd rather remain, here with the dead*

*Silent, frozen, never dry
I am alone to sing and to cry*

There are two ways to avoid combat with the dozen **Beast Clan wraiths**. If Bayela is killed they return to the water - they have no reason to attack the characters if not to defend the witch or fulfill her wishes.

Another option is to run. The wraiths are likely slower than the characters, so if they can make it to one of the tunnel openings they have a good chance to escape (see the rules for chases, *Gamemaster's Guide*, pages 159–162).

The number of Beast Clan wraiths standing in the characters' way when they try to flee the island is decided by the roll of 1d4. Should any characters have stayed at the tip of the peninsula, another 1d4 wraiths will be in their immediate vicinity. Note that the characters can always try to run past the enemies, but not without triggering opportunity attacks.



Bayela

You leave, you're not welcome, not by living, nor by dead." Ever since her beloved Haloban forced her to leave his side and instead accompany his daughter down into the Abyss, Bayela has had a hard time getting along with Helionor. She has kept to herself, mostly seated on the Crystal Isle, and silently watched her people being twisted by the dark power of the bedrock.

When Helionor ordered that the clan should flee for Davokar, Bayela refused to follow. The Crystal Isle is hers and she will not leave it under any condition, despite the fact that its corruptive energies have tainted her body and soul.

Tactics: If Bayela is attacked she will use *banishment* and *ray of enfeeblement* on her enemies. If that proves not enough, she will cast *hellish rebuke* at the highest level she thinks she can afford and use *eldritch blast* on distant combatants. After that she will use *dimension door* to escape the combat and leave it to the wraiths to finish up. She is prepared to die to defend her right to the isle.

Bayela

Medium human (Barbarian)

Armor Class 15 (enchanted witch gown)

Hit Points 58 (9d8 + 27)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	17 (+3)	16 (+3)	11 (+0)	20 (+5)	9 (-1)

Saving Throws Int +3, Wis +8

Skills Arcana +3, Insight +8, Perception +8

Senses passive Perception 18

Languages Ambrian, Barbarian

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

Manner peering, intense gaze

Shadow deep green like a blueberry bush filled with ripe berries (Corruption: 6/16)

Equipment component pouch, witch braid

Attuned to the Isle. Bayela is attuned to the Isle and thus gains only half of the usual temporary Corruption for casting spells and can use its benefits.

Lay on Hands (3/day). Bayela can touch a creature and restore 6 hit points to them as an action.

Song of Spring (1/day). Bayela can use her action to have all allies that can see and hear her to restore 30 hit points.

Spellcasting. Bayela's spellcasting ability is Wisdom (+8 to hit, spell save DC 16) and she knows the following spells:

Cantrips: *accurate strike* (0), *chill touch* (0), *eldritch blast* (0), *mage hand* (0), *minor illusion* (0), *prestidigitation* (0)

1st-level spells: *charm person* (1d4 + 1), *find familiar* (1), *hellish rebuke* (1d4 + 1)

2nd-level spells: *darkness* (2), *inherit wound* (1d4 + 2)

3rd-level spells: *larvae boil* (3), *ray of enfeeblement* (1d4 + 3)

4th-level spells: *banishment* (1d4 + 4), *dimension door* (1d4 + 4)

5th-level spells: *dream* (5), *turn weather* (5)

Rituals: *blood bond*, *comprehend languages*, *prestidigitation*

Witch Braid. Bayela has advantage on death saving throws.

ACTIONS

Dagger. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage.

Beast Clan Wraiths

Moans, groans and whimpers of hunger

The naked, bone-pale creatures swimming around in the lake have neither will nor goals, but they let themselves be commanded by Bayela for as long as she lives.

Tactics: The wraiths take aim at whoever comprises the greatest threat against Bayela. They will also pursue enemies on her command, but never beyond the Hall of the Rubble Hill.

Beast Clan Wraith

Medium undead

Armor Class 10

Hit Points 32 (5d8 + 14)

Speed 20 ft., swim 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	11 (+0)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)	16 (+3)

Damage Resistances acid, cold, fire, lightning, thunder

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained

Senses darkvision 60 feet, passive Perception 10

Languages Barbarian

Challenge 3 (700 XP, proficiency bonus +2)

Manner swaying bodies, staring eyes

Shadow glossy black, like oil (thoroughly corrupt)

Equipment —

Insubstantial. The wraith can use its bonus action to become insubstantial (able to move through creatures and objects; immune to nonmagical bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage) or substantial (able to make melee attacks and loses its immunity). It takes 5 (1d10) force damage if it ends its turn inside an object. If the object is a creature, that creature takes 2 (1d4) temporary Corruption.

ACTIONS

Dead Touch. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 5 (1d10) necrotic damage and the creature's Strength score by 1. If the character's Strength is reduced to 0 it dies and rises as a wraith within 24 hours.

REACTIONS

Fade Away. The wraith can become insubstantial when a creature comes within the wraith's reach.

The Sun Temple

THE SUN TEMPLE is under high pressure during the second act of the adventure. Many seek comfort, having lost relatives and friends to the sinkhole. Even more are afraid and demand reassurance from the priests that what has happened should not be understood as a punishment from Prios. The grand hall of the temple, called the Light Yard, is full around the clock and those who do not fit in there seek solace in The Park of the Elders or place autumn flowers at the feet of the statues by the temple's main gate - the statues of the lightbringers Eberon Ambra and Illoena Karras who both died a hero's death in the war against the Dark Lords.

The characters can visit the Sun Temple for various reasons. For one thing, some or all of them may be allied to the representatives of Prios. Then there are the possibilities of going there for help with injuries or to gain knowledge about the dark powers of the Beast Clan. However, the most likely scenario is that they approach the temple after having found the sun symbol in Anadea's belt purse, hoping to identify and learn more about her. Answers can be found, but only at the cost of a service in return.

FATHER ELFENO

About ten priests are moving about in the temple and in The Park of the Elders, offering blessings and words of comfort to all visitors. Gaining their attention is no problem, as long as the characters are patient and do not disturb them while they are tending to others. If asked about a meeting with Father Elfeno, the priests say that the First Theurg is praying and must not be bothered. However, if they are shown Anadea's sun symbol and informed that its owner was found dead in the sinkhole the reaction is another: the priest excuses himself, walks away and returns after a while, instructed to guide the player characters to Father Elfeno.

The crowding in the temple only affects the public areas. The priest leads the characters through a draped opening in the west wall of the antechamber, and onwards through a room dominated by a large table and with the whole long-side covered by a tapestry - the silver and gold threads depicting a young and mounted Queen Korinthia, sun-lit, in the midst of a sea of murderous undead. To the left after that room is a massive stone gate, bolted with four sturdy locks and three latches of steel, but the guide keeps moving along a curved corridor with several doors on the left-hand side. At the third door he stops to knock and waits for an answer.

The chamber they are let into is small, window-less and without furnishings. Father Elfeno is kneeling with his back to the characters, but slowly rises and turns towards them. If this is the first time they meet, he spends a long while assessing them with a haughty, concerned look on his face.

Elfeno assumes a cautious attitude and tries to get the characters to speak about themselves, their relation to Anadea and what has happened to her. If they are forthcoming

and appear to be honest he can offer the following information in return:

- ◆ The woman they describe was an initiate at the Sun Temple up until a month ago. If the characters still do not know her name, Elfeno can fill in that blank.
- ◆ Neither he, nor anyone else in the Church of Prios had any contact with Anadea, on that he can swear. Hence, if the characters are looking for her superiors or mission givers they have to look elsewhere.
- ◆ He does not want to comment on why the woman left the temple other than in a few carefully select words: *"Anadea lost her conviction."*
- ◆ Should any of the characters be a member of, or closely allied to, the Sun Church (the Contacts feat with a suitable focus) they also have a chance to learn more about the sinkhole. However, this requires that they expressly ask for the theurg's view on the hole and the abominations that ascended from the deep, and that the person who has contacts among the followers of Prios passes a **DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check**. If these criteria are met, a dark-eyed Elfeno says that, even if it has not been proven, previous reports and examinations of the underworld beneath the Hold suggest that what is called the Beast Clan is in fact what remains of Clan Jezora (see *The World of Symbaroum*, page 93, for more on this).

Before the characters have time to ask anything else, there is a knock at the door. In comes the priest who guided them to Elfeno. He glides up to the theurg to whisper something in his ear. A character succeeding at a **DC 13 Wisdom (Insight) check** notices a look of intense disapproval which quickly passes over the otherwise expressionless face of Father Elfeno.

After a while he turns away from the sun priest, gives the characters a nod and says: "Here, follow me!"

Father Elfeno

"Prios is Light; without the One, the night is eternal."

Father Elfeno was but a boy when The Great War reached his homelands. Both his parents were mystics in service of the Sun God and discovered his potential early on, so when the hordes of the Dark Lords came, the whole family worked together to safeguard the villagers seeking refuge in their temple. That was how he got to witness the power of Prios firsthand - the undead slaughtered and razed everything but avoided the holy temple as if it was a rock of light in a stream of darkness.

But he was also convinced that the aid of the Sun God comes at a cost, to be paid in obedience and self-sacrifice. He will never doubt that the price is worth paying, no more than his mother showed doubt as she left the safety of the temple and sacrificed her life in order to help the villagers who had put their faith in other, false and evidently powerless idols.

THE SUN TEMPLE

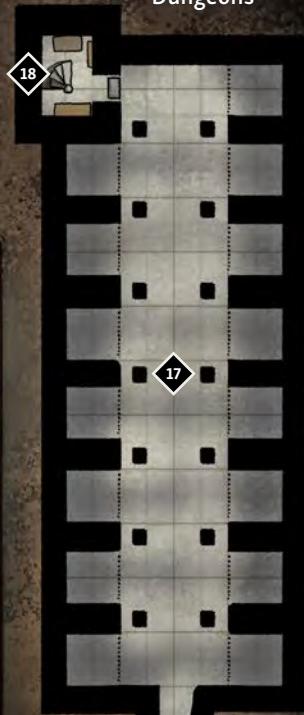
- 1. Antechamber
- 2. Meeting Room
- 3. To the Dungeons
- 4. Light Yard
- 5. Alcoves
- 6. Dorms
- 7. To upper floor
- 8. Hall
- 9. Library
- 10. Study Room
- 11. Common Room
- 12. Stair to the Dome
- 13. Storage
- 14. Dorms
- 15. Kitchen
- 16. To ground floor
- 17. Cells
- 18. To Lower Catacombs



Upper Floor



Dungeons



Ground Floor



Tactics: Father Elfeno is first and foremost a warrior in Prios' army, even if he at the moment has opted to serve the sun god by tending to the herd of wicked fools in the Hold. But when given a chance to use his powers in dire situations he holds nothing back – he protects himself with *death ward* and *resistance* then attempts to *inflict wounds* or hamper his foes with *blindness/deafness*.

Father Elfeno

Medium human (Ambrian)

Armor Class 13 (enchanted robes)

Hit Points 82 (11d8 + 33)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	13 (+1)	17 (+3)	11 (+0)	20 (+5)	17 (+3)

Saving Throws Int +3, Wis +8

Skills Arcana +3, Deception +6, Insight +8, Perception +8, Religion +3

Senses passive Perception 18

Languages Ambrian

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

Manner cold, judgmental, dogmatic

Shadow fiery yellow like sun soaked gold (Corruption: 5/16)

Equipment component pouch, flask with 1d4 drops of Water of the Dusk, sun symbol, book of the Lightbringer

Spellcasting. Elfeno's spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell attack +8, save DC 16) and knows the following spells:

Cantrips: *accurate strike* (0), *guidance* (0), *ray of frost* (0), *resistance* (0), *spare the dying* (0), *thaumaturgy* (0)

1st-level spells: *bless* (1d4 + 1), *command* (1d4 + 1), *holy smoke* (1), *inflict wounds* (1d4 + 1)

2nd-level spells: *blindness/deafness* (1D4 + 2), *warding bond* (2)

3rd-level spells: *dispel magic* (1d4 + 3), *speak with dead* (1d4 + 3)

4th-level spells: *death ward* (1d4 + 4), *freedom of movement* (4)

5th-level spell: *mass cure wounds* (1d4 + 5)

Rituals: *augury*, *silence*, *lifegiver*, *purify food and drink*

ACTIONS

Quarterstaff. Melee Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 6 (1d8 + 2) bludgeoning damage



Father Elfeno

DESEBA THE OLD

Elfeno leads them further along the corridor towards the back of the temple (#7), up a stair leading to the chambers and corridors on the second floor. However, they are apparently not headed there, but further up. Behind a door by the stair (#12) is a spiral staircase leading upwards. As they reach the top, the player characters realize that they are inside the copper dome of the temple building.

The floor is about ten paces across and is mostly empty. The exception is found in the western part, where screen walls of sun yellow fabric delimit a part of the space. Someone is moving on the other side and before they can see who it is, they hear the harsh voice of an old woman wishing them welcome to her humble abode. The woman who comes to greet them is short, wrinkled and scarred as if by fire, but with a straight posture and lively, light brown eyes. She waves them towards her and asks that Elfeno leave, which he does, hesitantly. A successful **DC 13 Wisdom (Insight) check** reveals a grumpy, stern frown on the lips of the First Theurg.

The woman shows them into one of the “rooms” created by the screen walls, where she invites them to sit at a round table with a cracked stone slab. She introduces herself as “Deseba, theurg and faithful servant of Prios” and begs that they tell her about themselves and their errand to the temple (something she already knows, thanks to the priest they initially talked to). Anyone who has the Loremaster feature or the Contacts feat (the Sun Church or similar) and succeeds at a **DC 13 Intelligence (History or Religion) check** remembers that Deseba the Old is the only individual ever to be appointed Lightbringer before her death, after having saved the life of the Queen and the First Father during the war.

When the characters have told their story, she lets them know that Anadea lived in the temple annex, that she left some things behind and that the characters can gain access to the items. But also that they first have to help her help another of the Sun God's servants. This is what she has to say and ask of them:

- ◆ During his whole time in Thistle Hold, Father Sarvola has been harassed by some who have a hard time accepting the appointed heretic (*Gamemaster's Guide*, page 30). He has been subjected to disturbances and disgraceful rumors, thrown objects during mass and even a couple of assassination attempts.
- ◆ According to credible sources, there are many who claim that the sinkhole is Prios' way of punishing the residents for harboring Sarvola. An attack is guaranteed to happen, probably more violent than anything up to date.
- ◆ Since the First Father has proclaimed Sarvola a heretic, the Sun Temple cannot be seen helping him. But the characters can.
- ◆ Those who harass the Mission House and its representatives seem to be ordinary residents and vagrants, but since they at times appear to be well-organized there is probably someone who guides or commands their actions.
- ◆ The characters have to find this "someone" and avert the threat against Sarvola. How to accomplish this is up to them, provided that they can prove it has been done.

If the characters question why she, a member of the Sun Church, wants to help Sarvola, she responds that the agreement concerns answers to questions about Anadea, not about her and her motives. She also asks that the agreement remains a secret, for their sake as much as for hers: "*No one must know about our terms, absolutely no one!*"

Deseba the Old

"The sun shines on all, also on those with darkness inside."

Deseba has been the servant of Prios since before the Dark Lords attacked and transformed her benevolent God into a cold, judging and ruthless giver of laws. She managed to convince herself that the transformation was necessary during



the war, but is just as firm in her belief that it is high time for the Sun Church to remember its roots. Prios must be allowed to be who He is, a warm and compassionate God who cares even for the darkest of souls. Otherwise the Ambrians are at risk of awakening His wrath – bringing about an even greater catastrophe than The Great War.

However, the awakening must be allowed to happen slowly and it must be anchored in the halls of power, both within the Church and among other factions in the Ambrian realm. The people are still threatened by darkness and if she does not tread carefully the risk is great that all who agree with her will suffer the same fate as Sarvola. That she herself is still alive, is likely due to the First Father being grateful she saved his life, but also to him not knowing what Deseba and the Queen are planning – an order where the Sun Church reverts to serving the people, in sharp contrast to Jeseebegai's ambition to turn Ambria into a "theocracy of the sun."

Tactics: Deseba avoids combat, but if she cannot get away she trusts in the defensive and calls on her *patron saint* – a very powerful spirit who has been faithful to her for several decades (*Player's Guide*, page 220).

Deseba the Old

Medium human (Ambrian)

Armor Class 11 (blessed robes)

Hit Points 82 (15d8 + 15)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	20 (+5)	13 (+1)

Saving Throws Con +4, Wis +8

Skills Arcana +6, Insight +8, Perception +8, Religion +6

Senses passive Perception 18

Languages Ambrian

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

Manner rubs her aching fingers

Shadow fiery yellow like sun soaked gold

(Corruption: 0/16)

Equipment component pouch, 1d6 Herbal Cures,

2 doses Elixir of Life, 2 doses Antidote (strong), sun symbol

Spellcasting. Deseba's spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell attack +8, save DC 16) and knows the following spells:

Cantrips: *acid splash* (0), *fire bolt* (0), *light* (0), *mending* (0), *resistance* (0), *spare the dying* (0)

1st-level spells: *bane* (1d4 + 1), *command* (1d4 + 1), *sanctuary* (1), *shield of faith* (1d4 + 1)

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

3rd-level spells: *clairvoyance* (1d4 + 3), *magic circle* (3)

4th-level spells: *guardian of faith* (4), *stone shape* (1d4 + 4)

5th-level spells: *legend lore* (5), *scrying* (1d4 + 5)

6th-level spells: *harm* (1d4 + 6), *heroes' feast* (6)

7th-level spells: *divine word* (7), *etherealness* (1d4 + 7)

8th-level spell: *holy aura* (1d4 + 8)

Rituals: *divination*, *gentle repose*, *patron saint*, *purgung fire*, *purify food and drink*

ACTIONS

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

THE DARK SIDE OF TOWN

If the characters ask Deseba about cultists and Corruption in town she immediately turns very serious and responds with a counter-question: “*Why do you want to know?*” Should the characters try to evade the question she only comments that there is much within the palisade of Thistle Hold that one should not speak about, and that the characters would do best to leave the fight against Davokar’s darkness to those equipped to handle it.

If they instead tell her what Anadea (and possibly the witches, page 23) told them and stress that there very well may be a very strong source of Corruption in town, she reacts differently. After some thought she stands up and asks the characters to accompany her to a meeting with a person who may be able to provide them with information.

As they are walking down through the temple towards the sturdy iron door, she tells them the following in a whispering voice:

- ◆ In a town like Thistle Hold, the dark is never far away. Its representatives are, for better or worse, careful not to get noticed – which means that they seldom consciously cause any atrocities, but also that they are hard to detect and terminate.
- ◆ That humans who ally themselves with the powers of the Eternal Night exist is unavoidable and maybe also necessary, since it shows other Ambrians what happens when the laws of Prios are abandoned. The ambition of the Church cannot be to eliminate all heretical behavior, but must be to guide sceptics to the way of light and to help those who have been led astray.
- ◆ Sure, the priests also work to quickly purge all heretical elements that grow strong enough to threaten pious people. In that context, the Knights of the Dying Sun have an important role to play, along with the section in the order of the Twilight Friars called The Whip of Prios, whose main task is to identify and take care of sacrilegious individuals.
- ◆ In the catacombs beneath the Temple, where they are going, are captives in varying corrupted states. Some are beyond salvation and will be transported to the monastery in the Titans, but most of them are involuntary victims that Father Elfeno and his priests are trying to save. And she adds: “*He who we will visit is staying at the top of the three levels of the catacombs. Further down are persons suffering from advanced symptoms of stigmatization, but don’t worry – they are caught behind bars blessed by Prios and the levels are separated by heavy iron gates. The risk that someone from below manages to get out is... small...*”
- ◆ The one they are about to meet is named Orai and he was nearly dead when he was captured close to the goblin village Karabbadokk, the day before the sinkhole appeared. He is yet to provide them with any useful information, but maybe he knows something about the situation – it is evident that he has been subjected to strong Corruption.

Inside the door on the ground floor, a spiral stair winds down into the dark (#3). Deseba lights two lanterns and keeps one for herself. About fifteen feet down into the darkness, the stair ends and an arched tunnel with paved floors begins. After about ten paces the tunnel opens into a dimly lit hall. From one cell hysterical giggling is heard, from another false tuned singing, and from a third something similar to the sound of someone moving about in full plate armor. Deseba walks straight to the door directly to the left and raises her lantern.

A middle-aged man is sitting cross-legged on the floor of the cell, squinting towards the light and hissing between clenched teeth. He wears a white chemise covered in yellow stains – probably because of pus leaking from wounds underneath. Deseba greets the prisoner: “*Good evening, master Orai, how are we doing today?*”

Without warning, Orai throws himself at the bars, furiously reaching for the theurg: “*I am well now, healthy as a bell, let me out!*” When Deseba does not answer he roars, saliva spraying: “*Let me out, or I will rip your heart out, crone!*” Deseba turns to the player characters, gives them a sign to step back and says that they probably will have to wait a bit for Orai to tire himself out.

When the hysteria finally dies down it is fully possible to talk to Orai, but to get him to answer any questions the characters must make him believe that they have come to help him be released – which requires a **DC 14 Charisma (Deception) check**. He is incoherent and he slurs, but the following pieces of information leave his lips in a sequence determined by the Gamemaster, colored by horrific images from fever dreams in the dungeon:

- ◆ Orai recently arrived at Thistle Hold, after having escaped the black-eyed bloodthirsty undead that was once the love of his youth.
- ◆ Some time ago (he alters between saying a day, ten days and a moon) he was hired as a sell-sword.
- ◆ An expedition left for the depths of Davokar, led by a person he sometimes calls “*the woman*,” at other times “*the changeling*” or “*the butcher with the axe*.”
- ◆ Along on the journey came (according to Orai) between ten and a hundred people – sorcerers, killers, beast-jawed barbarians, human blight-beasts, minstrels, drummers and four small faceless girls.
- ◆ At the end of the road was a God, a forest spirit, an “*ancient being with hoofs of gold and antlers of diamond*.” The goal was to dismember the God and make it dead, dead, dead!
- ◆ (This is told in a calm voice, astutely and with clear eyes) The members of the expeditions attacked, the God did nothing to defend himself, the meat-axe struck at its neck until the head fell off. It kept on mooing. The sound cut Orai’s soul to pieces.
- ◆ A sword through his back, the world went black, the steel was like ice. The steel was his payment; he never received any silver coins.

- ◆ But the Bull God did not die, and neither did Orai. Black mists covered the world and filled him with power, with the sweetest darkness...
- ◆ What happened to the other members of the expedition he first claims not to know, but then it seems to dawn on him: “*They cut off the antlers and hoofs and followed the whispering skull to Rada Valadla – to the black heart of Davokar where Symbaroum is about to awaken.*”

As you probably can tell, Orai was one of the sellwords who accompanied the Midnight Cult to the lair of Eox, and who was stabbed in the back once the mission was accomplished. The information he imparts cannot help the characters move forward, but it is a way of giving them an idea of the adventure’s backdrop and some insights which will prove valuable when they meet with Teara-Téana in the third act.

THE MISSION HOUSE

What the characters do after visiting at the temple is up to them. Should they ask for advice Deseba or someone else will suggest that they start at the Mission House. Maybe Father Sarvola actually knows who is tormenting him? He may at least have some clue or an idea on where to start. Another option may be to keep the building under observation and try to identify the wrongdoers, if and when they strike.

Unlike the leader of the Sun Temple, the figurehead of the Mission House is very much active in meeting the people who have come to seek comfort. He sits in a simple armchair in a corner, and in front of him is a long line of people who want to talk to him or just be assured that everything will be alright. Pushing past the line is not advisable – that only results in a stern look and a hand gesture, clearly indicating that the characters have to wait their turn. And should the characters claim that his life is in danger, Sarvola somberly replies that he is as condemned as all others beneath the sun and that his life is in the hands of Prios. That is all the apostate has to say.

The Mission House

The Mission House of Sarvola has but three rooms. The Assembly Hall takes up the major part of the one story building and is the place where the congregation gathers to talk about Prios and listen to Sarvola’s informal sermons. A simple tapestry covers one of the walls, depicting the sinking sun of Prios in yellow on blue. Aside from the Assembly Hall there is only the private chamber of Sarvola and a kitchen. The boy Aluin sleeps on the kitchen sofa.



Aluin

If the characters decide to join the line or to wait somewhere inside the Mission House they will soon get company. On a stool next to Sarvola sits a black-haired boy, about six years old, legs dangling and dressed in the same kind of dark brown robe as the priest. The lad looks radiantly happy, as if he did not pick up on the sorrow and fear permeating the atmosphere.

When he sees the characters, he stands up and comes walking towards them, holding up a twig whose leaves still have a healthy green color. “*Look what I have done!*” he says with a brilliant smile. If the characters ask what it is he replies casually: “*A twig, silly; can’t you see?*” And should they instead get the idea to try and guess what his creation is meant to picture, he corrects them factually: “*No-but-no, what’s wrong with your eyes? It is a twig, silly.*” After the chat he skips back to his chair and resumes dangling his legs, while at the same time trying to mimic the posture and gestures of Father Sarvola. For more information about this boy, see the textbox Aluin.

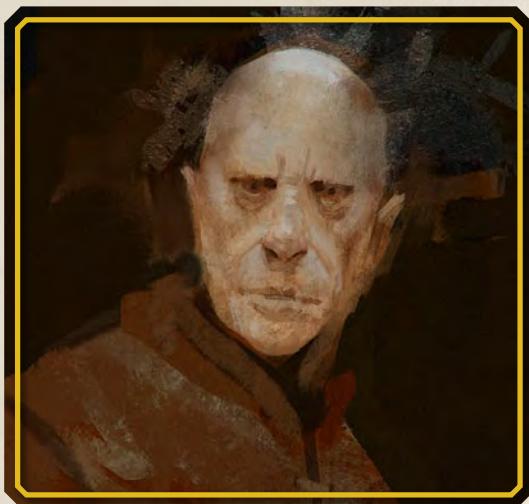
Father Sarvola

‘*Always doubt, with love, in benevolence.*’

Sarvola of the house Bargomol is more closely described under the header *The Sarvola Crisis* in the book *The World of Symbaroum*, page 92, and in the *Gamemaster’s Guide*, page 24. He claims that the only way to combat darkness is to literally be the light.

That said, he does not always find it easy to regard the First Father, the Templars or the murderous members of the Iron Pact with love and compassion. It is a daily struggle, but a struggle that he is determined to win, at any and all costs!

Tactics: Sarvola never resorts to violence, not even in self-defense. If the enemies are too many for him to successfully use *hold person* or *control water* to avoid violence, he puts down his staff and casts *death ward* or flees if possible.



Father Sarvola

Medium human (Ambrian)

Armor Class 14 (blessed robes)

Hit Points 82 (14d8 + 14)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	17 (+3)	13 (+1)	17 (+3)	19 (+4)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Dex +5, Wis +6

Skills Insight +6, Perception +6, Religion +5

Senses passive Perception 16

Languages Ambrian

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

Manner concerned, laid back

Shadow dark yellow, like tarnished liquid gold
(Corruption: 9/12)

Equipment component pouch, sun symbol

Spellcasting. Sarvola's spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell attack +6, save DC 14) and knows the following spells:

Cantrips: *guidance* (0), *light* (0), *mending* (0), *resistance* (0), *spare the dying* (0), *thaumaturgy* (0)

1st-level spells: *bless* (1), *command* (1d4 + 1), *cure wounds* (1d4 + 1), *detect evil and good* (1d4 + 1)

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

3rd-level spells: *dispel magic* (1d4 + 3), *protection from energy* (3)

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

5th-level spells: *hallow* (5), *mass cure wounds* (1d4 + 5)

6th-level spells: *find the path* (6), *forbiddance* (1d4 + 6)

7th-level spells: *divine word* (7), *symbol* (1d4 + 7)

Rituals: *anathema*, *atonement*, *detect poison and disease*, *holy smoke*, *lifegiver*

ACTIONS

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

Aluin

Before Sarvola settled down in Thistle Hold he walked through Davokar for a whole year. That he survived cannot be seen as anything but a miracle; wizards who have heard of the feat claim that the sun priest either is lying or that he must have been under the protection of some powerful forest spirit for most of the journey. What speaks for the latter is the boy Aluin.

During his time in the woods, Sarvola had a recurring and to him very unpleasant dream in which he engaged in carnal relations with a beautiful but beastly creature who called herself Ala. If indeed it was a dream? On a summer's day year 21 a small boy arrived at the Mission House to tug at the rim of Sarvola's robe. "I am Aluin," he introduced himself. "Mother Ala says that I am yours and that I will live with you."

The strange boy moved in to sleep on Sarvola's kitchen sofa, and he comes and goes as he pleases. The priest does as always: he doubts, out of love and in benevolence. On the one hand he is afraid of the boy, not least since he from friends has learned that the little one has no spiritual shadow. On the other hand, Aluin is the only one who can make Sarvola smile wholeheartedly.

THE ATTACK

The characters will never get a chance to speak to the priest before his detractors strike. Whether they are inside the house or are observing it from somewhere outside, they have a chance to notice two persons acting strangely in the crowd. A character with a **passive Perception of 15 or higher** will notice a man (Efram) and a woman (Lida) who look more nervous than grieving or in need of comfort; both of them young and dressed like ordinary commoners in tunic, cape and trousers. The characters can act directly or wait, a choice affecting their chances of finding the attackers' meeting place (see below).

If they decide to wait, they will first notice how the four-man patrol of the Town Watch that has been keeping an eye on the crowd walks away. And as soon as they have passed out of sight, each of the nervous youngsters brings forth something from inside their capes – a red scarf, that they quickly wave in the air, first one of them, then the other.

Shortly thereafter, a dozen people (**Sellswords of the Sun**, page 54) come storming out of the alleys on the opposite side of the Promenade. They wear dirty, white robes with deep hoods and all of them carry blood-red scarfs wrapped around their heads so that only their eyes show. They have daubed the symbol of the Sun Church, the sinking sun, on their robes and they carry flaming oil lanterns

with the intent of throwing them at the walls and roof of the Mission House. As they approach, they shout in hatred: "Heretics will burn!"; "Death to the Dark Lord Sarvola!"; "Prios loves you, heretic, he truly loves you!"

Panic erupts. Most people yell out loud and do their best to vacate the yard and the building. A few energetic and brave types move out in a counterattack but are incapable of doing much before the rioters have delivered their burning cargo. Also the characters can try to stop the attack, but depending on where they are, the crowd may hinder them from achieving a positive outcome. Tentatively, the challenge is handled like this:

- ◆ Most Mystical powers can be used without modification, provided that the target is in sight.
- ◆ The use of ranged weapons and other Mystical powers requiring a ranged spell attack will need for the character to have a clear path through the crowd and demands that the character gets to higher ground, for example onto a roof or the rear of a wagon. Reaching such an elevated

position in the chaos requires a **DC 15 Strength (Athletics)** or **Dexterity (Acrobatics)** check to use their movement. A character that fails the check can use their action to repeat the check.

- ◆ The adversaries who have thrown their lanterns will try to flee the scene, something which will happen on initiative count 10 the second round.
- ◆ There are three ways to stop a lantern from being thrown.
 1. If a carrier suffers damage they must make a **Constitution saving throw** with the damage as the DC or drop the lantern and flee.
 2. If a character reaches a carrier they can make an opposed **Strength (Athletics) check**. If the character snatches the lantern, the carrier will try to escape.
 3. Mystical powers like *hold person*, *dominate person* and even *mage hand* can help, of course.
- ◆ Depending on the number of thrown lanterns the effect reads as follows. The characters stop:

4 or more lanterns from hitting the target: The followers of Sarvola stop the building from being engulfed in flames; everyone inside, including Sarvola, makes it out unharmed.

0-3 lanterns from hitting the target: The house is engulfed in flames but Sarvola and most others make it out alive. However, Sarvola inhales a lot of smoke and will be unavailable for the rest of the adventure.

Sellsword of the Sun

Medium human (Ambrian)

Armor Class 14 (shield)

Hit Points 5 (1d8 + 1)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)

Skills Athletics +4, Perception +2

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages Ambrian

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP, proficiency bonus +2)

Manner taunting

Shadow copper with brighter and duller spots, like a buckled sheet (0/4)

Equipment two handaxes, 1D10 ortegs

Bash Lantern. The defender can use their bonus action to swing their lantern wildly, possibly splashing oil on a nearby creature or setting it on fire. Each creature within 5 feet of the defender must make a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw or become doused with oil. The next time the defender uses this feature, the creature must succeed on the saving throw or be set on fire. An alight creature takes 1d4 fire damage at the start of its turn and can use its action to douse the flames.

ACTIONS

Club. *Melee Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 5 (1d4 + 2) bludgeoning damage.

Sellswords of the Sun

"For Prios, the One!"

The Sellswords of the Sun are twelve concerned and worried residents who are terrified that all the heretical activities in Thistle Hold will cause Prios to abandon the town and hence leave it vulnerable to attacks from the shadows. They are all convinced that Prios, the Law Giver, is the only one who can save them, like he saved the Ambrians from the Dark Lords.

Tactics: The Sellswords of the Sun are no warriors even if they would like to be. If outnumbered or outmatched they will try to run away to regroup, hoping to improve their chances; letting go of the weapons and shouting accusations at the enemy in the moment of defeat is another acceptable strategy. If they are assembled it will take a lot before they admit defeat, especially if they regard the enemy as allied to the darkness of the world.

QUESTION OR PURSUE

There are two main ways of finding the way to the house in the northeastern district where the Sellswords convene after their work has been done – to trail them or to force a captive to reveal the location.

After the attack, all surviving members of the group run together to a narrow alley close to Lazifor's Road. There they remove their white robes, then split up and take different routes back to the headquarters.

The Patrol

The woman leading the Town Watch patrol at the Mission House is called Samela and owes a great debt at Benego's. When an unknown figure offered her fifty thaler to leave her posting, she gladly accepted. She knows nothing about who was behind the attack on Sarvola's building, but characters who find her can force her to confess to what she has done by way of credible threats and a successful **DC 13 Charisma (Intimidation) check**. If passed, they also get a description of the one who bribed her – a description fitting one of the two youngsters who waved their red scarves right before the Sellswords of the Sun attacked.

Pursue: Pursuing them is not very difficult; the challenge is to do it without the Sellswords finding out. The character (or characters) who handles the shadowing must make a check using their **Dexterity (Stealth)** versus the Sellswords' passive Perception. If taking special precautions (for example moving along the roof tops or in parallel alleys where possible) they have advantage on their check but also need to make a **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check** to not lose sight of the Sellswords. Should the character be discovered, the prey will of course try to shake them off (use the chase rules, *Gamemaster's Guide*, pages 159–162).

Question: The player characters will get their questions answered if they succeed at a **DC 10 Charisma (Persuasion) check**. The mere threat of rituals makes them give up and spill their guts.

The two youths that the rioters had paid to bribe the Town Watch patrol and be their eyes and ears in the crowd are called Efram and Lida. They linger at the Mission House after the attack and also take part in trying to quench the fire, with the purpose of keeping an eye on what is happening and in the hope of avoiding suspicion. Should the characters capture one of them, they will, after a moment of hesitation, confess to everything, which admittedly is not very much. They are trying to earn money for a forest expedition and never knew what their employers had planned. Luckily, they know about the deserted house where they were supposed to be two hours after the attack, to report and get paid.

If the characters capture one of the Sellswords instead, the furious devotee of Prios can tell them more (after having been duly pressured):

- ◆ He or she is a member of a group called The Sellswords of the Sun, sworn to fight the Darkness however it may appear.
- ◆ The group consists of twelve members, led by the former Black Cloak Dolani who grew tired of his order's political considerations and wanted to set up a more actionable group of agents.

- ◆ Since six months back, the Sellswords of the Sun have had a powerful protector. They have no idea who this is, but the protector has given them access to a headquarters, in the basement under a building in the northeastern district of the Hold.
- ◆ The building has three entrances. The headquarters can be entered through a cellar door at the back of the house. They never visit the upper floors. They seem to be empty – rough planks cover the main gate, heavy drapes hang in all windows, and the kitchen entrance is locked with an iron bar.

THE HEADQUARTERS

The Sellswords of the Sun make use of a tall and narrow building in the neighborhood closest to the stockade, south of Haloban's Ring. The main gate of the three-story house is nailed shut by sturdy planks and behind the windows are thick, black curtains making it impossible to see inside. The small back yard, shared with several other buildings, can be entered by way of a narrow alley. In there can be found a steep stair down to a cellar door and a kitchen entrance whose door is locked and also equipped with an iron bar, secured by a big, heavy padlock.

If the characters have trailed one of the troublemakers there, the whole group is in the cellar (twelve persons minus the ones who were lost during the attack). Should they instead have taken the time to interrogate a captive, only the group's leader, the Black Cloak Dolani, remains at the headquarters.

What the characters do with the Sellswords of the Sun is, of course, up to them. If they attack, the members will regard them as champions of the Eternal Night and fight to the bitter end. Dolani would rather die than reveal the name of the Sellswords' benefactor. Getting him to say anything other than phrases like "*The judgment of Prios will crush you, heretic!*" requires very brutal methods and a successful **DC 20 Charisma (Intimidation) check**.

Fortunately, there are both simpler and less bloody ways to find out who the secret protector of the sellswords is. Simplest of all is of course to ask the neighbors. The oldster Bofrynd sits all day at his kitchen window and watches the empty back yard, and he is not the least happy with the owner of the house next door and the shady business he is convinced takes place in the building. A **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check** by someone standing in the yard makes a character notice the drunken chimneysweep, and then they just have to knock on his door.

Another option is to gain entrance to the house through the kitchen door. If Dolani is killed he has the key to the padlock hanging from his belt, but it is also possible to break the door open (a **DC 13 Strength [Athletics] check**) or pick the padlock – a **DC 13 Dexterity (Thieves' Tools) check**. However, note that if the characters do not notice Bofrynd and somehow divert his attention during the break-in, he will see what is going on and alert the closest Town Watch patrol.

Sure, he hates his neighbor, but it does not detract from the joy of telling on thieves and having them caught in the act!

The building has three stories and is without furnishings, with the exception of the salon on the second floor, where the owner of the house and his friends convene each month. The salon is dominated by a huge wooden table with a coat of arms depicting a jumping salmon painted in red, blue and silver under glossy lacquer. Aside from the table and its six armchairs, there is a man-high dresser against a wall. It looks old and worn, maybe salvaged from some estate in Alberetor.

The following information and items can be found in the salon:

- ◆ A character can make a **DC 15 Intelligence (History) check** to recall that the crest on the table belongs to House Salamos, whose most famous member is the Light-bringer Leandro – the priest who supposedly convinced Queen Korinthia of the supremacy of Prios and later died in acid storms conjured by the enemy.
- ◆ On five of the padded backs on the armchairs are embroidered monograms. The one at the short end carries the initials K.S. (Kargoi Salamos), the others S.A. (Serex Attio), R.G. (Roia Garlaka), E.D. (Efrynn Dresel) and I.B. (Isedra Berakka).
- ◆ A successful **DC 20 Intelligence (Investigation) check** reveals a lose plate in the floor. Under it is a small glass bottle containing $1d4 + 3$ drops of Water of the Dusk (*Gamemaster's Guide*, page 141).
- ◆ In the upper drawer of the dresser are a collection of books, containing stories from The Great War. Common for them all is that they tell about a squad of petty nobles who, without being priests themselves, worked together with the armored section of the Sun Church near the end of the war. The leader of the squad was Kargoi Salamos and after having browsed the book for a while, two other names stand out – the brothers Serex and Herakleo Attio, the latter now being the Key Master of Yndaros. The books make up a chronicle of the feats of the squad.
- ◆ In the bottom drawer are five army coats. Once upon a time they were white with yellow and red linings, but time and heavy use have made them discolored and patched over and over. On the front two symbols are sewn – the sinking sun of Prios in yellow and House Kohinoor's Flaming Pine in red. The characters who have memories from the war or succeed at a **DC 13 Intelligence (History) check** can come to the conclusion that the coats must have been worn by an outfit fighting for the honor of both Alberetor and the Sun God.

That Kargoi Salamos lives in Thistle Hold is easily found out by asking just about anyone in town, together with his address. Should they also ask about Serex Attio, whomever they talk to will disclose that he lives next door to Kargoi in the southwestern part of town. Although, if they want

to find Serex, they would probably do better scouring the taverns at the Toad's Square than looking for him at home.

Dolani

"Expect no mercy, heretic!"

Dolani arrived in Ambria at the age of nine and then spent close to two decades in Yndaros, the final ten years as a tutor at the Convent School of the Last Light. He asked again and again to be reassigned to The Whip of Prios or some other section that battles the darkness more directly, but was always denied – mainly because of the blight which had latched on to his soul after an encounter with an abomination during the journey across the Titans. Finally he grew tired and travelled to the place where the threat from the dark is the greatest: Thistle Hold.

Tactics: Dolani has evolved into a veritable fencing master and uses the sword his father left him with great precision, preferably in combat with more than one person at a time – he tries to stab one enemy twice each turn and simultaneously use a second adversary as a Human Shield.

Dolani

Medium human (Ambrian)

Armor Class 16 (woven silk)

Hit Points 45 (6d8 + 12)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (-1)	18 (+4)	15 (+2)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)

Skills History +3, Insight +4, Perception +4, Persuasion +5, Religion +3

Senses passive Perception 14

Languages Ambrian

Challenge 3 (700 XP, proficiency bonus +2)

Manner piercing gaze

Shadow dull silver with blackened scratches (Corruption: 4/7)

Equipment mastercraft fencing sword, 1d4 Herbal Cures.

Human Shield. If Dolani is within 5 feet of another creature attackers have disadvantage to strike him as he weaves around others.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Dolani makes two attacks with his fencing sword.

Mastercraft Fencing Sword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage. *Deep Impact:* the sword does 17 (2d8 + 8) piercing damage on a critical.

REACTIONS

Riposte (Recharge 5–6). If an attacker makes a melee weapon attack against Dolani, he makes a single weapon attack as a response.

Complications

The characters' clashes with the Sellswords of the Sun can lead to certain complications. If the Sellswords discover that they are being followed or if the characters attack the headquarters but let one or more of the enemies escape, there is a definite risk that Kargoi Salamos learns about what has happened. This, in turn, means that he and his friends are prepared when the characters arrive to break into his house: Kargoi has two guards patrolling the yard with **battle-trained jakaars** (*Bestiary*, page 141) and another two posted by the entrances (stats as **Queen's ranger**, *Bestiary*, page 190).

Furthermore, Roia and Serex will respond much quicker if Kargoi wakes up and calls for them with his dog whistle. In this scenario it is suggested that the characters never get more than five rounds to explore the building – they may move at half speed if they are sneaking, full speed if they indicate that they take no precautions.

DEBRIEFING

It is not unlikely that the characters return to the Sun Temple after having met the Sellswords. Deseba will receive them up in the dome and patiently listen to their story, but then she voices her verdict: “*You are far from done yet!*”

The agreement was that the characters would avert the threat against Sarvola and this is still to be accomplished. They have to put pressure on Kargoi Salamos and make sure he protects the apostate, so that both he and all he holds by the leash will leave the Mission House be.

If the characters ask how to make this happen, she calmly says that it is up to them. But she points out that an individual like Kargoi may be more valuable alive than dead, particularly if they have some kind of hold over him...

AN ALTERNATE PATH

Father Elfeno is not as fond of Sarvola as Deseba is. He would rather see that those who are harassing the old heretic be allowed to continue, but is not prepared to argue his case. Instead he writes a letter to the characters and asks one of his most loyal agents to deliver it to them.

The agent, a changeling named Goriol, will wait until the characters are in a location with lots of people and there try to sneak the letter into the pocket of whoever he suspects to be the least vigilant (the Gamemaster decides).

If the character has a **passive Perception of 15 or higher**, they notice that someone touches a pocket or a knapsack – namely a young woman who looks like a market vendor.

Should the character call out, the woman turns around, says “*sorry*” and hurries away through the crowd. The player character gets one chance to see through the illusion, by making a **DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check**. If that check is successful the character will, for a fleeting moment, notice that the woman adopts the appearance of a middle-aged man with elvish features.

The characters may of course try to hunt down Goriol, but this is easier said than done. As soon as he gets a chance, he will dive into an alley or into a tavern and try to change his appearance. If the changeling succeeds, they must another **DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check** to find him. In the unlikely case that they manage to catch up to him, he will act as if they have captured the wrong person.

The letter from Elfeno is meant to offer the characters a simpler solution to the situation than the one purposed by Deseba. It reads:

What you seek is in the annex of the Sun Temple. Two times a day, at the mass held each morning and evening, the building is empty except for House Father Idaros. When you see him leave you have a short timeframe to get inside. Go through the gate facing Ofelya's Road, take the stairs to the second floor, turn right and head for the third door on the right-hand side. Act with haste!

In reality the characters can take their time, since Elfeno has one of his liturgs handle the mass while he keeps the House Father occupied with talks on fabricated accusations regarding irregularities among the initiates.

Following the offer from Elfeno is a shortcut to the information which can be found in Anadea's chamber. It comes with the cost that the characters never get a hold on Kargoi Salamos and that Deseba the Old gains a negative image of them, but maybe it is worth it – since Father Elfeno will come to remember them in a positive way.

THE WAR VETERANS

Kargoi Salamos lives in a house along Summer Street, close to the palisade. His next-door neighbors are his two companions: Serex Attio and Roia Garlaka. If the player characters somehow happened to reveal themselves during the hunt for the Sellswords of the Sun, there is a risk that Kargoi has learned about it. In that case, he as well as his neighbors are on their guard, which will have an impact on the characters chance to get to him (see textbox *Complications* above).

In order to gain a proper hold over Kargoi, the characters have to reach the skeletons he hides in his closet, or rather down in his basement. After the war ended, Kargoi returned home from his long service and found the area around his estate ravaged by death magic. Even worse: everyone working in his service had been corrupted; they had died and



risen again as undead. He cut them all down in anger, but as he entered his own bed chamber he stopped. There waited his wife and seven-year-old daughter – undead and thirsting for his blood. Since that day he has kept his family alive, feeding blood and lukewarm flesh to the loves of his life, held captive in one cell each.

It is fully possible to get in and search the building. On a normal night, the elderly noble is alone in the house, except for the four **battle-trained jakaars** guarding his backyard. A character with a Poisoner's Kit (*Player's Guide*, page 174) can prepare two pieces of meat with sedatives (for example Drone Dew, *Player's Guide*, page 181) and overcome the guardians without blood being shed. Otherwise the jakaars must be fought (*Bestiary*, page 141).



Kargo Salamos

"If you only knew what I've done for you to have a life..."

During The Great War, Kargo was the leader of a squad including Serex and Roia among others. He is still an imposing strong-man, despite his poise being somewhat muddled by worry and shame over his wife and daughter.

The family members are his everything – they are his strength but also his greatest weakness. To him, protecting them is more important than anything and so far he has been able to keep their condition secret, even from the servants who are forbidden to walk downstairs. The curious and not so bright kitchen boy who once defied the ban is no longer alive to gossip...

Tactics: After having called out to his neighbors for assistance, Kargo tries to keep the opponents busy until they arrive. He starts off by holding a fiery speech to his friends about the importance of facing up to dark minded villains, then he lets his sword do the talking. Note that Kargo hardly has time to put on his full plate armor when the characters break in to his house; he has to settle for sword and shield.

Both entrances to the house are locked; the same goes for the cellar door. Picking them is not difficult (DC 10) but requires lock-picks and a **DC 12 Dexterity (Stealth) check**, or else the sleeping Kargoi will wake up and sound the alarm (see below). Kicking in or breaking the doors is easy, but such an approach is sure to wake Kargoi up.

Anyone passing by or examining the cellar door (#10) may make a **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check**. If successful, they will smell a faint but distinct sweet-sour odor, reminiscent of the smell from a rotting carcass.

Down in the cellar, the characters meet Kargoi's family. The husband has recently gone through the painful procedure of changing the clothes of his daughter and wife,

which is why they are wearing beautiful dresses of the latest model – the woman a velvet blue with elements of silver and ice blue, the girl a burgundy red with white laces. They are locked into one cell each, furnished like bedchambers in a noble residence. The eye-catching exception is the blood covering the linens, chairs and walls; also the half-eaten animal cadavers scattered over the floors. That the captives are Lord Salamos' wife and daughter is evident when looking at the oil painting hanging on a wall outside the cells, depicting the whole family at the time when they were all alive.

If the characters happen to wake the sleeping lord, he will immediately sound his dog-whistle. The whistle makes the watchdogs of the neighbors react, but a character with a passive Perception less than 20 cannot perceive it other than as a faint chill running down the back. Kargoi will then wait for Serex and Roia to appear before making himself known – giving the characters time to discover the cellar but not enough to make their way out again; it is recommended that a round after the characters discover Kargoi's wife and daughter that the friends attack.

It is not easy to predict how the meeting between the characters and the war veterans will pan out. Serex and Roia will want to silence the intruders for good, but Kargoi is more hesitant – he does not want his family to be the cause of unnecessary bloodshed, particularly if his friends are also at risk of being hurt. Hence, the characters have the opportunity to offer him a way out: they promise to never speak of his family, provided that Kargoi and his companions promise that they and their followers shall refrain from harassing Father Sarvola in the future.

Kargoi Salamos

Medium human (Ambrian)

Armor Class 18 (full plate, shield)

Hit Points 110 (13d8 + 52)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	11 (+0)	18 (+4)	10 (+0)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages Ambrian

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

Manner grim, monotone voice

Shadow shiny steel, like a polished blade (0/6)

Equipment —

Noisy. While wearing his armor Kargoi has disadvantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks.

ACTIONS

Multattack. Kargoi makes two attacks with his longsword.

Longsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8 + 5) slashing damage or 10 (1d10 + 5) slashing damage if wielded with two hands. Kargoi scores a critical hit on a natural 19 or 20 on the attack roll.

REACTIONS

Bid to Action. When a creature's turn ends, Kargoi can call out a command, allowing an allied creature that can see and hear Kargoi to take their turn next. They cannot have already acted this round and this effect ends when their turn ends.

Two-handed Force. If Kargoi misses an attack roll, he can use his reaction to reroll the attack.

Serex Attio

"Stand still! Or face the fury!"

Serex Attio may have a strong body, but his psyche was clearly not strong enough to handle what he experienced during the war. While his brother Herakleo has risen through the ranks thanks to his feats of war, Serex has fallen further and further down into the bottle and also lost much of his self-control. Both brothers are well-known in the realm, but for very different reasons...

Serex is often seen in the taverns by the Toad's Square and many barkeeps would rather have a rage troll than him as a guest. Surprisingly, he can pull himself together when he wants and needs – all who for some reason have awoken that side of him can bear witness to this.

Tactics: Serex is far from graceful. He launches into battle and then it is usually over for the opponent. Note that he most likely will not have time to equip his full plate before rushing over to help his friend in need. However, if he has reasons to suspect that something will happen, he sleeps seated in his laminated armor.

Mirela died an agonizing death after having swallowed
night-tainted water; she rose as undead and has
ever since been her father's bittersweet torment...



Serex Attio

Medium human (Ambrian)

Armor Class 16 (full plate or laminated armor)

Hit Points 76 (8d8 + 40)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	12 (+1)	20 (+5)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)	17 (+3)

Skills Athletics +7, Intimidation +6, Perception +3, Survival +3

Senses passive Perception 13

Languages Ambrian

Challenge 5 (1,100 XP, proficiency bonus +3)

Manner twitches around the eyes

Shadow whirling iron gray, like a misty storm
(Corruption: 0/4)

Equipment –

Brutal Critical. When Serex is raging, he rolls 3d12 + 4 for a critical hit with his executioner's sword, rolling the first damage die twice (see below) and picking the best result.

Rage (3/day). As a bonus action, Serex can enter a rage that lasts for 1 minute. While in the rage, Serex has advantage on Strength checks and saving throws. When he makes a melee weapon attack he adds 2 bonus damage. Serex has resistance to bludgeoning, piercing and slashing damage while in the rage. The rage ends early if Serex ends his turn without having attacked a hostile creature since his last turn or taken damage since then. He can also use a bonus action to end the rage.

ACTIONS

Multiaction. Serex makes two attacks with his executioner's sword.

Executioner's Sword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (1d12 + 4) slashing damage. *Massive:* Serex rolls twice for his first damage die and uses the better result, his average damage value accounts for this effect.

Roia Garlaka

“Sure, I am kind of tired of killing, but I’m deadly good at it!”

Roia was once the scout of the squad and has innumerable scars on body and face from being the first to discover (and at times, being discovered by) the enemy. Other than that, she is primarily known for her dark sense of humor.

When Serex has his famous outbursts it is not uncommon to hear the hoarse, croaking laughter of a woman over the sound of the turmoil; later the two friends often leave the scene together – the utterly drunk Serex leaning on Roia, who has been thrown out for making other guests uncomfortable with her gallows humor. The idiot who dares suggest that they are headed for a shared bed has only himself to blame for the pain.

Tactics: Roia uses her acrobatic ability to avoid serious threats. If facing a single opponent, she will use both of her blades against them in an attempt to down her foe as soon as possible.

Roia Garlaka

Medium human (Ambrian)

Armor Class 17 (mastercraft concealed armor)

Hit Points 27 (6d8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	20 (+5)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	12 (+1)

Skills Acrobatics +7, Perception +4, Sleight of Hand +7, Stealth +7

Senses passive Perception 15

Languages Ambrian

Challenge 3 (700 XP, proficiency bonus +2)

Manner sways from foot to foot

Shadow shiny steel with star shaped rust roses (0/5)

Equipment 1d4 Herbal Cures

Backstab (1/turn). Roia deals an extra 14 (4D6) damage when she hits a target with a melee weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of her ally who isn't incapacitated and she doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

Blade Work. If Roia uses her bonus action to make an off-hand melee weapon attack, she adds her Dexterity modifier to the damage.

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

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

ACTIONS

Assassin's Blade. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d6 + 5) piercing damage.

Concealable: Roia can make a Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check to hide this weapon on her person.

Stiletto. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d4 + 5) piercing damage. *Deep Impact:* a critical hit with this weapon does a total of 20 (2d4 + 10) piercing damage.

REACTIONS

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

APPLYING PRESSURE

Should the characters make it in and out of Salamos' residence without being seen and having found what is hidden in the cellar, they have all they need to stop the attacks against Sarovolta instigated or sanctioned by Kargoi. For a moment he considers moving his beloved somewhere else; for another moment he contemplates ending their unnatural lives. But when it comes down to it, he wants to have them in his life, and he wants to keep them close.

The characters can present their demands during an audience in his house, or they can write an anonymous letter with the required details. The only difference is that in the former case the nobleman gets to see their faces and maybe even learn the names of one or more persons bearing knowledge that could wound him deeply. In that case, it will probably not take long before he uses his contacts, or maybe even his growing friendship circle of Priors loving veterans from The Great War, in order to remove the threat permanently...

Deseba will accept both approaches, provided that she is informed of what the characters have found and what they have said or written to Kargoi. The old theurg seems to be very impressed by the result, while the younger First Theurg of Thistle Hold's Sun Temple only rewards them with a sullen nod.

THE CHAMBER OF ANADEA

No matter if the characters arrive at the annex of the Sun Temple alone or Deseba has ordered one of the younger priests to take them there, the content of Anadea's small alcove is the same. Elfeno and House Father Idaros agreed to let it remain undisturbed, in the hope that she would return, and when they learned of her death Deseba the Old decided that they should wait a while longer before disturbing the chamber.

The alcove is not more than two paces deep and less than that in width. A simple bed, a closet, a commode, and a small trunk for storing private belongings is all the cramped space has room for. There are three items of interest in there:

- ◆ Aside from civilian clothes, a pouch containing 13 shillings and 8 ortegs and two pairs of sturdy boots, a briefcase-like box can be found in the trunk. The box contains paper and coal crayons of different sizes, and a character that succeeds at **DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check** finds two unfinished sketches at the bottom – one depicting a stone-framed pond by which a dozen cape-clad figures are sitting, bent over the rippled surface; the other a half-finished portrait of someone with obvious elven features. A character that closely examines the illustration of the well might recall legends regarding such a place (page 40).
- ◆ A character who passes a Vigilant test finds a notebook hidden in the space under the enameled sink of the commode. The book contains transcripts of something which must be barbarian legends, with some sentences and paragraphs underlined. A character that browses the book and makes a successful **DC 15 Intelligence (History) check** reaches the conclusion that all marked sections are about situations when crimes against taboos have resulted in corruption sickness. Barbarians have advantage on the check.
- ◆ From the rod in the closet hangs a necklace in silver with a medallion in the shape of a coat of arms, more precisely two crossed war axes. A character with the Loremaster feature can make a **DC 16 Intelligence (History) check** to remember that this is the crest of House Erebus. Another way to identify the crest is to ask in the Hall of Knights.

Incriminating Evidence

Up in Kargoi Salamos' bedchamber is something which would have a great impact on the power games within Ambrian nobility if it landed in the wrong hands (for example Deseba's). It is a letter signed by someone calling himself "Your Friend D," in which the writer asks Kargoi to "make life hard on the heretic of the Hold." A character with the Loremaster feature may come to the conclusion that the writing is similar to the style taught by the Twilight Friars.

The challenge is to find the rolled up letter. First and foremost, it is far from likely that the characters dare enter the chamber where the owner of the house is sleeping. Secondly, the letter is hidden under a hatch in the bed frame – a hatch which in turn is covered by the thick

mattress of the bed. If the characters get the opportunity to search there (for example if Kargoi is woken up and somehow incapacitated during the break-in) it still takes a passed **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check** for anyone to find the well-hidden compartment.

For the Gamemaster it can be said that the letter is composed by First Father Jeseebegai, whose birth name was Demeon Soleij. However, the truth about this cannot be figured out by the characters or anyone else, and above all, they will not be able to prove it. In the end, all they can do is to smirk at the insight that the conspiracy against Sarovolta probably is instigated by someone higher up than Lord Salamos.

The Queen's Legation

THE ARCHIVE AT the Queen's Legation is open to all who want to search for information about small and large events in the region. For the reasonable price of one thaler an hour, anyone can browse the files and notebooks, supervised by the notaries Karasto and Perela. If one wants the help of the employees, it costs an additional thaler per notary and hour, but this may prove to be money well spent since they know the archive very well (advantage to anyone searching for information).

Aside from research in general, the characters may have another reason for visiting. The key that was found in Anadea's belt purse suggests that she owned some kind of property or estate, and where is the record for such ownerships kept if not at the legation? Under the header *Audience with the Legate*, page 64, is a description of how the characters may gain access to the record, something which requires that they manage to get an audience with Suria Argona.

BROWSING FOR INFORMATION

The archive can be used to search for information about all kinds of happenings in the eleven-year history of the Hold. Exactly when and why the characters go there is of course up to them, but provided that they have figured out Anadea's name (through the medallion or the Sun Temple) an important document can be found.

The information the characters seek is uncommon and requires **DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check** (*Player's Guide*, page 124, for more information). On a success the character finds a witness statement from a brutal quarrel at the Salons of Symbaroum eight days ago. The name of the fortune hunter who gave the statement is Geleto and his story is transcribed in the following words:

On the evening of the twenty fourth day of the second month, 21 years after the Victory, a brawl erupted at the Salons of Symbaroum. When the brave guards of the Town Watch arrived to avert the quarrel, it had spread to three floors and involved about one hundred souls. When asked why they were fighting, the combatants gave diverse answers, but most named intoxication or "the heart's delight" as the foremost reasons.

However, a witness named Geleto (fortune hunter) knows what actually caused the turmoil. With his own eyes he saw two young priests involved in a violent altercation. They called each other Anadea and Arkel, and the dispute seemed to be about the Forest of Davokar, more exactly about whether or not the Church of Prios has adopted a correct standpoint regarding the nature of the woods. The witness is (due to his own inebriation) unsure about who of the two championed which viewpoint, but swears that one of them, at one point, clearly yelled "Death to First Father Jeseebegai!"

The priests never brawled, but their argument became so heated that the woman, flailing her arms, happened to hit a drinking

The Legation

The Queen's Legation is housed in a grand two-story building right outside the gates of Nighthome. The western wing includes lodgings and on the second floor is a majestic hall where the father of the Legate tends to hold court, surrounded by town dignitaries or visiting nobles. The building's core and southern wing hold its public spaces with reception, offices, meeting rooms and an archive. The latter is placed furthest south, on the ground floor and down in the basement.

jar that stood on their table. The jar hit a large barbarian woman in the neck, which is why she spun around and face-slapped a totally innocent youngster, whose friends were quick to accept the invitation to dance. The woman Anadea and the man Arkel sneaked out of their booth as the brawl attracted more and more to clench their fists.

So it was that the Forest of Davokar, on the evening of the twenty fourth, caused Queen Korinthia's subjects unnecessary pain and honest businessmen economical loss, like so many times before.

If the characters ask around at the dives inside Haloban's Ring, they will be able to track down the destitute Geleto at the Rosegarden. He has nothing to add to the story but promises that all he told the notaries is true, cross his heart and *reeeally* hope to die. And should the characters want to look for Arkel he is possible to find. They can ask just about anyone at the Sun Temple and they will be told that the young initiate has left the Hold and moved back to his parent's home outside the village of Glimmervann.

VISITING GLIMMERVANN

The village Glimmervann lays less than a day's ride west of Thistle Hold. Its walled center houses a roadside tavern, a trading post and a couple of handicraft stores. If the characters go to one of these and ask nicely, while passing a **DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) check**, they will learn how to reach the site where Arkel's parents have their small farmstead, a bit south.

The farm is in mourning, since one of the stable hands was killed and three wounded by a predator attack the day before. Two jakaar skulls are pinned to the gate poles and only a few people are working the fields.

At the Gamemaster's discretion, the journey to Glimmervann could be the right time for a cultist attack (page 34). Depending on how far the characters have come in their investigation it may even be the Night Cape who is behind the ambush. Tentatively, it plays out as follows:

The characters have been asked to sit down to a simple meal. The grownups are all seated around the table while Arkel's five siblings huddle in a corner, the youngest girl babbling in the cradle. A character with a **passive Perception of 15 or higher** hears a muffled cry. It comes from the yard outside.

A group of Red Eye's cultists (twice the number of characters, maybe accompanied by the Night Cape) have beaten down the stable boy who was tasked with keeping an eye out for jakaars. They come running towards the house; two of them pushing a wheelbarrow for blocking the door, the rest carrying flaming flagons of oil (these work the same as the oil lanterns, page 54).

Characters who have a lower passive Perception will first hear a thud against the door, then the flagons crashing against the windowless timber walls.

There are two ways to get out. They can bash the front door – it is a resilient Medium object with AC 15 and 22 (5d8) hit points. It is immune to poison and psychic damage. Only two creatures can be within reach of the door at a time.

Another way is to climb the beams of the roof trusses and punch a hole in the softer roof, which is AC 10 and has 11 (2d10) hit points. Damaging the roof allows a Medium creature to squeeze through the resulting hole and escape to the rooftop. Getting up on the beams requires a **DC 13 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check**.

If a character hears the cry and alerts the others they have time to open the front door before it is barricaded. The cultists carrying flagons will in this case throw them at walls and roof before entering melee.

Irrespective of which, the fire spreads quickly in the bone-dry and drafty timber house. After two rounds all who remain in the building must make a **DC 13 Constitution saving throw** or take 2 (1d4) fire damage from the hot vapor and nearby flames. To avoid this they have to hold their breath, which may cause them to begin to suffocate.

Arkel and his parents try to rescue the younger children and will not fight. Even worse: the seven year old Merel is panicking and her mother is unable to get her to let go of the leg of the kitchen sofa, made extra difficult since she is carrying an infant! Characters who escape the building may make a **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check** to realize that the mother and two of the children have not come out, or a bellowing Arkel will make them aware of this.

Saving the trio from certain death takes two rounds – one to locate them in the smoke-filled building – a **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check** in the heavily obscured environment, and one for dragging them all outside. However, this is only the case if the character succeeds at a **DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check** with their action to get Merel away from the sofa; if that fails, yet another round is required to get them to safety.

Depending on how the characters handle themselves during the attack, it is more or less difficult to get Arkel to

talk. Should his mother and two siblings have died in the flames, indirectly caused by the characters, he refuses to talk to them unless they pass **DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check**. On the other hand, if they saved all three of them then the Persuasion check is still required (Arkel is grumpy that they put his family in danger), but the character will have advantage on the check.

A conversation with the farmer's son provides the following:

- ◆ Arkel has left the Sun Church, not because he has lost his love for Prios, but since he has come to the insight that he is needed on the family farm.
- ◆ Anadea was his best friend in the world, but she always had so many ideas. He often heard her defend the heretical teachings of Father Sarvola and she questioned everything spoken by the priests – not openly, but when they were alone.
- ◆ The argument at the Salons of Symbaroum was indeed about Davokar. Anadea claimed that the priests were wrong; that nature can never be evil in itself. Instead she stressed that the barbarian witches may be right in claiming that humans make nature evil and vindictive.
- ◆ He has never heard Anadea yell or whisper “*Death to the First Father.*”
- ◆ Anadea left the temple about a month ago after a violent quarrel with Father Elfeno. Exactly what it was about, he does not know, but she ran off and swore never to set foot on “*the holy ground of the Church*” again.
- ◆ The last time they saw each other was the day he left for Glimmervann. She searched him out to tell him that she had found a new tutor to follow. Arkel called her crazy; if he had not, she would probably have told him more. As it was, the only thing she had time to say was that “*the new tutor is not in any way involved with the Sun Church or the Ambrian realm at large.*”

AUDIENCE WITH THE LEGATE

The registry containing information about the property owners in town exists in two copies, but gaining access to either of them is all but impossible for the common folk. Learning who owns what in Thistle Hold is usually only possible when someone is selling an estate, or by asking directly at the door. However, the latter is hardly a passable route for those who are searching for the estate of a particular owner...

The characters need to arrange a meeting with Suria Argona, something which can be difficult since she basically loathes humankind. At the time of this adventure it is even harder than usual. For one thing, as the Queen's confidant has a lot on her plate because of the sinkhole and the potentially difficult diplomatic situation brought about by the arrival of the witches and their demands on getting access to the town – Korinthia expects to receive birds with regular reports updating her on the situation. But as if that were not enough, she has an earlier order to



Suria Argona, the loyal Legate of the Queen and one of the most learned people in town.

execute: the copper tablet containing Sarkomal's Prophecy is in town, and the Queen wants it!

If asked, the notaries Karasto and Perela can tell the characters about the existence of the registry, that Mayor Nightpitch has one copy and the Queen's Legate a second. Perela can also help the characters gain an audience with the Legate. For this to happen, they have to pass a **DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check**, with advantage if they either managed to find Geleto's witness report without help from the notaries or if it is known that they participated in the defense at the sinkhole. If the check is successful, Perela asks them to return later for confirmation or to specify where they are staying and pay a shilling for someone to bring the Legate's answer to them.

Suria will in turn ask Perela about the characters, and if she learns that they appeared to be a capable group she will be glad to greet them in her study. She calls on Guard Captain Dekamedo, alias Akman Kohinoor, to sit in on the meeting. If the characters do not make a really bad impression they will get an offer: Suria promises to tell them which property is owned by Anadea, provided that the characters help Dekamedo gain possession of an object on behalf of the Queen – and that they are willing to do this without asking any kinds of questions regarding the nature of the object or the task.

SARKOMAL'S PROPHECY

Queen Korinthia has decided that she will be the one to fulfill Sarkomal's Prophecy, discovered in the temple ruin now being restored by the Knights of the Dying Sun about five day's walk east of Karvosti (see *The Prophecy of Sarkomal, Gamemaster's Guide*, page 47). Whether she puts any faith in prophesies in general or in Sarkomal's in particular is not important. The main thing is that this prediction has



Akman Kohinoor, alias Dekamedo, son of Korinthia's cousin and her most actionable agent in the Hold.

two great benefits – first, it can be interpreted as an answer to the Queen's ambition to become the sovereign ruler of the region north of the Titans; second, it can work as a unifying symbol for the endeavor of the Ambrian people. And for both of these reasons it is important that she – not the Sun Church, Ordo Magica or some other faction of power – is in possession of, and has the right to interpret, the ancient phrases.

Korinthia's problem is that the copper tablet was found by representatives of the Sun Church and that the First Father has ordered it brought to Templewall. The same morning that the sinkhole appeared, three templar brothers came to Thistle Hold. They had the relic with them, tasked to hand it over to a delegation from the Church's High Seat. As it happened, the brothers arrived three days early and when they encountered the agents of The Eternal Night by the sinkhole, they decided to wait in town.

The conflicts within the Church mean that the brothers have no contact with the town's temple or monastery. Instead they have a room at *The Winged Ladle*, and one of Dekamedo's informants has reported seeing a wooden crate placed under one of the beds – one pace long, half a pace wide, and one foot deep.

The task of the characters is worded as follows: In room #3 at *The Winged Ladle* inn is a wooden crate, which they will steal and hand over to Dekamedo within ten hours (the Gamemaster may, of course, adjust the timeframe up or down). He will wait for them at a booth at the Salons of Symbaroum, on the second floor. He will then be able to provide them with the address they are interested in. If they are found out or get caught the deal is off. And should they say something about the involvement of the Legation, they have not only made a deadly enemy of Dekamedo, but also of the Queen.

CONTACT WITH NIGHTPITCH

The knowledge that a second register is managed by the Town Seat and Mayor Nighthpitch, may make characters who are already acquainted with Lasifor to try to avoid getting involved with the legation. The Mayor is extremely busy and it is not easy to arrange a meeting with him – not only has a whole block been swallowed by a hole that spewed out a horde of abominations at the town center; he also suffers from a terrible cold and has a politically sensitive situation to handle, with the Huldra's envoys and their Collosi outside the palisade (see page 72 for more information on the Mayor).

Nighthpitch is at home and if the characters want to meet him they first have to speak to the captain of his personal guard, the war veteran Garasto. The captain has been ordered not to let anyone except leading representatives of the realm's power factions disturb the Mayor, no matter what. And to persuade him is hardly possible, since the characters have nothing more than suspicions to back their case up. If they claim that the city is threatened, he replies that Thistle Hold is always under threat. Should they tell him about Anadea, he questions her credibility and stresses that her warning may very well have been in regards to the abominations below town. At best, they can be allowed to write a message to Nighthpitch – the writer must make a **DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) check** (with advantage if they were involved in the defense by the sinkhole), that he will read if and when he can.

Whatever they may write in the message, the Mayor will leave it to rest – he has more acute problems to handle! The only thing that can convince the old treasure hunter to divert his attention is if the characters say that the copper tablet with Sarkomal's Prophecy is in town. In that case he agrees to a meeting, in the dining room on the ground floor of Nighthome, while he is eating. He listens to their tale, sometimes exchanging a glance with Yagaba who is standing by the door, motionless like a statue and scrutinizing the characters with her steel-colored eyes. When he finally

speaks he offers them a deal: "*Let me see and touch the tablet and I will give you what you need.*" With that, the conversation is over and Garasto escorts the characters back out.

THE BREAK-IN

Characters who decide to try to steal the copper tablet will probably start by visiting the inn to check it out. They can talk to the staff, keep an eye on the door to room #3, and map the various routes in and out of the building.

The brothers carry no symbols or other markers which reveal them to be templars. However, characters who recognize them from the battle at the sinkhole know what they are, since they made no efforts to hide their holy powers in the fight against the beasts of the Abyss. Should they also succeed at a **DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check** while watching the brothers, they will come to the conclusion that they most likely are nobles – for instance by their posture and way of speaking, not to mention that they can afford living at such an exclusive inn.

Talking to the patrons and staff of the inn will not help very much. A passed **DC 13 Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion) check** will provide information on when the brothers arrived, that one of them suffers from a grave wound in the abdomen and that the two others often leave the inn for long periods at a time.

Regarding ways in and out, there is of course the spiral stair along the trunk. Another option is to get up to the lowest branches of the tree, either by using a grappling hook – a **DC 13 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check** is required to set the hook, or by jumping from some of the surrounding rooftops – reaching the tree branches is not easy; a character must succeed at **DC 13 Dexterity saving throw** or fall to the ground below (a fifteen foot fall).

Room #3 can be entered through the door (by way of the corridor) or through the shut and sealed window facing the back of the house. Both of these are easy to pick (DC 10) but a character must succeed at a **DC 14 Dexterity (Stealth) check** to avoid alerting the inhabitants of the room. If successful, the brothers will be surprised.

The Gamemaster is encouraged to let the players be creative. During the night, the inn has two guards (stats as a **Queen's ranger captain**, Bestiary, page 191); these can be avoided with a **DC 13 Dexterity (Stealth) check** with advantage since the guards are playing dice most of the time. Provided that they wait until Hen-Loan and Venhal have left the premises, they will encounter no opposition in the room. Sure, Leohan stands up and draws his sword, but immediately falls to his knees. He can do nothing but glare at them with hatred and call for the guards who arrive after 1d4 rounds (if they have not been dealt with earlier).

As soon as the characters grab the wooden crate hidden under Leohan's bed they realize that something is amiss. It is empty!



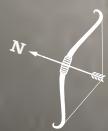
The Zarekian witch Yagaba is the constant shadow of the Mayor, as well as his body guard and friend.



THE WINGED LADLE

1. Kitchen
2. Dining Room
3. Leohan's Room
4. Stairs to second floor
5. Larder
6. Western Annex
7. Eastern Annex
8. The Queen's Suite
9. Stairs to street level

2 m
6 feet



Mekele Brothers

Medium human (Ambrian)

Armor Class 18 (full plate, shield)

Hit Points 60 (8d8 + 24)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	12 (+1)	17 (+3)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)

Saving Throws Str +6, Con +5

Skills Athletics +6, Insight +5, Intimidation +3,

Persuasion +3, Religion +2

Senses passive Perception 13

Languages Ambrian

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

Manner smiles aggressively, teeth bared

Shadow gold-shimmering and radiant with black stains like from acid (Corruption: 1/7)

Equipment component pouch, 2d10 thaler, book of the Lightbringer, templar symbol

Action Surge (1/day). The brother can take an extra action.

Holy Aura. The brother can choose to gain either 1, 1d4 + 1, or 1d4 + 2 temporary Corruption when he makes a successful attack roll. The brother can then add 3 times the Corruption gained as radiant damage to the attack.

Indomitable (1/day). If the brother fails a saving throw he can reroll the saving throw.

Noisy. While wearing its armor the brother has disadvantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks.

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

Spellcasting. The brother's spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell attack +5, save DC 13) and he knows the following spells:

Cantrips: *accurate strike* (1), *guidance* (1), *sacred flame* (1), *spare the dying* (1)

1st-level spells: *bless* (1d4 + 1), *command* (1d4 + 1), *cure wounds* (1d4 + 1), *sanctuary* (1d4 + 1)

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

3rd-level spell: *protection from energy* (1d4 + 3)

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The brother makes two attacks with his longsword.

Longsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) slashing damage or 9 (1d10 + 4) slashing damage if wielded with two hands.



The Mekele Brothers

"The law of the Lawgiver is life."

Leohan, Hen-Loan and Venhal Mekele lost their mother and two sisters to an elven warband while crossing the Titans. That experience made them chose to walk the path of Prios, rather than the Queen's. They are extreme even compared to other templars but can compromise when it comes to issues not related to their faith.

Tactics: The brothers tend to rely on their formidable armor and skill with the blade, preferring to take on a single opponent at a time. But they are honorable, and won't stoop to deception and are willing to listen to an opponent that makes a credible explanation or a heartfelt plea for mercy.

THE TABLET'S RESTING PLACE

After having brought the invaluable copper tablet into Thisle Hold, the brothers had a change of heart and took it to one of their previous brothers-in-arms, wrapped in a blanket. The former templar Alamei Sevio sustained grave damage to the soul during the cleansing of the ruin where the prophecy was found. Since then he has retired to a small croft on the estate of House Derego, just east of the Hold. The question is how the characters will learn this.

The most obvious way is of course to force the truth out of Leohan Mekele. Threatening him does not do much good – he will never willingly admit to knowing where the content of the crate is hidden. However, he can be reasoned with, if the characters are willing to tell him about the potential threat to the town. If the characters have figured out what they are looking for, one option is to arrange a meeting between the brothers and the Mayor. Another alternative is to use mystical powers and rituals like *command*, *tale of ashes* (the brothers talked about Alamei's croft by the room's heater), *detect thoughts* or *dominate person*.

A very brutal solution to locating the priceless relic is to kill Leohan. When his brothers return to find out what has happened, they will immediately head for the croft in



order to assure themselves that the tablet is safe. In that case, trailing them is a possibility. As usual, this requires that the player character following them succeed at a **DC 14 Dexterity (Stealth) check**. If the group follows the brothers, require a group check where half or more of them must succeed in order to not be noticed.

The only real clue to the whereabouts of the tablet is an elderly medicus named Belora. A successful **DC 15 Intelligence (History) or Wisdom (Medicine) check** (the character has advantage on the check if they have the Medicus feature) makes it possible to draw some conclusions based on the dressing around Leohan's abdomen - the poultice contains the herb Baseliom which has a hard time growing north of the Titans but is still used by some old-school healers who were active during The Great War. By asking the staff at the inn they can learn that a woman named Belora usually is sent for when some guest is in need of healing.

Belora has her small and mangy clinic in a nearby house along Pitch Street. She has gotten a bit senile and is easily convinced that the whole town is at risk if she will not help

the characters with information on the patient in room #3 at *The Winged Ladle*. After a thorough account of Leohan's injury she gets lost in a lengthy monologue about old Alberotor's superiority when it comes to herbs, food, sceneries and so on. After many 'if's and 'but's she recalls that the friends of the wounded boy talked about something very important while she tended to the cut - something about a painting being in danger, about a croft beyond the East Gate, and someone called "Almo or Alimon, no: Alamei!"

There is no shortage of people who know that an old hero of the Knights of the Dying Sun named Alamei Sevio has settled down close to the Hold. The character can ask just about any of their contacts, be it within the Town Guard, the Sun Church, Ordo Magica or some of the nobles.

THE CROFT AND THE KNIGHTS

Were it not for the two farmhands, Alamei would live alone at his croft. Hen-Loan and Venhal visit a couple of times a day, to talk about old memories and to assure themselves that the copper tablet is safely stowed away under the floorboards of the main building.

If the characters have broken into their room at the inn, the two uninjured brothers will make their way to Alamei's, whether Leohan is dead or alive. They will retrieve the treasure and immediately set off for Templewall in full gallop.

Alamei Sevio

Medium human (Ambrian)

Armor Class 17 (chain shirt, shield)

Hit Points 60 (8d8 + 24)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	15 (+2)	17 (+3)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Str +7, Con +6

Skills Athletics +7, Perception +3, Religion +2

Senses passive Perception 13

Languages Ambrian

Challenge 3 (700 XP, proficiency bonus +2)

Manner composed, hostile

Shadow a black void with bright, golden stars (Corruption: 3/5)

Equipment 1d8 thaler, templar symbol, the book

The Lightbringer, Sun Axe (masterwork axe with deep impact, shaped to resemble the symbol of Prios, the dying sun).

Action Surge (1/day). Alamei can take an extra action.

Dueling. As long as Alamei is only holding his axe and no other weapons, he gains a +2 bonus to his damage (included below).

Holy Aura. Alamei can choose to gain either 1, 1d4 + 1, or 1d4 + 2 temporary Corruption when he makes a successful attack roll. He can then add 3 times the Corruption gained as radiant damage to the attack.

Spellcasting. Alamei's spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell attack +3, save DC 11) and he knows the following spells:

Cantrips: *accurate strike* (1), *ray of frost* (1), *shocking grasp* (1)

1st-level spells: *bane* (1d4 + 1), *command* (1d4 + 1)

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

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Alamei makes two attacks with his axe.

Masterwork Axe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8 + 7) slashing damage. *Deep Impact:* the axe does 23 (2d8 + 14) slashing damage on a critical hit.

There is, however, a window for the characters to act, before Hen-Loan and Venhal discover what has happened. Roll 1d6 as the characters approach the croft. The outcome **1-2** means that the two brothers are visiting; **3-6** means that Alamei is alone with his farmhands. Should they be unlucky with the roll, they may of course wait for Hen-Loan and Venhal to leave (about two hours).

If **Alamei** is alone, he will never give up the tablet without a fight, and he will not stop fighting before his final breath. He is a tough nut to crack and his **farmhands** (*Bestiary*, page 197) will do their best to help. The youngsters come running from their cabin when the fighting starts and are ready to assist their master beginning on the third round. If Alamei falls they will flee until they drop.

If the Mekele brothers are in the building, combat can be avoided. But this requires that the characters have talked to Mayor Nightpitch and promised he could see and touch Sarkomal's Prophecy. By explaining the threat to the town and convincing the brothers that such a meeting may be the only chance to get away from Thistle Hold alive and with the tablet. Doing so requires a successful **DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check** for them to consider an agreement. In all other instances, combat is the only way.

Alamei Sevio

"Still, my soul glows with the light of the Lawgiver!"

Deep below the temple ruins where the templars found Sarkomal's prophecy, Alamei encountered a living darkness. It killed four of his companions before Alamei, empowered by the force of Prios, managed to scatter the dark, though at a high cost in corruption. The graying hair has fallen off and been replaced by nasty, pus-leaking wounds. And he has nightmares, terrible nightmares indicating that the darkness never vanished but only moved into his body, biding its time. At times he can almost swear that the dark is creeping up his throat...

Tactics: Alamei fights in a holy rage, convinced that his soul is already lost and that his only chance of regaining the favor of Prios is to die in combat with the Lawgiver's enemies.

Farmhands

"Don't hurt my master!"

The youngsters would rather make a run for it but will fight as long as their master lives, more scared of losing their livelihood than their lives. However, if the provider falls, they have no reason to continue fighting.

ANADEA'S STORAGE SPACE

The small storage space that Anadea owned lies at the center of the block between Ynedar's Road and Abesina's Alley. She bought it a little less than a month ago, before she stormed out of the Sun Temple, as a retreat where she could read,

write and collect things that she had to keep secret from the priests. When she left the Church with nowhere to go and no one to turn to, the storage became her home.

The storage space is found in a larger warehouse which is divided into multiple sections. Most of the building is occupied by crafting material and finished but not yet sold products of various artisans, stored behind robust, iron-framed wooden doors. The locked door that the characters are after is number four and is a Large wooden door (AC 15) with 27 (5d10) hit points. It can be kicked in or broken through if the ones doing the kicking or breaking succeed at a **DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check** or pick it with a **DC 15 Dexterity (Thieves' Tools) check**. However, one would presume that no such methods are needed, since the key found on Anadea's corpse fits in the lock.

Inside the door there is a windowless chamber, about two paces deep and three paces wide. The first thing the characters notice is the stench – a vigorous, prickling odor that makes their eyes water. A successful **DC 10 Intelligence (Nature) check** reveals that the source of the stench must be animal urine.

The space feels cramped though there is not much in there – a simple mattress on the floor to the right and a rickety shelf opposite the door, containing two books, some old clothes and used field gear, and a couple of dry rye bread loaves. Also, along one wall is what first appears to be the owner's provisional writing desk – a crate with an oil lantern, writing utensils, some sheets of paper, and something looking like the notebook of a clerk. However, as soon as the door swings open, a character with a **passive Perception of 13 or higher** can hear a scraping or scratching sound, and something resembling a child's whimper.

It is true that the crate serves as a writing desk, but thanks to three layers of thick blankets inside it is also a sound absorbing casing around an iron cage. In the cage sits a half-grown mare cat that Anadea bought from the Abomitorium a few days ago, with the purpose of using it to quickly gain entrance to the Halls of a Thousand Tears if she was called for (see *The Twin Keys*, page 79). But the ignorant initiate had not thought it through.

The wild cat is already in very bad shape, with its fur clumpy from feces, urine and foodstuff. A **DC 10 Intelligence (Nature) check** – the Medicus feature provides advantage – reveals that it is severely malnourished, dehydrated and seems to have bit and scratched itself, probably as a result of stress. Anadea quickly realized her mistake, but the Abomitorium did not want to take the weak beast back and she could not make herself end its suffering. If the characters commit themselves to helping the poor creature they may soon thank Anadea for having a soft heart.

Aside from that, a number of discoveries can be made:

- ◆ A ceramic flask standing on the shelf contains a transparent fluid. A **DC 13 Intelligence (Alchemist's Supplies or**

Poisoner's Kit) **check** indicates that it is most likely 1d4 + 2 doses of the sedative drug Drone Dew (*Player's Guide*, page 181). Anadea was using the Drone Dew to keep her mare cat calm.

- ◆ In the outer pocket of the knapsack found amongst the field gear, there is a small box made from bark. It contains a lump of something which feels and smells like a truffle but which is rust red in color. The pearl shaped paste is made of the mushroom Touber that only grows in the Halls of a Thousand Tears. It takes a **DC 20 Intelligence (Alchemist's supplies or Field Laboratory) check** to recognize the substance and know that it is "a fungus said to be used by elves but whose growing place is unknown."
- ◆ Anadea has drawn on one of the paper sheets (see handout, page 198). It is a sketchy map, depicting what she remembers from her only visit to the Halls of a Thousand Tears, with a few cryptic notes to describe its different sections.
- ◆ The notebook seems to be a kind of journal, if a very fragmentary one. Anadea started writing it only a couple of days before she died, in an attempt to process her conflicting emotions and confused thoughts. The first page contains a self-portrait of Anadea with sad, tear-filled eyes and smiling lips. The text on the second page reads as follows (see handout, page 199):

I will save the world. From Prios, from the Queen, from all. Violence begets violence till none are left to fight! That's it! Nevermore!

I am alone here, about knowing. Not everything. The Mayor has also been there, in the Halls. And the friend of Goldengrasp. Mearoel. But they don't know me. Cannot know!

I am needed. But I'd rather be needed there. Contribute to the well with my tears and s

STOP! The choice has been made. You'll learn. She trusts you. Remember what you serve. Anadea is nothing, her actions everything. EVERYTHING!

Now sleep. Drone dew sleep.

If the characters have made it so far as to the hideout of Anadea, they should be ready to draw the conclusions which lead to Act III, alone or with the help of some ally. What happens then is described starting on page 78.

Under Attack!

The storage space can be a perfect place for the cultists of Erok the Dark or Red Eye to strike at the characters, especially if it is nighttime and the streets outside are relatively deserted.

Other Factions

WHILE ORDO MAGICA, the Queen's Legation and the Sun Church play the main parts in the second act, other factions may play a supporting role.

All groups and agents mentioned below can be encountered in or close to town. Some are also affected by previously described challenges, but their importance is primarily decided by the actions of the player characters.

THE WITCHES

Gadramon and Eferneya arrive at the town in a spectacular way, riding one mighty coloss each. Their errand is first and foremost to report back on what is happening, to the Huldra and the High Chieftain. However, they have also offered to help the townspeople. Yeleta used *contact other plane* in her quest to understand Davokar and has some insight into the well (see below).

The characters can head for the edge of the forest north of town to meet the witches. They do not have to be witches or barbarians themselves for Gadramon to greet them – all who know anything about what happens in town are welcome to sit by the fire. As a suggestion, the Gamemaster should handle the talk between the characters and the witch as an exchange. For every piece of information regarding the situation in town offered by the characters, Gadramon agrees to answer a question.

This is what he has to tell:

- ◆ Three days prior to their arrival at Thistle Hold, the Huldra learned in a vision that “... *a dying god will bring forth darkness...*”; “... *the night drowns the plunderers' town*”; “... *not exaltation, a fall, deep down into the Abyss...*”
- ◆ “The plunderers' town” is what many barbarians call the Hold, and the word “god” has a different meaning among clanfolk than among Ambrians – a better translation might be “spirit” or “forest warden.”
- ◆ The Bronze Well on the Antique Plaza is an ancient device, activated when powerful sources of Corruption come close. That (or if, depending on when the characters meet with the witches) it sounded is evidence supporting Yeleta's vision.

Nightpitch and the Witches

The reason why Lasifor is hesitant to let the witches through the palisade is political in nature. Most residents in town are afraid of witches in general and the Huldra (or “Arch Witch”) in particular, and this is how the powerful factions of Ambria want it to be. The fear of the people is important to both Korinthia and Jeseebegai, since depicting the barbarians as a potential enemy furthers their aims. The First Father even wants the Huldra of Davokar to appear as allied to evil, and that image would surely be severely damaged if Gadramon and Eferneya were allowed to freely fight abominations on the streets of the Hold. For this very same reason, Nightpitch's dear friend Yagaba cannot take part in any public battles against “the Powers of the Eternal Night.”

- ◆ This source of Corruption must be found and neutralized – it is deadly in itself and can in the wrong hands be used for horrible deeds. If everything in the Huldra's vision corresponds to the factual situation, the power may be used to give birth to a very potent abomination.

The witches will try to persuade Mayor Nightpitch to let them into town, but until they succeed they are in need of help. Should the characters imply that they want to do something about the situation (in order to identify Anadea and her superiors, for instance), Gadramon emphasizes that he and Eferneya want to contribute as best they can – if the characters continuously keep them informed of what is happening, they can assist with interpreting the information and suggest reasonable strategies.

If the characters are or become acquainted with Mayor Nightpitch, they may have a chance to persuade him to allow the Huldra's envoys to enter town, for example right before they go up against Erlaber Ambreagos and his cultists.

LASIFOR NIGHTPITCH

During the adventure *Wrath of the Warden*, Mayor Nightpitch has busy days. Not only have the sinkhole and the arrival of the Huldra's envoys made the residents of town and the representatives of the realm's factions turn their demanding and expectant gazes toward him; he also suffers from an absolutely terrible cold, that causes him to speak hoarsely as he coughs, snorts and burns with fever.

The Mayor will remain at Nighthome during the main part of Act II. A steady stream of envoys and messengers passes through the residence's gate with reports and questions, then out again carrying commands and in some cases answers. He fully trusts that others will sort out the practical handling of the challenges brought about by the situation, even if he deep down has a hard time accepting that he cannot be in total control.

Arranging a meeting with Lasifor is not easy in the current situation. Even if the player characters knew him before, they will be hard pressed to pull that off, and they will also need the support of some other influential figure. As examples, a letter of introduction penned by Father Elfeno, Chapter Master Cornelio or Suria Argona could help persuade Nightpitch to receive them. Even so, this will likely happen during the latter part of the adventure, when the characters have enough information to convince one of their contacts to write such a note.

Of course, the reactions of the feverish Mayor during such a meeting depend on what the characters have found and how much they are willing to tell. The Gamemaster must make this decision, based on the premise that Nightpitch will do almost anything to protect his town. If they meet him early or if they withhold some essential information, they will



Lasifor Nighthpitch, the uncrowned regent of the Hold, is one of the most influential people in the realm – a sign that the Promised Land lets commoners rise through the ranks.

suffer a scolding for wasting his valuable time; should the meeting be held in Act III, after the characters have visited the Halls of a Thousand Tears, he will instead offer them all he has to give – provided that the matter is handled discreetly and without upsetting the residents more than necessary!

Lasifor Nighthpitch can offer the characters the following, depending on when they seek him out:

- ◆ A permit to climb down the sinkhole. Only possible if the Mayor is a close acquaintance/friend of the characters.
- ◆ The address to Anadea's storage, given the conditions presented in the section *Contact with Nighthpitch*, page 66.
- ◆ A letter encouraging all residents of the Hold to be as helpful as possible to its carrier. This letter must be returned at the end of the adventure.
- ◆ Permission to smuggle Gadramon and Eferneya into town, provided that it is kept secret from all commoners. For this to happen, the characters must have met with Teara-Téana and repeated her words to Nighthpitch.
- ◆ Inform them of what it takes to get to the Halls of a Thousand Tears and offer suggestions on how to secure what is needed to find the Halls (see *The Twin Keys*, page 79 for more information).
- ◆ Help to convince hesitant parties to join up with the characters in the fight against the cultists, which may be extra welcome if they are trying to form an alliance between, for instance, the Iron Pact (Lysindra Goldengrasp) and the Sun Church, or between witches and templars.

THE TEMPLARS

If none of the player characters has a history as a templar, it is highly unlikely that the brothers Leohan, Hen-Loan and Venhal Mekele will come into play as anything but antagonists, but the opposite is possible.

That the brothers are Knights of the Dying Sun can come to light during the fight by the sinkhole, and the characters may get the idea to seek them out when it becomes apparent that they are dealing with a threat related to the dark of Davokar. There is also the possibility that the characters will reach out to the trio, instead of robbing them of the copper tablet, hoping to reach some kind of agreement. Of course, the brothers cannot be convinced to hand over the relic, but there is a chance that the characters decide to ignore the mission offered by the Legate and try to find Anadea's storage with the help of the Mayor instead (see *Contact with Nighthpitch*, page 66).

The Mekele brothers know nothing about what happens in Thistle Hold. Regarding the situation in the realm at large, they have the following suspicions and pieces of information to share. However, this requires that the characters can convince them that they are worth talking to (the stats of the brothers are on page 68). To do this they need to make an opposed **Charisma (Persuasion)** check with the brothers arguing against wasting their time talking to the characters. If the brothers saw the characters fight by the sinkhole then the player characters have advantage on their check.

- ◆ The commander of the Templars, Iakobo Vearra, expresses an increasing frustration over the Queen's and the First Father's passive attitude towards barbarians and elves. The brothers agree that all hope is lost: Prios is dead and the obvious duty of the Ambrians is to avenge Him and restore His honor!
- ◆ It was Prios who saved the people from the Dark Lords. The brothers and many of their companions believe it to be an insult to the Lawgiver that Ambria is still governed by a human monarch. Prios should rule, through a more actionable and righteous First Father than the current one.
- ◆ The famous strophe from Sarkomal's Prophecy that talks about "a mistress" is false (*Gamemaster's Guide*, page 47). According to both the Church and the scholars of Ordo Magica, the text never specifies a gender – the Symbarian word used translates as both master and mistress. Moreover, the text says nothing about the master being human. It could just as well be a god. A male god. It could refer to Prios!

The Prince at Nighthome

For the upcoming episodes of the chronicle it may be interesting if the characters have encountered the sanitary commissioner Agramai Kalfas, alias The Prince. He might be talking to Nighthpitch as the characters arrive for their audience, or he can knock at the door when the meeting is afoot, demanding to exchange a few words with the Mayor – having to report on something to do with the sinkhole and its effect on the town's fresh water wells. However, it is imperative that the sanitary commissioner does not come off as mysterious or suspicious. His presence/entrance may only appear as a way of illustrating how busy Lasifor is during the days following the Beast Clan attack.

THE HALL OF KNIGHTS

During this adventure, the Hall of Knights is all but empty. Most of the nobles have left town for their country estates, or try to stay out of the way until Mayor Nightpitch has cleaned up the mess in his town. Alkantor Argona has flown the coop, the same goes for Lesena Vearra.

In truth, there are only two interesting people left to encounter for characters who decide to stop by at the hall of the nobles: Ana Herengol, who otherwise does not have a place nearby to seek shelter, and Keroldo Erebus who is nothing but happy, now that he has the hall's store of fine spirits to himself.

If the characters arrive at the Hall of Knights, they likely do so trying to find Keroldo, to ask him about the medallion found in Anadea's bedchamber closet. Another reason may be that one of the characters is of noble birth and wants to use their contacts during the course of the adventure. Irrespective of which, they find Ana Herengol sitting in an armchair with a book in her hands, and a visibly drunk Keroldo rummaging through the wine storage in the kitchen.

Ana does not talk to just anyone – a character must make a **DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check** though a character with the Houses of Nobility background has advantage on the check. Should the guests be badly dressed and unknown to her, she will demand that they leave at once – a refusal leads to her rising to her feet and placing her right hand on the hilt of her fencing sword. If they manage to handle Ana (with or without resorting to violence), the next challenge is to make Keroldo sober enough to talk.

A large cup of steaming herb water or a couple hours of sleep are required to get the nobleman back into shape. Despite the throbbing headache he is glad to have someone to talk to – hungover or not: the not so venerable Bailiff of Blackmoor is totally unconcerned about appearing smart, diplomatic, or tactful.

- ◆ If shown Anadea's necklace, Keroldo will first look surprised, but if he is told where it was found he will soon remember and retell a story that he seems to be immensely proud of. He met a farmer's daughter when he was fourteen years old. With flattery, gifts and sweet promises he finally got her into bed, convinced that he was to hoist her out of the dung and make her his spouse. Now he cannot even remember her name, but he seems to recall giving her that exact piece of jewelry. That she has kept it all these years is something he finds laughable, considering how thoroughly he crushed her dreams.
- ◆ If he is asked about other nobles in town (for example about their current whereabouts) it will be hard to shut him up. He starts by mocking the Queen for her “headless idea” to fulfill Sarkomal’s Prophecy and restore the Symbarian Empire – that will only lead to ruin, according to him.
- ◆ He is also happy to gossip about what is going on in the Hall of Knights and makes it sound like all nobles hate each other. Superficially, they appear courteous and

polite, but underneath an intense power game is afoot, primarily between houses Argona and Vearra who are fighting an idiotic contest in the hope of winning a throne that will never be theirs.

- ◆ Should the characters ask Keroldo about Corruption and evil he continues to play the jester. He claims that there are a fair number of genuinely rotten individuals among the nobles, but that most of them are too lazy or cowardly to meddle with the forces of darkness. He will never believe the whispers about cultists and occult nightmare rituals among the nobles of Ambria. On the other hand, he adds seriously, a majority of the members of Ambrian nobility seem convinced that their noble blood cannot be corrupted, and with such a belief they need not be afraid to “cuddle with the Dark”...

THE IRON PACT

The aggressive branch of the Iron Pact which is led by the former treasure hunter Lysindra Goldengrasp has no idea about what has happened to Eox or that the skull is hidden inside the palisade. However, the autumn elf Mearoel knows the truth about the “well,” so right from the start the group will be on the hunt for whatever source of Corruption the device warned of – though without any success, since the skull is concealed with mystical veils.

The Gamemaster can introduce the group in different ways, though most likely through Lysindra since she is a person of note. As a suggestion, the characters can notice her presence in the following ways:

- ◆ When the characters return to the surface after having been down the sinkhole, characters who succeed at a **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check** can see a woman watching them from a distance. She leans against a razed wall close to the hole, her facial expression indicating intense disapproval and deep concern. A character that succeeds at a **DC 20 Intelligence (History) check** can identify the woman.
- ◆ When/if the characters approach the camp of Gadramon and Eferneya, they may make a **DC 17 Wisdom (Perception) check** to notice Lysindra. A successful character gets a glimpse of her, glancing at them over her shoulder before hurrying into the woods. Again the character can make an **Intelligence (History) check** as above to identify the woman but have disadvantage on the check due to the brief glimpse. The witches refuse to comment and advise them not to follow.
- ◆ One of the group’s most important tasks is to eliminate cultists in town. Hence, they will of course react when the followers of Red Eye and Erok the Dark start terrorizing the player characters. If the characters at some point discover that they are being trailed and get the idea to hunt down the persecutor they are in for a shocking surprise – they arrive at a backyard where the follower lays executed on the ground, throat cut wide open.

Aside from Lysindra and Mearoel, the group consists of several hopeful initiates (we recommend one goblin or human for each character and an ogre for each two characters, see **prospective Ironsworn**, page 76) still to be accepted among the Ironsworn, the fully fledged members of the Iron Pact. All of them are very eager to demonstrate their worth.

Should the characters find their way to Anadea's storage, they can discover a direct lead to Lysindra and her group. No matter if they seek her out for that reason, or only because they have seen her at the sinkhole and with the witches, she welcomes them into her home near the East Gate. She will not answer any questions they may pose, admitting to nothing more than being a normal concerned resident who just happens to be braver than most.

However, she is happy to listen to the characters speak about themselves and the situation they are in. The lead in Anadea's storage indicates that Lysindra is friends with someone who knows the way to the Halls of a Thousand Tears. To get her help, the characters must be totally open with what they know, and they also have to let Lysindra accompany them on the journey. If the Huldra is correct in assuming that a powerful abomination is about to be born in the Hold, all forces of good must stand together in the fight!



Lysindra Goldengrasp

"I was an idiot, now I am... enlightened."

Lysindra is one of the most successful explorers ever to map and salvage the treasures waiting in Davokar. Her fortune comes from her own finds, and also from fees paid by the nobles who wanted to come along on her well-guarded and well-planned expeditions. What finally made her acknowledge humankind's harmful effect on the world was that she on numerous occasions revisited areas that she had explored before.

When she for the seventh time could observe how the lovely, lush and rich nature of such an area had turned into

a blight-stricken wasteland, it was impossible to ignore the truth – humanity, not nature, is the mother of evil. Now she is prepared to atone for her many atrocities, whatever the cost may be!

Tactics: Lysindra is no warrior but she can use her crossbow. She keeps her distance if at all possible, assisting her companions with well-aimed bolts.

Lysindra Goldengrasp

Medium human

Armor Class 16 (woven silk)

Hit Points 45 (6d8 + 18)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)	11 (+0)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)

Skills Acrobatics +5, Perception +5, Persuasion +2, Sleight of Hand +5, Stealth +7

Senses passive Perception 16

Languages local tongue

Challenge 3 (700 XP, proficiency bonus +2)

Manner loud voice, intense gestures

Shadow red and green, like a gleaming copper roof covered in vines (0/4)

Equipment Alchemist's Supplies, 1d4 doses Wraith Dust, 1d4 Ghost Candles, 1d6 Herbal Cures, 2 doses Elixir of Life, thieves' tools, 2d8 thaler

Cunning Action. Lysindra can take a bonus action to Dash, Disengage or Hide.

Expertise. Lysindra has double her proficiency bonus for Perception and Stealth.

Sneak Attack (1/turn). Lysindra deals an extra 10 (3d6) damage when she hits a target with a melee or thrown weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of her ally that isn't incapacitated and she doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

ACTIONS

Hand Crossbow. Ranged Weapon Attack: +6 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. Hit: 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage.

Knives. Melee or Thrown Weapon Attack: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. Hit: 6 (1d4 + 4) piercing damage.

REACTIONS

Uncanny Dodge. When an attacker that Lysindra can see hits her with an attack, she can halve the damage dealt.

Mearoel

Medium humanoid (autumn elf)

Armor Class 17 (woven silk, Man-at-Arms, see below)

Hit Points 105 (14d8 + 42)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	18 (+4)	17 (+3)	11 (+0)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Str +8, Con +6

Skills Acrobatics +4, Intimidation +6, Perception +4, Persuasion +6, Survival +4

Senses passive Perception 14

Languages Ambrian, Barbarian, Elvish

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

Manner calm but hateful stare

Shadow red, yellow and green like an autumn forest
(Corruption: 0/9)

Equipment 6 mastercraft handaxes

Action Surge. Mearoel can take one additional action on his turn. He must take a rest of any length before using this feature again.

Indomitable (1/day). Mearoel can reroll a failed saving throw.

Man-at-Arms. Mearoel adds a +1 bonus to his armor class (included above) and can don or doff his armor in half the usual time.

Melee Expert. Mearoel has 3 combat dice (d6s). He can use a bonus action to add a bonus die to an attack or damage roll. When takes a rest of any length he regains any spent combat dice.

Two-Weapon Fighting. Mearoel can make an off-hand attack with one of his axes and add his Strength modifier to the damage.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Mearoel makes three attacks with his mastercraft axes.

Mastercraft Axe. *Melee or Thrown Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60, one target. Hit: 8 (1d6 + 5) slashing damage. *Combat Mastery:* Mearoel scores a critical hit on a 19 or 20 on the d20.

REACTIONS

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

Combat Speciality. When Mearoel succeeds at his first attack roll he gains advantage on his second attack roll.

Mearoel

"You are the sickness of this world."

Mearoel is one of the many Iron Pact members who has given up hope on the Ambrians. The clanfolk managed to uphold some kind of balance, but the hunger of the newcomers threatens to drag all of them into perdition. All that Mearoel and his allies can hope for is to hamper the wrongdoers and postpone the inevitable as far into the future as possible. Not in the hope of triumphing or to enact revenge, but out of the aspiration to honor the power that breeds life.

Tactics: Mearoel will throw all but two of his axes at the threats he judges the most dangerous (mystics primarily). If necessary he will disarm himself to dispatch a threat and continue to fight unarmed.

Prospective Ironsworn

"You heard them say it: NEVERMORE!"

All of the humans, goblins and ogres who have abandoned their previous lives in hope of becoming permanent members of Lysindra's aggressive Iron Pact cell, have previously participated in one or more expeditions led by the former treasure hunter. They are blindly loyal and fully convinced

Prospective Ironsworn I

Medium human (Ambrian or Barbarian) or humanoid (goblin)

Armor Class 14 (studded leather + shield)

Hit Points 11 (2d8 + 2, human) or 9 (2d6 + 2, goblin)

Speed 25 (goblin) or 30 (human) ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	11 (+0)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)

Senses passive Perception 11 (darkvision for goblins only)

Languages Ambrian, Goblin (barbarian or goblin only)

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

Manner quiet, waiting for orders

Shadow brownish red, like a copper treasure hidden in the dirt (0/4)

Equipment 2d6 shillings

Pariah (Goblin only). The goblin has disadvantage on Charisma checks with other origins.

Survival Instinct (Goblin only). The goblin can take the Dash, Dodge or Disengage action as a bonus action.

ACTIONS

Mace. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 6 (1d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage.

that humankind's intrusions into Davokar must be stopped and penalized.

All of them aspire to become accepted as fully-fledged members in the Iron Pact, called Ironsworn. To succeed in this they have to impress both Lysindra and the autumn elf Mearoel, and finally Prince Eneáno's second in command, the feared warrior Arielial.

Tactics: The agents obey Lysindra's orders, eager to atone for their sins and convinced that their self-worth depends on their willingness to serve.

Prospective Ironsworn II

Medium humanoid (ogre)

Armor Class 10

Hit Points 15 (2d8 + Tough, see below)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	11 (+0)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)

Senses passive Perception 11 (darkvision)

Languages Ambrian, Goblin

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

Manner waiting for orders

Shadow crimson red (0/4)

Equipment 2d6 shillings

Calmness. The ogre has advantage on Wisdom saving throws against enchantments and other mind-altering magics.

Pariah. The ogre has disadvantage on Charisma checks with other origins.

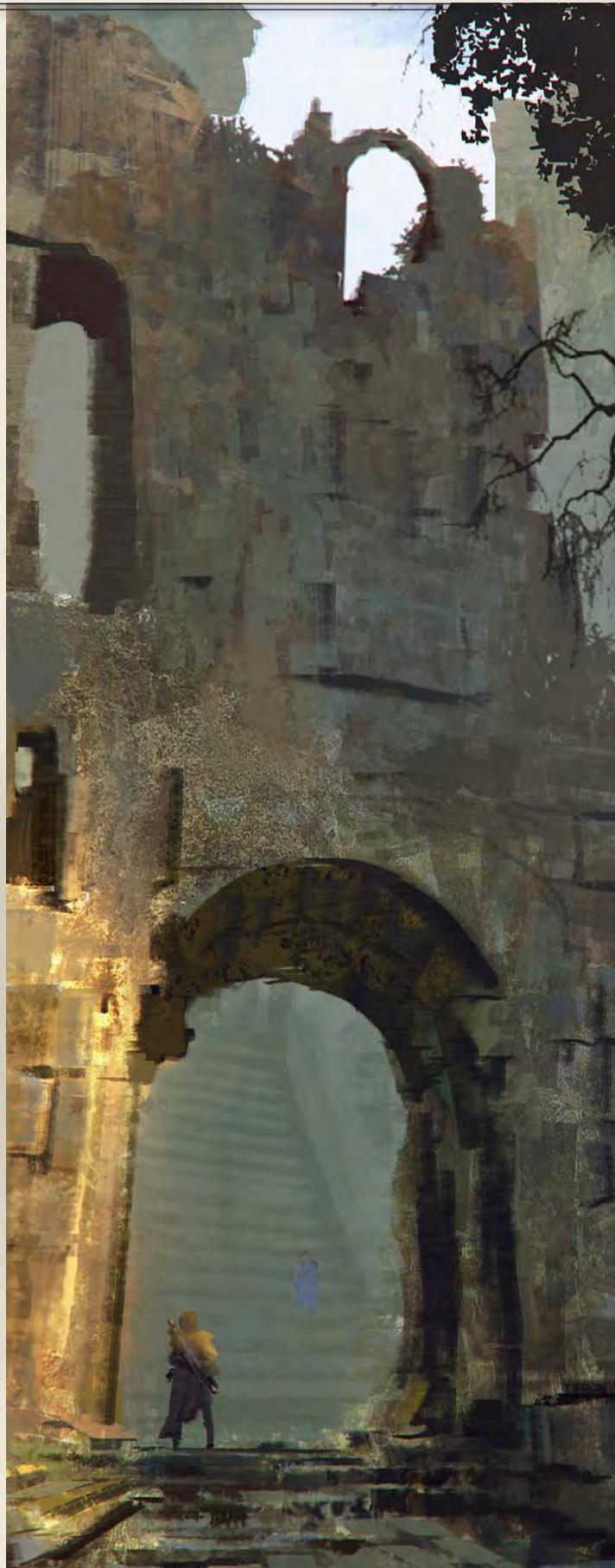
Tough. The ogre has 1 extra hit point for each Hit Die it has (included above).

ACTIONS

Greatclub. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage. Two-handed.

Approaching the Iron Pact

The Queen as well as the Sun Church regard the Iron Pact as a hostile organization, and for its agents there is no other future than the gallows. With that in mind, one can understand that the members of the pact are safe rather than sorry – should the characters be clumsy or behave aggressively when they approach Lysindra they have most likely made themselves an enemy for life...



ACT III:

Midnight in Thistle Hold

For the third act of the adventure to start, the players and their characters must reach the right conclusions from the leads in the second act. They must realize that Anadea was a member of the Iron Pact, and that her “superior” is in the Halls of a Thousand Tears.

AS ALWAYS, IT is best if the players can put the pieces together and reach the right conclusions on their own, which is made possible by the elven Halls being mentioned in the *Gamemaster’s Guide* on pages 48, 101, and 112–113, and two times in the section about Thistle Hold in the book *The World of Symbaroum* (pages 11 and 17). If this is not enough, there are many who are willing to help.

The witches, Ordo Magica’s masters, Father Elfeno, Ly-sindra Goldengrasp and others are all capable of reaching the conclusions mentioned below, and also to link the leads to the legends about the Halls of a Thousand Tears. If the Gamemaster wishes to make it more exciting, the players may make appropriate checks mentioned below for the one they are talking to, but that is not a requirement. However, it should be noted that only three persons in Thistle Hold know how to get to the Halls: the autumn elf Mearoel, Lasifor Nighthpitch and his witch. More on that in the upcoming section, after a closer look at the leads.

THE CLUES

The Letter in Anadea’s Belt Purse: Aside from the text being written with symbols resembling cuneiform writings and speaking of sorrow and tears, it is signed by Teara-Teána. Anyone with the Loremaster feature immediately recognizes the name as elvish. If they succeed at a **DC 13 Intelligence (History or Investigation) check**, they will recall that elves seldom communicate in writing, but that they often use script that looks like Symbarian symbols when they do.

The Road to the Elves

WHEN THE CHARACTERS realize that the person who can help them reach their goals – whether that goal is to reap the extravagant rewards promised by Anadea or to learn more about the alleged source of Corruption – probably is in the Halls of a Thousand Tears, they have to find a way to get there. If they have been to the storage and found the journal, they already know that Lasifor Nighthpitch and someone

Arkel’s Testimony (page 64): In combination with the report of Geleto, the story of Arkel implies that Anadea was a heretic, both in the sense that she defended Father Sarvolia and in that she had an idea of “Davokar’s nature” which deviated from that of the Church. It is also clear that she had a “new tutor,” one who was not part of the Sun Church or the Ambrian realm in general. If needed, the Gamemaster can let the players roll a **DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check** for the characters to realize that this only leaves the clanfolk or the elves as likely alternatives.

Anadea’s Storage (page 70): In the storage area there are several items pointing to the elves – the ball of Touber, the sketchy map, and the entry in the journal. For one thing, the journal entry contains the exclamation “Nevermore!” which can be identified as the motto of the Iron Pact by someone with the Loremaster feature. The note also mentions “the halls” and a “well,” which corresponds to the scribblings on the map.

The Box in the Alcove (page 62): The portrait of a person with elven features speaks for itself. When examining the sketch of the stone-paved pond, a character can make a **DC 13 Intelligence (History) check** to remember a barbarian legend about “the Well of Tears.” It is supposedly a pond or well into which the elves shed tears of bottomless grief, but exactly what they are grieving for is disputed – the unwavering brutality of humankind, the evil of corruption, their dying prince, or maybe that the elven race is about to become extinct.

called Mearoel should be able to help them; if not, they have to ask around, but with some caution.

HELP ON THE WAY

Ambrian factions like the Sun Church and House Kohinoor would be delighted to receive confirmation of the existence of the Halls of a Thousand Tears, but hardly in order to get

themselves invited to a cup of elven herbal water. On the contrary, they would regard the Halls as a strategic, military target and do ALL in their power to **a)** help the player characters get there, and **b)** afterwards force them to disclose where this elven settlement can be found. If the players do not realize this, the Gamemaster should explain the situation, provided that some of the characters have the Loremaster feature or the Contacts feat focused on either the Sun Church, the Ambrian Army, or Ambrian Nobles. If the group does not include such a character, it is recommended that they can make a **DC15 Intelligence (Investigation) check** to reach the same insight if at least two of them succeed. What they then do with this insight is up to the players and their characters...

Whomever the characters confide in will initially adopt a skeptical stance and express doubts that the Halls are real. If they keep trying, everyone they might talk to will finally refer them to the same person: *"If anyone knows anything about these Halls or has an idea on who else to contact, it is Mayor Nighthpitch."* The exceptions to this are the witches who say that also the Huldra may know and Lysindra who never mentions Nighthpitch, but instead brings them along to meet with Mearoel.

THE TWIN KEYS

Getting to the Halls of a Thousand Tears is not very difficult, provided that the characters know what needs to be done and can acquire two vital components: a piece of Touber mushroom and a mare cat or jakaar, alive and kicking. Both Nighthpitch and Mearoel can tell the characters this – the former if the characters can convince him that it is necessary to prevent his town from being attacked, the latter if Lysindra Goldengrasp asks it of him.

There is a chance that the characters already have both components (found in Anadea's storage). If not, the Mayor or the autumn elf can provide them with the mushroom, in exchange for the promise that the characters will try to gain some more when they visit the Halls. However, the wild beast is something they must acquire themselves. At the stables of the Abomitorium there are both mare cats and jakaars but their keeper, Miesma, claims that all are needed for the upcoming Fight Day. The two remaining alternatives are to stage a break-in or to overpower the night guard and take one of the beasts by force.

A more diplomatic solution is to ask for the name of the trapper who provides the beasts for the Abomitorium. That way they will get to meet the game hunter Malmedo who lives in a small apartment inside Haloban's Ring and who welcomes them to join his next hunt. Malmedo has located

a pack of **mare cats** (*Bestiary*, page 143) – a male, three females and a litter of six half-year-old **kittens** – but has not dared go after them on his own. Should the characters help him, he will let them keep one kitten and half of the meat from the ones that are killed. The details of such a hunt are left to the Gamemaster to decide.

Younger Mare Cats

These mare cats are not yet fully grown and cautious around humanoids. But like their parents (*Bestiary*, page 143), they are death-defyingly fearless once battle is joined.

Tactics: The mare cats sneak up on their victims and surprise them, then use their Twist reaction to avoid any counterattacks.

Mare Cat Kitten

Medium Beast

Armor Class 11

Hit Points 45 (7d8 + 14)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)	3 (-2)	14 (+2)	8 (-1)

Skills Perception +4, Stealth +3

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages —

Challenge 1/8 (25 XP, proficiency bonus +2)

Manner hisses angrily

Shadow green as grass after a heavy rain (Corruption: 0/3)

Equipment —

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 1) piercing damage. If the target is a creature it must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned for 1 minute. The creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of its turn, ending the effect on a success.

REACTIONS

Twist. If the mare cat would be hit by an attack it can add 2 to its armor class if it is not grappled or restrained.

Journey Through the Woods

ONCE THE CHARACTERS have acquired a piece of Touber and a live forest beast, the instructions say to take them out into the forest. When they have made their way past the tree-line, the beast must be leashed and fed the mushroom, wrapped in some minced meat. According to the information the characters have, they are then to follow the animal, since it will head straight for the gate to the Halls. However, a few things should be noted.

GUIDE THE BEAST

First, the Touber mushroom does not affect the temper of the beast, so if it is anything else than a kitten or a weakened specimen (for example the one in Anadea's storage) the characters have to mind their own safety. Someone who is used to dealing with animals and/or is proficient with Survival can suggest that instead of a leash they use two tools called Shaft Snares – sticks that are two paces long and equipped with a noose at one end, making it possible for two moderately strong people to keep the beast at bay.

Each time the animal becomes aggressive, each character must make an opposed **Strength (Athletics) check**. As long as at least one of them succeeds the beast is still under control. If a character lets go of their shaft snares (for instance if they are attacked) then the animal gets trickier to manage – in that case it has advantage on its **Strength (Athletics) checks**. If both handlers fail their checks then the beast tears free and goes bounding off into the forest (unless the characters have made other precautions like a tethering rope).

THE LONG ROAD

Secondly, their instructor says that there are several gates to the Halls of a Thousand Tears, but that these either appear at different places in the woods or are not active all at once. Irrespective of which, it is impossible to be sure where the beast will go or how long the journey will be. Consequently, they should be prepared for more than a short trip.

As a suggestion, the Gamemaster can roll 1d4. The result is the number of challenges that the players must face and twice the result is the number of days that they must travel to reach the halls (two days per challenge). For the challenges,

Challenges (d10)

- | | |
|----------------------|------------------------|
| 1. The Brigands | 6. Sea of Light |
| 2. Fairy Dance | 7. At the Brink |
| 3. The Pupae | 8. Aluin |
| 4. Free Settlers | 9. Mother Marsh |
| 5. The Ranger Patrol | 10. Beast Clan Raiders |

you can roll on the table below, use the Misfortunes on pages 64–66 of the *Gamemaster's Guide*, or invent your own.

1. The Brigands: A group of greedy brigands has heard the characters come stomping through the forest and arranged an ambush amongst thorny shrubbery. The would-be thieves are human if they are encountered close to the forest edge, goblins if met further in, but whatever the case there are twice as many as the characters (use **robber**, Bestiary, page 186), guided by a leader (**robber chief**, page 187). They will attempt to surprise the characters – make **Dexterity (Stealth) checks** opposed by the characters' passive Perception scores.

2. Fairy Dance: A group of persistent fairies has discovered the characters, curious to know why they have a beast on a leash. They decide that the animal must be set loose, and may very well succeed at this since the oldest among them has learned Ancient Magic (*Player's Guide*, page 153) from an Arch Troll and now knows *minor illusion*. The **fairy** (Bestiary, page 173) must make a **Dexterity (Stealth) check** opposed by any lookouts' passive Perception. Using *minor illusion* to hide itself, the fairy then makes a **Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check** to fiddle with the knot, lock or other measures hindering the beast from running away. If discovered, he sets off into the night while his three friends fire arrows from up in the trees.

If the first attempt fails they will try again during the following night, with a new strategy. The four companions storm the campsite and fire an arrow at one character each, after which they retreat back into the dark, hoping that the characters will hunt after them. The oldest remains behind and once again attempts to use his Stealth skill and the *minor illusion* cantrip to try to get close to the beast and set it free. The check against the characters' passive Perception is made as usual but a character who actively states that they are watching out for any unusual activity (and not just the elves who attacked them) can make a **Wisdom (Perception) check** and use that result if it is higher.

So, what happens if the fairies succeed? Well, the suggestion is that the characters get a chance to catch the beast before it escapes – either by using the chase rules (*Gamemaster's Guide*, pages 159–162) or by grabbing the creature before it can escape – an opposed **Strength (Athletics) check**. If the beast has a rope or chain dangling from itself, the character can make their check with advantage (if you use the chase rules then this impediment gives the characters advantage on their chase contest checks as well).

If the characters succeed at the chase, they eventually find the animal asleep from exhaustion. Should it fail (or the attempt to grab it fail) then they have no option but to return to Thistle Hold and hope they can acquire more of the mushroom...



Beneath the treetops of Davokar you
often feel like you are being watched.
Most of those times you really are...

3. The Pupae: The characters' guide leads them straight through a dense and vast area of thorns, about fifty paces wide. In its midst they encounter something peculiar – a shapeless, black lump, large as a curled up ogre; like a vile, stinking giant boil. And something is moving under the oily, leathery surface!

If the characters let events take their course, a fully grown, humanoid creature soon claws itself out of the boil. And it indeed proves to be an ogre – a very confused, starving, scared and hence rather aggressive ogre. It is totally void of memories and has no language, but if the characters refrain from attacking, it will only growl and wave its arms at them to try to scare them away. It has the statistics of a **famished rage troll** (*Bestiary*, page 211).

4. Free Settlers: The characters encounter a small community of free settlers in their path. It consists of two families, numbering sixteen individuals in total – six children, eight adults in two generations and two elderly men who once where priests in service of the Executioner and who refused to accept the supremacy of Prios. The characters are welcomed with smiles and are offered to spend the night in one of the huts the settlers live in.

What the characters are unaware of, is that the inhabitants live in a symbiosis with a vicious **lindworm** (*Bestiary*, page 35) called Gulgafal, nesting at the top of the giant village tree. Gulgafal is fed and cared for by the settlers, who in turn can count on the serpent to protect them. Naturally, the village Elder Hugor intends for the characters to become Gulgafal's next meal.

The adult villagers (half male, half female) have stats as **cult followers** (*Bestiary*, page 183) and will try to sneak up on the characters in the middle of the night. If any character is keeping watch, the villagers must make a group **Dexterity (Stealth) check** against the lookout's passive Perception. Should the characters quickly gain the upper hand, the settlers decide to make a run for it and Hugor sounds his horn.

A moment later, an abysmal roar is heard from above. Gulgafal comes slithering down the trunk, determined to shelter his herd and fill his belly.

If the characters manage to best the serpent, they can climb up to its nest and make some interesting finds. The Gamemaster is free to decide the details or to use the tables on pages 78–81 in the *Gamemaster's Guide*. If going with the latter option, it is suggested that the characters roll four times on the table Curiosities, and once each on Mystical Treasures and Artifacts.

5. The Ranger Patrol: A patrol from the Queen's Rangers attracts the attention of the characters from a distance. The group includes **Captain Serela** and her five **rangers** (*Bestiary*, pages 190–191), and they are in the area to investigate the rumors of a raging arch troll. They are, of course, also

obliged to check that all Ambrians they encounter in the woods are carrying a License for Travels in and Explorations of the Forest of Davokar.

Serela may very well be one of Queen Korinthia's most tenacious subjects. If the characters do not have their license in order, she demands that they immediately turn on their heels and also spares one of her rangers to escort them back to the tree line. If they do have the license they need, she may still raise bothersome questions. Are they really allowed to keep wild beasts in chains or on a leash when the explorer's license says nothing about it? Do they really have the skills warranted to be wandering about or should they be forced to pay a small fee for their incompetence?

How the encounter ends depends on how well equipped the characters are in terms of a valid license and how convincing they are: even if the papers are in order they must succeed at an opposed **Charisma (Persuasion) check** to satisfy the zealous captain. It may actually come to combat, since the irreproachable Serela takes her orders very seriously!

6. Sea of Light: As the time comes to seek shelter for the night, the characters arrive at a vast field of ruins whose ancient remains can barely be seen through the undergrowth. In a couple of places, walls still stand tall enough to protect from the wind – great places for the characters to roll out their blankets.

A character with a **passive Perception of 14 or higher** discovers that what was first assumed to be a twig poking up from the ground actually is the bone from some long dead creature. A character can make a **DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine) check** – the Medicus feature provides advantage – to reveal it is a human femur and that the death must have occurred less than two years ago. If they dig on the spot, they will find more bones beneath the moss, also items in the form of weapons and Ambrian coins (4d6 thaler). It is impossible to tell how these people died, at least from studying and analyzing the remains.

The answer to that question comes as night falls over the field. It is then that they rise from the Underworld: dozens of **frostlights** (*Bestiary*, page 157) that have ruled the area for centuries. Initially they are scattered and the sight of them is more beautiful than frightening. But if the characters are to make it out alive they better get a move on.

If they depart immediately, they will only attract the interest of 1d4 frostlights; each round another frostlight joins them. It takes five rounds of movement to reach the edge of the field.

Should they stay by the wall segment, the frostlights will eventually take notice of them and close in on the campsite together. If so, the characters' only chance is to form up back to back and keep the spirits at bay during the five rounds it takes to reach safety. Once they have left the field they will not be followed since the frostlights are bound to its ruins.

7. At the Brink: A barbarian woman comes staggering through the woods. When she sees the characters she stops to stare at them with terror in her eyes. Her clothes are shredded, she has bite and claw marks on her arms and face, and she screams at them in the barbarian tongue: “Stay away! Don’t come any closer! Fly, you fools, fly!” A character with Shadow-sight can make a **DC10 Wisdom (Perception) check** to reveal that the woman positively oozes Corruption!

If the characters do not obey, she bursts into a full-blown frenzy. And when she activates her mystical artifact, the battle axe Hunger (see textbox), she exceeds her Corruption Threshold, gains a mark of Corruption that increases her permanent Corruption which crosses her Threshold and transforms her into a **blight-born human** (*Bestiary*, page 122)! The woman’s skin immediately adopts a blood red nuance, her eyes turn black, and she drops the axe as long claws sprout from her swollen, gnarled hands.

Combat is unavoidable and will hopefully teach the characters to be careful with people they encounter in Davokar, even if they appear to be in distress.

8. Aluin: A character who has a **passive Perception of 12 or higher** can suddenly notice a strange sound intermingled with the rustling of the leaves. It sounds like someone is humming a cheerful melody; a child or maybe a woman, or a man with a high pitched voice. Shortly thereafter all Ambrians among them recognize the song as an old Ambrian lullaby.

Aluin comes strolling through the forest – the very strange, six-year-old boy who has appointed Sarvola to be his father. He greets the characters with a smile: “Hey, hello-hey, you’re also on a stroll in the woods? You walking the dog/cat?” He sits down on a stump and asks if the characters wish to join him for a while. If asked what he is doing all alone in the depth of Davokar he just shrugs his shoulders and points out that he likes playing in the forest since it is “full of fine plants and other interesting things.”

See the textbox for Aluin, page 53, for more inspiration on how the conversation may run. If the characters allow it, he is glad to walk with them for a while, until he leaves them as abruptly as he appeared, with the excuse that he must return before “papap gets worried.”

9. Mother Marsh: The characters are forced to come to a halt when their path takes them to the rim of a bog. The beast that leads them wants to continue straight ahead, but it looks as though it should be possible to walk around it without losing much time. Whether the characters put up a fight with the willful, hissing and stubborn beast or decide to try to navigate the swamp, they are soon joined by a peculiar creature.

It is a short female figure – bony and bent, with moss-green skin which looks hard and wrinkled like the bark of a pine. She seems ancient but has a posture suggesting that

The Battle Axe Hunger, ARTIFACT (RARE)

There are tales of a barbarian ruler named Yakobor who was tricked into entering into an alliance with the Spider King. In exchange for his loyalty, Yakobor got a battle axe and a chest full of red gold coins. According to the legend, everything bought with the coins was soon destroyed – meat rotted, butter went rancid, iron rusted, and slaves withered into crippled elders in a day. And the axe that was to make Yakobor into the greatest of all, instead darkened his soul.

Hunger is a double-axe with Deep Impact property (double both the dice and modifier on a critical hit), made to corrupt both wielder and enemy.

Night Bite

The master of the axe can use their bonus action to have it radiate Corruption. Activating the power causes it to last for 1 minute, and with every hit, 1d4 is rolled. The wielder suffers the outcome of the roll in Temporary Corruption, the victim suffers the outcome in both Temporary Corruption and extra damage.

Requires: Bonus action

Corruption: as above

she is alert and hearty like a youngster. The wide smile is toothless and she watches the characters with big eyes, just as dark blue as ripe blueberries.

The creature welcomes them to the wetland of Mother Marsh, and continues to speak of herself in the third person. She offers to guide them through the swamp; all she asks in return is that one of the characters will owe her a favor which she can collect when she has the need for it. Should the characters agree, they will have no problem trailing her to the other side of the marshland, where she waves them off with a sly smile. If they instead turn down her offer, she will mutter a curse over the character who has been most talkative. At first, all he or she feels is a tiny sting at the base of the nose. But about one week later a small wart appears on the right nostril. The wart will grow by a tenth of an inch in diameter per month, and no one but Mother Marsh is able to break the curse, at the cost of a favor of course...

The character who agrees to the initial offer will most likely come to regret the decision. For one thing, their shadow will become tainted – anyone looking at the aura of that character will notice a dark, uneven stain at the center of his or her forehead. Additionally, the character will wake up one morning with an inexplicable understanding of what needs to be done in order for the contract to be fulfilled: Mother Marsh wishes for “the depraved heart of a greedy human.” Should the character refuse or take too much time it leads to a wart curse like the one described above.

10. Beast Clan Raiders: The Beast Clan has been forced to abandon their previous home and is looking to start over somewhere else. To gather resources, two groups have been sent out to strike at free settlements and barbarian camps; each group consisting of a **Beast Clan guardian**, a **Beast Clan warrior** for every two characters and a **clan beast** for each character (stats on pages 24–27). One of these groups has gotten wind of the characters.

Should the characters take precautions before setting up camp – for example if they end the day's walk by tracking some hundred paces back, in parallel to their own trail – whomever has the watch can quite easily discover the threat. If so,

the enemies must make a group **Dexterity (Stealth) check** against the watch's passive Perception in order to surprise them. Without such precautions the watch must succeed at a **DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check** to notice the hunters.

The Beast Clan members are probably a tough challenge for most groups, but when venturing into Davokar one should not expect anything less. A kind Gamemaster might allow the characters to discover the threat at a distance even if no precautions have been taken, so they can find somewhere to hide or somewhere to make their stand. Should they opt for combat under those circumstances, they will only have themselves to blame!

The Halls of a Thousand Tears

THE CHARACTERS VISIT to the Halls of a Thousand Tears will be short and they will not have the time or opportunity to see very much of the elven realm. *Wrath of the Warden* is the opening episode of the chronicle, so for now the players will have to make do with a glimpse of the grandeur, as a prelude of things to come.

The main reason for the visit is to gain a clear lead in the hunt for the powerful source of Corruption located somewhere in Thistle Hold, based on Anadea's last conversation with her contact in the Iron Pact. Adding to that, the talk to Teara-Téana will provide the characters with important insight into how the Iron Pact works and also about the dynamic which is fundamental to the main conflict in the game world: the one between the principles called Wyrhta, Wielda and Wratha by the barbarians.

ARRIVAL

The first sign that they are closing in on the Halls is that their guide starts tugging at the restraints, eagerly yelping or whining. The beast stops in a grove with the ground covered by fallen, fiery yellow or deeply red leaves. It sniffs the air and scratches the ground, with its ears twitching back and forth.

After a while it sits down, closes its eyes and lets out a continuous howling/meowing. A strong gust of air hits the grove and quickly transforms into a whirlwind that lifts leaves, dirt and debris from the ground – debris that, before the characters' eyes, merges into something that more and more looks like an archway. At the moment when the wind dies, the portal is activated and they can see that it leads to a short corridor with floors of vulcanized glass, with the walls clad in shimmering algae and with the far opening covered by a drape made from vines of green and brown.

A character who has Shadow-sight and succeeds at a **DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check** realizes that the portal immediately starts to lose power and that it will soon collapse; a character without Shadow-sight can make the same check at disadvantage but success is more in the form

of a feeling than a sense of knowing. In any case, they only have about a minute to act before the archway collapses into a pile of leaves, twigs and dirt.

THE ENTRANCE

The corridor is not more than ten paces deep and ends at a curtain of bushy vines. The draping is under the influence of a mystical rune that reacts to Corruption; its stalks are normally a brownish green but if blight-stricken creatures approach they shift into ever-darkening shades, based on the level of permanent Corruption (*Player's Guide*, page 38). For a blight-stricken creature the drapes take on a red nuance, for blight-marked ones they shift towards purple, and for thoroughly corrupt creatures the drapes become pitch black as a warning to the elves posted as guard in the Entrance Chamber.

The hall behind the curtain is about twenty paces wide, fifteen paces deep and the height of three humans, rising to a natural cave ceiling. The latter is overgrown with moss that emits a soft, pale-blue shine, and long threads of shimmering algae hang all the way down to the cave floor, each a few paces apart. Along the side where the characters enter, there are five other openings, covered in similar vine draperies. On the opposite wall are two arched doorways whose massive gates are closed. The walls at the short ends of the hall display something looking like large mosaics – actually plant and flower arrangements whose color and life force have been preserved by mystical means.

Three beings are in the hall, on a moss-clad podium between the doorways on the far side. One sits cross-legged at the front edge and two stand behind him holding shallow, wooden bowls up to their chests. In the gloomy light, it first appears as if the ones standing are children. But as the characters come closer, they find that they are mistaken: the closest person is huge, tall as a fully grown man when seated. Anyone with the Loremaster feature who succeeds at a **DC 15 Intelligence (History) check** recalls that elves are said to continue growing as long as they are alive, probably



For centuries Ka'eroan has watched
the gates to the Halls of a Thousand Tears.
So far, no one has entered without his blessing.

meaning that the individual sitting on the podium is very old. The wrinkled face, misty eyes and hunched posture that are revealed as they approach, all seem to indicate that the initial guess was correct.

The man and the woman behind him give the characters a welcoming nod, after which the female speaks up in the harsh elven language: "Tell me what you seek." A character with the Loremaster feature who is 6th level or higher can both understand what is said and deliver a crude answer (for more elaborate conversations an **Intelligence (History) check** is required). Should the characters fail to understand, the eternity elf Ka'eroan echoes the question telepathically.

It is not very likely that the characters get it into their heads to behave threateningly, but if that is the case the

nearly 12-foot tall Ka'eroan will rise to his feet and start by trying to ensnare them with *black tentacles*. If this does not change their minds, he will swing away with his seemingly ordinary wooden staff (actually a powerful artifact). And if it comes to combat, it will not take more than two turns before a group consisting of two dozen elven warriors (**late summer elf**, Bestiary, page 175) join in. In short: if the characters are stupid enough to pick a fight with the elves of Davokar, in their halls, they will soon come to regret it!

Most likely, the meeting with Ka'eroan is without incident. If the characters answer that they seek Teara-Téana, "Anadea's master" or similar, the male weeper soon nods and walks off to fetch the sought-after person. He leaves the twin gates of the doorway ajar...

Ka'eroan

An extended, hateful rustling

Ka'eroan is one of very few elves to survive his fourth slumber, and he made it through for one purpose alone: to keep guarding the gates to the Halls of a Thousand Tears. The stats below are only relevant if the player characters give the eternity elf any reason to grow angry. Defeating him and the late summer elves arriving to his aid is most likely out of the question.

Ka'eroan

Large humanoid (elf)

Armor Class 16

Hit Points 375 (30d10 + 210)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	22 (+6)	24 (+7)	28 (+9)	18 (+4)	20 (+5)

Saving Throws Dex +12, Con +13, Int +15, Wis +10

Skills Arcana +21, History +21, Intimidation +11, Perception +16, Persuasion +11, Survival +10

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, poisoned, stunned, unconscious

Damage Immunities bludgeoning, piercing and slashing

Senses passive Perception 26

Languages Elvish, telepathy 120 ft.

Challenge 19 (22,000 XP, proficiency bonus +6)

Manner adamant

Shadow brown and rough, like the bark on an ancient tree (Corruption: 3/21)

Equipment Soul Stone

Ancient Magic. Ka'eroan can cast *accurate strike*, *chill touch* and *poison spray* without gaining Corruption.

Capture Corruption. Ka'eroan uses his bonus action to press a rune on his Keeper's Staff and rolls 1d6 + 3 and notes the result. The staff then draws in the temporary Corruption that Ka'eroan would have gained until 1 minute passes or its temporary Corruption reaches the result. Ka'eroan then gains temporary Corruption equal to half of the result.

Legendary Resistance (3/day). If Ka'eroan fails a saving throw, he can choose to succeed instead.

Spellcasting. Ka'eroan is a 20th-level spellcaster (Elvish mystic, all spells are favored except unfavorable ones). His spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell

Tactics: Ka'eroan will begin by using black tentacles to restrict his opponents and will activate the Capture Corruption feature of the Keeper's Staff, hoping to conclude the battle before he gains too much Corruption. He activates his Mystical Shield as soon as he can, and will also use his ability to Cast a Spell without gaining Corruption to make quick work of his opponents. He will then attack with the Staff, taking advantage of its paralyzation feature to make his opponents easier to hit.

save 26, +16 to hit with spell attacks). He knows the following spells:

Cantrips: *fire bolt*, *message*, *prestidigitation*, *ray of frost*

1st level spells: *alarm* (1), *magic missile* (1d4 + 1), *sleep* (1)

2nd level spells: *continual flame* (2), *locate object* (2)

3rd level spells: *counterspell* (1d4 + 3),

protection from energy (3)

4th level spells: *black tentacles* (1d4 + 4),

dimension door (1d4 + 4)

5th level spells: *fire soul* (5), *hold monster* (1d4 + 5)

6th level spells: *eyebite* (1d4 + 6), *instant summons* (6)

7th level spells: *forcecage* (7), *reverse gravity* (7)

8th level spells: *antimagic field* (8), *incendiary cloud* (8)

9th level spells: *meteor swarm* (9), *time stop* (9)

ACTIONS

Keeper's Staff. *Magical Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8 + 7) magical bludgeoning damage and the target must succeed at a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or be paralyzed until the end of their next turn.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

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

Cantrip Master. Ka'eroan casts a cantrip that he knows.

Cast a Spell. Ka'eroan casts a spell of 3rd level or lower that he knows. It does not require any material components and does not cause him to gain Corruption. He can cast each spell only once this way, and then must complete a short or long rest before using this feature on that spell again.

Mystical Shield. Ka'eroan weaves magical defences around himself. Until the end of his next turn his armor class improves by +3.

Blight-Marked Characters

If the curtain at the entry indicates that a blight-marked creature approaches the entry hall, the elves take no risks. Just when the characters emerge from the corridor, twenty-five late summer elves pour through the gateways in the far wall, all of them with arrows ready to fire. However, provided that the player characters behave calmly the meeting with the eternity elf can play out much as it is detailed above.

THE WAIT

The wait for Teara-Téana to join them in the entry hall is long. Meanwhile, the player characters can get a glimpse of what is beyond the half-open gateway, study the vegetal mosaics at the short ends of the hall, and even exchange a few words with the female weeper.

If the characters approach the twin-doors they will receive a firm but gentle reprimand from Ka'eroan – a telepathic “No!” echoing between their ears. But no one will stop them from glancing through the opening. The hall beyond is lit by algae like the entry hall, and it looks huge. Here and there crudely cut, or possibly natural, pillars rise from the floor, covered by algae that in places is concentrated into tiny clusters, like bright stars on a pale summer night sky. A couple of groups of slowly wandering people, probably elves, walk past at a distance and a wild boar piglet comes right up to the door, sniffing the air and giving the player characters a short, black-eyed look.

The mosaic on the wall to the right of the podium depicts a scene in which about twenty people wearing iron-gray clothing walk across a landscape that is burnt to ashes in front of them, and more and more lush the further the perspective extends behind. The mosaic to the left portrays a grove in a dense forest. A massive stone table stands at the center of the grove and around it thirteen people are assembled. The details are not fine enough to make out individual features, but it is clear that three of them are much taller than the rest and that these are wearing different clothes – tunics and mantles of ankle-length, instead of half- or quarter-length jackets.

A character with the Loremaster feature who passes a **DC 15 Intelligence (History) check** can initiate a dialogue with the female elf standing behind Ka'eroan on the podium. Her answers are short, and in regards to anything besides the topics listed below she asks them to be patient and await the arrival of Teara-Téana:

- ◆ Her name is Áleia, her male friend Dareol. The shallow bowl is used to collect their tears and it is emptied three times a day, into the Well of Tears which can be found deep within the Halls.
- ◆ The elf before her is named Ka'eroan and he guards the gate. He is very old and it is he who controls where on the surface the six portals will materialize.

- ◆ According to Áleia, the mosaic to the right symbolizes “*the battle and victory over Symbar's darkness*,” which was won without weapons in hand.
- ◆ The left mosaic portrays the council where the elf prince Eneáno and ten human chieftains agreed on and signed the Iron Pact. (A character with the Loremaster feature can make a **DC 20 Intelligence [History] check** to remember that one of the humans in that picture is said to be the forefather of Queen Korinthia, Argalo.)
- ◆ If the characters are hungry, Áleia can fetch a pitcher of water and a tray filled with berries, nuts and marinated mushrooms. They must promise not to disturb Ka'eroan while she is away.

The characters have waited for several hours when Dareol returns. He exchanges a few, concerned words with Áleia and a character with a **passive Perception of 15 or higher** can clearly hear Dareol mentioning Eneáno. If any if the characters understand elvish, they hear the following:

Áleia: “Problems?”

Dareol: “We met Prince Eneáno. He wanted to talk.”

Áleia: “Oh. How is he?”

Dareol: “It is a bad day...”

Shortly thereafter, they can hear the powerful roar of a man from somewhere outside the gate. It goes silent for a while until the same voice begins to laugh, first in a restrained way, then wilder and wilder and finally it turns into violent crying and angry whimpers. A woman raises her voice (“Find your calm, Prince!”), and the male voice goes silent.

Should the characters ask the elves on the podium about the incident they will be told to direct their questions to Teara-Téana. And before long, she comes through the door, closing it behind her.

Lysindra in Tow

When Teara-Téana hears the name Lysindra Goldengrasp she involuntarily flinches and her face darkens. Her gaze wanders between the characters for a while, after which she states that the conversation is over and that they have to leave the halls forthwith, willingly or with an escort. The characters have one chance to explain that they are not in league with Lysindra but that she forced them to take her along. For her part, Lysindra demands that she must be allowed to stay since she is a full member of the Iron Pact, but that is not reason enough for Teara-Téana. It ends with a very grumpy Goldengrasp being shoved through one of the corridors by ten spear-carrying summer elves. Of course, the reason for this is that Teara-Téana distrusts Mearoel and other aggressive members of the pact, worried that their actions will provoke the humans into intensifying the effort to cultivate/exploit the Forest of Davokar.



Teara-Téana has fought for the world
and the Iron Pact for centuries.

TEARA-TÉANA

The awe-inspiring shape that enters the entry hall is taller than most humans, dressed in a dark brown coat with the hood folded down, and carrying two slender swords hanging from a wide belt with floral embroideries. The feline features with marked cheekbones, big eyes and a small nose are accentuated, so that her face almost resembles that of a beast more than a human.

Teara-Téana nods towards Ka'eroan before turning her full attention to the player characters. She watches them suspiciously, if not threateningly, and asks them in broken Ambrian to take a seat on the floor. She remains standing, her arms crossed and with a look in her eyes that demands an answer: “Who are you and who has taught you my name?”

If the characters give her any reason to doubt their answers, she excuses herself, walks up to the podium and kneels before Ka'eroan. He removes a necklace from his neck and offers it to her, after which she returns to show its pendant to the characters – a pearl large as a clenched fist that seems to be filled by gray-white smoke. She places the necklace between herself and them, while explaining that the spirit inside the pearl will darken if someone nearby utters a “*conscious untruth*” (the pearl casts zone of truth at DC 16 when activated). That being done, she gestures for them to continue telling their tale.

A character that failed the save against zone of truth can choose to lie, this makes the pearl darken and the characters are warned: “Lie again and you will be escorted out of the halls!” a threat which will be carried out without pardon. Hopefully the player characters will realize that the situation they are in provides no room for anything besides humble obedience – after all, they are all alone in an underground realm full of mighty elves without even knowing how, or if, it is possible for them to escape.

In the end, once Teara-Téana has received the answers she is looking for she proves to be very reasonable. She joins them on the floor, wanting to know how she may help them. The following lines may be used directly or work as inspiration if the characters ask other kinds of questions:

With whom did you argue outside the gate? Why?

She will not respond to this question, other than with a disapproving glance.

The Gold Pearl?

The Mind Stone was a gift from Teara-Téana to Anadea, for them to be able to keep in touch. She would very much like to have it back and if a character is attuned to the artifact she can break that link. Should one of the characters later on be considered for membership in the Iron Pact, she will return the Mind Stone to them, and reveal how to use it with a reduced risk of attracting Corruption – 1d4 per usage instead of 1d8.

The aim of the Iron Pact?

The basic force of the world is creation. Every time someone violates this force by taming, manipulating or cultivating it, the force will react in its defense, giving rise to the phenomenon known as Corruption amongst humans. And the reaction grows stronger with the force of the violation – sometimes so strong that it destroys itself in the process. This has happened before, many times before, and the goal of the Iron Pact is to prevent this from happening again – hence the pact’s watchword: “Nevermore!”

How is the Iron Pact organized?

The Iron Pact consists of about ten cells, which in different ways try to ease the effects of civilization’s quest to subjugate the pure power of creation. There are no rulers or chieftains giving orders to the individual members – some of which have lost all hope, claiming that the world can only be saved by the destruction of humankind. Others (like her) still harbor some hope that humans can be convinced of the truth.

Questions About Elves

It is not unlikely that the players and their characters take the opportunity to raise other kinds of questions during their talk to Teara-Téana. Maybe they what to know about the purpose of the changelings or about elves in the Davokar region – how many they are, how they live, from whence they come and so on. In response to such questions they will get nothing but silence. The autumn elf has neither the right nor the need to enlighten the characters on elven mysteries.

What happened to Symbaroum?

That is not important. All that humans need to know is that if they continue to violate the world, what happened in Symbaroum will happen again, sooner or later. Moreover, it is totally true that a number of dark creatures are slumbering in Davokar, and that careless behavior may awaken them. Should such beings be unleashed, they will cause massive destruction and expedite an already disastrous development towards darker days.

What threatens Thistle Hold?

A group of humans embracing the powers of Corruption has managed to find a powerful god of the forest, cut its head off and take the skull to the town. The spirit, called Eox, still lives and may possibly be saved if the head is reunited with the body, but it cannot wait much longer.

The collaboration with Anadea?

After her previous contact in Thistle Hold, the tutor Vernam, was killed, she sent one of her agents into town to identify a worthy replacement. It was a time-consuming and difficult task, not least since the agent needed to keep to the shadows and only act during the night. But finally he managed to enlist Anadea, who then was invited to the Halls of a Thousand Tears where she swore the oath of the Iron Pact and inherited Vernam's position as Teara-Téana's eyes and ears in the Hold.

When Teara-Téana learned about what had happened to Eox, she contacted Anadea through the Mind Stone and asked her to recruit a group of trustworthy companions, and to first identify the wrongdoers, then reclaim the skull of the god. She was supposed to report back about her accomplishments each day at dawn, but she only had time to do that once before she disappeared – probably because she happened to reveal herself. Her short report stated: "Believe I have found the cultists. The leader is named Erlaber, an antique dealer. They keep to the old tannery. I'll strike later today."

When Anadea did not get back to her the next morning and Teara-Téana heard the rumor that the old alarm contraption had tolled, she gave up – it would take too long to recruit a replacement and it would be too dangerous to send any of her other agents into town, because of the heightened security. To ask the only remaining Iron Pact cell in the Hold for help was unthinkable – Mearoel champions a more aggressive

interpretation of the pact's duty and if he were to learn of Eox's fate he would most likely make matters even worse.

She finishes by asking the characters if they are willing to resume where Anadea left off.

What about the reward?

Depending on what the characters initially asked for, Teara-Téana's answer will vary. The Gamemaster is left to decide, but basically she is willing to make good on Anadea's promises, if not to any and all extremes. Sure, the Iron Pact has great riches, deep-reaching knowledge and is in possession of numerous artifacts of both elven and Symbarian origin. However, in the end it is important that the reward **a)** helps the characters one or two steps along the road to their respective goals, and **b)** is not so grand that the goals immediately can be fulfilled. As a suggestion, Teara-Téana has each character choose from among:

- ◆ An artifact corresponding to the abilities and goals of the character (choose an item from the *OGL Magic Items* list, *Gamemaster's Guide*, pages 121–123).
- ◆ Training – a character receives $1,000 \times$ their proficiency bonus XP from the sessions (this requires $2d4 + 2$ downtime days).
- ◆ Taking part in a cleansing ritual that lowers the value in permanent corruption by $1d4$, requiring $2d4 + 4$ downtime days.
- ◆ Gemstones or precious metals to a value of $400 + 5d20$ thaler.

Where to take the skull?

Teara-Téana's agent has told her about the witches outside Thistle Hold. Hence her answer is that once they have reclaimed the skull from the "corruption eaters," the characters should contact the witch Gadramon and ask him to guide them to Eox's territory.

Can I/we become members of the Pact?

That is not impossible. The elves are very restricted when it comes to moving about in human settlements, which is why the Iron Pact is always in need of agents from other origins. She will not make any promises, but provided that they succeed in reclaiming and returning the skull they can talk more on the matter at a later stage.

Confirmation

ONCE THE CHARACTERS have completed their questioning (or it is clear that Teara-Téana cannot answer them), she asks Ka'eroan to open a portal close to Thistle Hold. With a nod, the eternity elf causes one of the vegetal mosaics to rearrange itself into another forest scene. Teara-Téana explains that if they step into the illustration, they will be teleported to that location, just north of Thistle Hold.

Now all that remains is the showdown with Erlaber Ambreagos and his followers. The Gamemaster should try to keep the pace and the tension high, not least by reminding the players that time is short. If they are not quick enough, the forest warden will die and, maybe even worse, a mighty abomination will be born in Thistle Hold, ready to tear the town apart.

WHAT HAS TRANSPired?

Much has occurred since the appearance of the sinkhole, not only for the player characters but for Erlaber Ambreagos as well. First, the cult leader has studied and learned the ritual that, according to The Prince, will imbue him with the strength of the Eternal Night. He has also been busy relocating his ritual chamber, from the closed down tannery to a location which in itself will lend the event of his rebirth even more power – namely down into the Underworld and to the smooth surface of the Crystal Isle (this is also on the Prince's initiative).

No matter if the characters or someone else inspected the sinkhole on behalf of Ordo Magica, the information from the descent has spread to the leading figures in town, largely due to the fact that Master Goncái has a hard time keeping his mouth shut. The Hold's Sanitary Commissioner Agramai Kalfas of course knows as much as anyone else, especially about the cracks close to the surface which are at risk of affecting cellars and wells in town. He also knows that Nighthpitch has decided that no one is to climb down into the Abyss before the arrival of the delegation he is waiting for – a group of fifteen Black Cloaks led by the much-feared theurg Losadra, belonging to The Whip of Prios, the section within the Sun Church specializing in problems linked to Corruption and blight sickness. Hence, the puppet of Agramai should have all the time he needs to perform the ritual down there.

Getting down was not much of a problem, thanks to the assistance of The Prince. One of Erlaber's followers is the witch Manaloum and he used the Prince's gift of a *scroll of teleport* to transport another cultist, Desidera (also an adept of Ordo Magica), down into the caves. She cast *teleportation circle* in the Eastern Hall of Mosses, and then sat down to wait.

Back in Thistle Hold Manaloum, Erlaber and the leader's two bodyguards could then move down into the Abyss thanks to another gift from The Prince, a *teleportation circle* scroll. Of course, they took the skull of Eox along – something the characters will not discover until they have fought a tough battle inside the old tannery building.

INFORMATION

Meticulous characters might do nothing drastic until they know who or what they are up against. The information presented below can be found in different ways, depending on who the characters are and what alliances they have fostered. Knowledge about Erlaber may for instance be gained through the Town Watch or the merchants in town (see the bullet points below).

As for the closed down tannery, a search in the archive at the Queen's Legation or a talk to the Building Commissioner's assistants at the Town Seat reveals that it was closed about a year ago. The tannery was relocated to the village of Glimmer, a short way west of the Hold, since the vile stench surrounding it caused problems in the densely populated town.

The building is in the northwestern part of town and is still without an owner, in large part due to the lingering tannery smell inside. There are plans to tear it down and raise a new structure in its stead, but the decision is yet to be finalized. Instead the house is rented to a merchant from Yndaros, named Beniam Golak according to the contract – in reality a decoy for Erlaber Ambreagos with a made up name.

A floorplan of the building can be acquired, either by persuading the staff at the Town Seat – a **DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) check** – or by talking to a former tannery worker who can be found at one of the dives inside Haloban's Ring – a sickly woman named Irona, afflicted by severe shakes and twitches due to the chemicals she was exposed to in the tannery.

- ◆ If asking about Erlaber among merchants and auction houses by the Antique Plaza, they get the perplexing answer that he usually introduces himself as an antique dealer but that no one can remember having seen him actually peddle any kind of antiquities in the Hold. Most guess that he is a buyer, hired by some wealthy but secretive individual from Yndaros, or that he himself is a well-off collector of Davokar's curiosities.
- ◆ Many antique dealers can testify that Erlaber seems attracted to the macabre and grotesque. For instance, the barbarian merchant Elda sold him a Symbarian figurine not more than a month ago – a figurine depicting a man with his abdomen split open and torn apart, and with his head replaced by a gaping snake skull.
- ◆ If the characters break into Erlaber's home they will be disappointed. Sure, the three rooms are luxuriously furnished and smell of pungent incense, but aside from a chandelier made from linked, blackened skulls and a bowl of dried berries they find nothing of interest – he obviously stores any artifacts he owns someplace else. The berries can be identified with a **DC 13 Intelligence (Nature) check** (see textbox *Krusean Berries* for a description). A character proficient with Alchemist's supplies has advantage on the check.
- ◆ At the headquarters of the Town Watch they can meet Herado Duskwatcher. If they succeed at a **DC 15 Charisma**

Krusean Berries

The berries from the Krusean bush can be eaten both fresh and dried, and give rise to a long-lasting buzz which may be compared to that of alcohol consumption. The one eating the berries also suffers 1d4 in temporary Corruption. For this reason, the berries have become popular among people who are charmed by Davokar's darkness and the powers of the Eternal Night. According to rumor, they are also used during torture – the buzz combined with the amassing blackness can get just about anyone to talk...

- (Persuasion) check** (with advantage if they fought at the sinkhole), they can convince him to share some information. Apparently, Erlaber has a tendency to figure in lots of criminal investigations, never as the prime suspect but often enough for him to be included in the informal record that Captain Dekamedo has established to keep track of suspicious people in town.
- ◆ To gain access to Dekamedo's record on Erlaber the characters must be acquainted with the Captain since earlier, or manage to convince Herado to let them see it. This requires a **DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check** (with advantage if they succeeded at the prior check or fought in the defense by the sinkhole). The record has the following to say:

Erlaber
 Antique Dealer
 Lowborn Noble?
 Settled year 17 (from Yndaros)
 Probable cultist
 Possible murderer
 Possible cult leader

Year 18. Alone to survive when the rest of his family (wife and four children, age 0 to 9) were strangled to death, exsanguinated, and left to hang by the feet from a beam in the ceiling. Claimed to have been at a business meeting with wizard (Desidera) who backs the statement and implies a love affair. Door broken and valuables missing.

Year 18. Highly corrupt statuette stolen from warehouse in the northwestern district, two guards brutally murdered. Using mystical means, the owner traced the item to Erlaber's home. Claims to have bought the statuette in good faith from fortune hunter Gendla. Investigation terminated when Gendla is found dead wearing necklace from the warehouse.

Year 19. Beastly cult exposed in the village Glimmer. The cult leaders last, wheezing words were "Ambréagos, Erlaber, Ambréag..." According to OM, Ambréagos was a tyrannical Symbarian noble house – possibly worshipped by the cult. Erlaber is questioned, (acts?) bemused, has never been to Glimmer.

Year 20. Was seen with the changelings Klagander and Sibela, wanted in relation to a series of robberies and murders with dark overtones in Yndaros. Claims they contacted him, offered to sell him artifacts which proved to be trash.

Year 20. The antique dealer Jorlio found poisoned, with intestines spilled out and self-inflicted wounds all over the body. Three witnesses speak of a black-dressed visitor three days earlier, one identifies Erlaber. Unconfirmed, especially since the key witness suffers from dementia.

ALLIANCES

Aside from searching for information, the characters would do well to gain allies for the fight against the cultists. Below is a list of potential allies specifying what it takes to come to

an agreement, including notes regarding who or what the different groups refuse to work with.

No matter who they talk to, the leader of the faction will stress the importance of everything being handled with discretion – if the people in town learn that an “evil cult” has been allowed to exist at the heart of the Hold, it will have long-term consequences for their faith in Ambrian authorities in general and Mayor Nighthpitch in particular. The only exception to this is Lysindra Goldengrasp, who on the contrary emphasizes that the residents have a right to know.

The Town Watch/Town Seat: Captain Dekamedo, alias Akman Kohinoor, can enlist a handful of watchmen from other posts (primarily from the barricade surrounding the sinkhole) and join up with the player characters.

The Sun Temple: Provided that the characters did not help to stop the harassments against Sarvola, Father Elfeno and two of his sun priests can participate in the strike against the cultists. Otherwise they have to talk to Deseba the Old. She cannot partake in any attacks but asks three sun priests to be at the characters' disposal. Irrespective of which, it takes a skilled negotiator (e.g. Nighthpitch) to get them to fight alongside the witches.

The Sun Knights: The Mekele brothers might consider fighting on the characters' side, provided that they have met at some earlier point. Even if they have previously fought against each other, it may be possible to convince Leohan to put old grudges aside, for a good and noble cause. The templars will under no circumstances cooperate with the Iron Pact and it will take a skilled and authoritative negotiator (e.g. Nighthpitch) for them to consider working alongside witches.

The Iron Pact: If asked, Lysindra and Mearoel do not hesitate to join up. They will even consider dressing up and lying about their identities in order to make an alliance with the Town Watch and/or the Sun Temple possible. If they learn that there are templars in the mix they will force the characters to choose – the blood is all too bad between them...

The witches: Gadramon and Eferneya never hesitate to join the fight against the cultists, provided that the characters (with or without the help of Nighthpitch) can get them into town.

Ordo Magica: The chapter in Thistle Hold is accustomed to hiring sellswords to take care of the fighting and feels that such chores are best handled by others. However, if the Gamemaster wishes, Kullinan Furia may be present when the characters are denied help from Chapter Master Cornelio and offer to give them a hand.

Stormy Night

As a suggestion, a thundering storm is raging over Thistle Hold as the characters return from the Halls of a Thousand Tears. The rain is hammering against roofs and pavements, and thunder is rolling across the lead gray skies. Provided that the attack takes place during the wee hours, people in the area will not easily notice what is going on in the abandoned tannery building – actually, the sounds of battle will be drowned out by the storm so that the characters and their allies will be able to vacate the premises before a crowd gathers. If the Town Watch has not been informed beforehand, the first patrol will arrive half a minute (five rounds) into the fighting, but they will not dare to enter before reinforcements come running, another minute later.

THE CULT'S HIDEOUT

Once the characters return from their meeting with the elves, Erlaber and his closest companions have left the tannery and taken the skull with them. But since they know that the characters are on their trail, they have filled the building with Red Eye's and Erok the Dark's cultists hoping to stop them permanently or at least slow them down (stats on pages 35–36). A majority of the force is hiding in the windowless storerooms (room #1 and #2); some are down on the floor and four cultists with crossbows are patrolling the balustrade inside the building.

If watching from outside, the characters can see two people at each entrance, dressed like hired guardsmen. Also, should they climb some nearby rooftop and pass a **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check** then they can see through the dirty and cracked windows and notice movement inside the building. However, since most of the cultists are in hiding, they will not be able to count more than a handful of people. If one of the characters expressly states that they will watch the hideout for at least two hours, then they make the **Wisdom (Perception) check** as above will notice that large quantities of food are delivered to a sliding door inside – a door which is opened by someone who passes the crates on to a room further in...

To get a clear idea of what awaits them, the characters must resort to more drastic methods. Maybe they can employ distractions or fake attacks to be able to kidnap one of the guards at the backdoor, and then interrogate him or her, preferably aided by mystical powers or rituals? Maybe they can use the Change Self or Ancient Magic feats or cast invisibility, polymorph or scrying to gain a better understanding of the situation? Note that if scrying is used, the character

will see the stairs to the basement, but the basement itself is impossible to make out, as if it is protected by *private sanctum*. Also, do not forget that if none of the characters have the feats or spells mentioned above, they can always ask for help from their allies and friends.

Warned about the hidden cultists or not, the battle in the building will be tough. How many cultists the characters must fight can be determined based on the number of allies they have in tow. Below is a table with suggestions regarding this, but the Gamemaster should adjust the numbers to suit the characters in their group.

NUMBER OF ALLIES	MISSILE ATTACKS	OPPONENTS	MAX OPPONENTS
0 (alone)	4	3	15
1–2	4	3	12
3–4	3	2	9
5–6	2	2	6
7+	1	1	3

The first column (Number of Allies) refers to the number of groups/factions, not to individuals.

The second column (Missile Attacks) indicates the number of ranged attacks (+3 to hit, 5 (1d8 + 1) piercing damage) against each character in each round. The cultists stay within about 60 feet of the characters to avoid disadvantage on their attacks.

The third column (Opponents) indicates how many opponents each character must face each round (in addition to any cultists that arrived in an earlier round and are still alive).

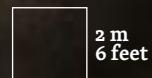
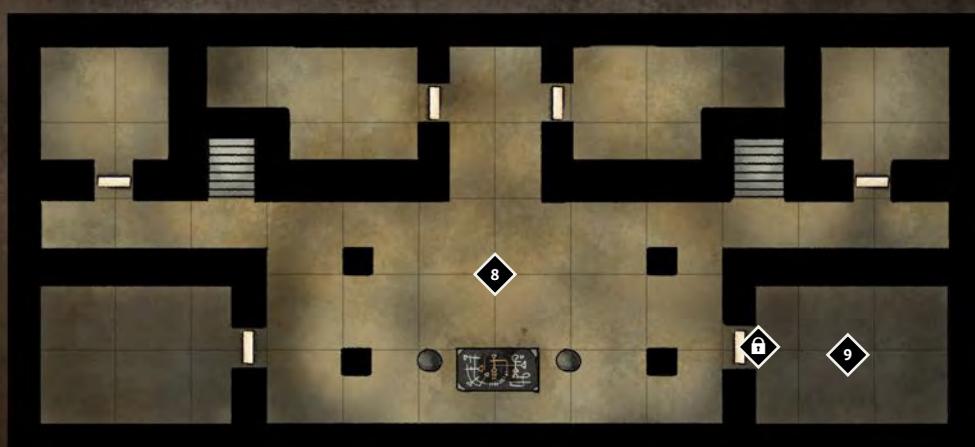
The fourth column (Max Opponents) lists the total number of opponents for each character. Once the character has dealt with this many cultists they will face no more attacks from them.

It should also be mentioned that if the characters have not eliminated one of the cults, the opponents come from both Red Eye and Erok.

EXAMPLE: After having talked to Lasifor Nighthpitch, the characters have managed to smuggle Gadramon and Eferneya into town and had the Mayor's help convincing the Mekele brothers to fight along with the witches. Hence, they attack the tannery with two allied factions, meaning that the characters will face four missile attacks each round and be attacked by three cultists with melee weapons. Once they have dealt with 12 cultists each, there are no more to attack them. During the combat the rest of the cultists in the building move in on the witches and the templars – encounters that can be handled in summary by the Gamemaster, on the basis that the characters part of the battle will determine the outcome of it all.



Ground Floor



Combat in the Tannery

The more intense and eventful the battle at the tannery is, the better. Let the players make use of the structure of the building and reward their ingenuity. If they try to push a cultist down into one of the tubs that has been filled with leftover tanning acids, they can use the Attack action to shove a creature (see *Shoving a Creature* in the core rules). A creature pushed into one of the tubs takes 7 (2d6) acid damage at the start of their turn and must spend their action to attempt a DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check to get out of the tub. The giant cauldron (see map) does 14 (4d6) acid damage and a creature pushed off the balustrade takes 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage from the fall.

AFTER THE BATTLE

When the cultists have been taken out, the characters and their allies soon discover that neither the cult leader nor the sought-after skull is in the building. Luckily there are several ways to figure out where they are.

The plan was that the ritual would be performed in the cellar beneath the tannery. The massive stone podium where the skull of Eox lay up until a few hours ago can be found down there, covered by a black blanket, embroidered with archaic symbols and soaked in rose scented secretions. The place is protected by *private sanctum* so it can't be discovered by divination magic, but if the characters use the hatch or the stairs to get down, the site is waiting to be explored. What has happened and where the skull has been moved can be determined in the following ways:

- ◆ A character (or npc) with the ability Shadow-sight can make a **DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check** when they first enter the cellar. On a success, they receive a vision of a giant ox head with staring fisheyes, lying on the podium mooing softly. During the vision they can attempt a **DC 20 Intelligence (Investigation) check**. On a success, other images flash by, as if the creature is trying to show the character something: first a sinkhole somewhere in Davokar; then a dark lake, also inside the woods; finally, a huge cave with moss-covered walls. These images should help the characters recall the underground lake beneath Thistle Hold, given that they have seen it before.
- ◆ At the sides of the podium are two braziers. By casting *tale of ashes* a character can see and hear what happened when Desidera and Erlaber cast *teleportation circle*. Erlaber is just a humanoid shape in black robes but he cocks his head when Desidera contacts him with *sending*. He then holds up an ancient and ornate scroll and begins to read from it. They can then see the figure and three others (two changelings and the ogre witch Manaloum) gather around the podium and pick up the ox skull before the vision fades.
- ◆ A successful **DC 20 Intelligence (Investigation) check** reveals barely noticeable scratches in the floor by the podium, hidden under the black cloth. The podium can quite easily be pushed sideways to expose a crudely cut space, intended to be used for hiding the skull of Eox if something happened. Down there the characters will find one of Erlaber's cultists, the hissing and hateful youngling Gardai. He knows full well where his master has gone, but will not say anything unless the player characters pressure him hard and succeed at a **DC 20 Charisma (Intimidation) check**.

Final Encounter

IT IS IMPERATIVE that the Gamemaster thinks things through before the concluding battle against Erlaber Ambreagos. The encounter with the sorcerer and his followers should prove a real challenge and the players should feel that the outcome depends on how their characters perform in the fight.

We suggest that the characters will have to climb down into the sinkhole alone, even if they have had several allies during the clash in the tannery building. That they suddenly are without companions can be explained by injuries suffered in the fight with the cultists and that the few who are unharmed are reluctant to leave the wounded without someone to care for them. Another explanation may be that some of the allies (Kullinan, Eferneya or Elfeno) have pushed themselves to the brink of becoming blight born. Also, it is urgent - Erlaber has already initiated the ritual!

Phase I

When the characters wrap up the examination of the podium where the skull used to lay, people who have the Shadow-sight feat or 5 or more permanent Corruption can sense rhythmic tremors in the air, like blast waves caused by the beating of a powerful heart. Should one of the characters' allies fit the required criteria, they will rise up and shout at the top of their lungs: *"Do you feel it? It has begun! Run, hurry, this ritual must be stopped!"*

Phase II

If neither the characters nor the allies perceive the waves, or if the characters for some reason decide to wait, phase two commences. The blast waves grow in strength until they can actually be heard. A character with a **passive Perception of**

15 or higher discerns a sound reminiscent of the slow but accelerating beating of a heart. It is not possible to determine from where the sound comes – it feels like it permeates the whole world. Incapacitated allies who take note of this will try to order the player characters to get a move on, with fear and panic in their eyes.

Phase III

The third and final warning is impossible to miss. The sound of the heartbeats grows even louder and is made physically manifest: the sound waves emit a faint, etheric, bright blue light, like waves from a stone thrown in water, but in spheres instead of rings. Moreover, everyone feels how the surges bring with them an instant nausea that inspires dark thoughts and murderous impulses.

Phase IV

If the characters persist in waiting they will never be able to stop the ritual in time. Instead they will notice how the frantic heartbeat suddenly dies out, about fifteen minutes into phase III. A grave-like silence descends over Thistle Hold. If they immediately start to run, they will make it to the sinkhole in time to witness how the creature that once was Erlaber Ambreagos rises from the abyss, on its new, enormous bat wings (see *Showdown on the Surface*, page 99). Should they instead hunker down and stay hidden, they will be forced to hear the abomination wreak havoc among people and houses, causing death and destruction before leaving the town, headed for Davokar's deeper and darker parts (see *Triumph of the Night*, page 103).

THE WAY DOWN

For the characters to have any chance to stop Erlaber's ritual they must get a move on before the chain of events reaches Phase IV. No matter if they get going in Phase I, II or III, their way down to the Beast Clan caves will look the same. Remember to describe the signs of the progressing ritual as the characters are running through Thistle Hold – even if they started moving as early as in Phase I, the distance they have to cover is long enough for them to both hear the sound of the heartbeat and see the faint, bluish surges shoot through the air.

There is no time to form new alliances and should they hope for the Town Watch to back them up they will be disappointed. If Dekamedo is not already allied to the characters they will find him in charge of the guard around the sinkhole. He says that the guards on duty are exhausted after having been active since the morning before. Adding to that, they are needed where they are, since the number of incidents is increasing: attacks are coming from desperate fortune hunters who aim to be the first ones down into the caves, looking to examine the wilder and wilder

rumors about the treasures down there, but also from more or less corrupted figures who feel drawn to the dark power of the deep.

In order for the characters to pass and gain access to the ropes that are in place, they have to be able to show Dekamedo a letter from Nighthpitch or convincingly argue that they have been down into the sinkhole before. An alternative is to persuade the Captain of the gravity of the situation, which is done with a **DC 20 Charisma (Perception) check**. They have advantage on the check if a leader from some other faction (injured or not) accompanies them to the rim of the hole.

THE HALL OF THE RUBBLE HILL

The first thing the characters notice when they reach the top of the rubble hill is that someone has placed burning torches over the cave floor, lighting up the area between the hill and the openings to the north and west. A **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check** makes it possible to glimpse (what remains of) the Midnight Cult, standing in the gloom between the openings leading to the lake and the Crystal Isle.

How many individuals they glimpse depends on if the characters have been in the cave before and what happened then. If they did not kill the blight marked witch Bayela, she has unknowingly helped them by killing the bodyguard **Klagander** and the adept wizard **Desidera**.

If they instead killed the witch, they are forced to encounter all four: the ones mentioned above along with **Sibela** and the ogre mystic **Manaloum**. Irrespective of how many cultists are waiting, their orders are clear as uncorrupted crystal: to slow the characters down until the master has completed the ritual.

Runefala Roots

Similar to Concentrated Magic, runefala allows a user to reduce the temporary Corruption gained from magic. When consumed, any temporary Corruption a mystic gains is reduced in half for one hour. However, there are two potential drawbacks: first, the consumer always gains 1 temporary Corruption from the root and, secondly, the root is addictive – a user must make a **Wisdom saving throw** at the start of each day or consume a root. The DC begins at 10 and increases by 1 each day. If the creature succeeds at seven consecutive daily saving throws they have broken the addiction and do not need to make any more saving throws unless they use the root again.



Manaloum

"Corruption breeds power, not vice versa..."

Manaloum grew up as the adoptive son of a childless witch of Clan Enoai, far to the north. He did his best to live up to the high demands and expectations of his mother, but never got anything but reprimands and deep sighs in return.

His frustration grew into desperation and finally he started breaking the clan's taboos in order to grow stronger. And sure, the roots of the herb Runefala have helped

him. They helped him to overcome and slay his stepmother when she discovered what he was up to, and they have helped him realize that the price of success must be paid for in Corruption...

Tactics: Manaloum first uses *scorching ray*, *firebolt*, or *magic missile*. He has consumed a runefala root and cast *mage armor* before the encounter begins. He will try to deal with enemy mystics by using *counterspell* and *banishment*. He only enters into close combat if it is impossible to avoid it.

Desidera

"The dark is the rule, light the exception."

Four years have passed since the then novice wizard Desidera met Erlaber and fell in love. The stranger gave words to her thoughts and to the view of the world which she until then had only suspected during her struggles to understand the relationship between light and dark, goodness and evil, order and wilderness.

Darkness is not the absence of light as her former masters taught, she knows that now. Instead, the dark is the natural state of existence, perverted and weakened by light. Desidera is prepared to follow her love to the end of the world, if it is there that their shared studies into the powers of darkness will take them!

Tactics: When combat starts, Desidera will use *ray of enfeeblement* to slow enemies down. She then uses *illusory corrections* to aid her allies or confuse her enemies.

Manaloum

Medium humanoid (ogre)

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 60 (8d8 + 24, see below)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	13 (+1)	8 (-1)

Senses passive Perception 12 (darkvision)

Languages Ambrian

Challenge 3 (700 XP, proficiency bonus +2)

Manner laughs death in the face

Shadow brownish red with black spots, like opals hidden in ferrous earth (2/10)

Equipment 3d6 thaler, 2d6 Runefala roots (page 95)

Calmness. Manaloum has advantage on Wisdom saving throws against enchantments and other mind-altering magics.

Pariah. Manaloum has disadvantage on Charisma checks with other origins.

Ritualist. Manaloum can cast *detect magic* and *locate object* as rituals (he gains no temporary Corruption for casting them as rituals).

Spellcasting. Manaloum is an 8th-level spellcaster (Self-taught mystic). His spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks). He knows the following spells:

Cantrips: *fire bolt* (1), *mage hand* (1), *prestidigitation* (1)
1st level spells: *mage armor* (1d4 + 1), *magic missile* (1d4 + 1), *shield* (1d4 + 1)

2nd level spells: *blindness/deafness* (1d4 + 2), *scorching ray* (1d4 + 2)

3rd level spells: *counterspell* (1d4 + 3), *send* (1d4 + 3)

4th level spells: *banishment* (1d4 + 4), *private sanctum* (1d4 + 4)

Tough. Manaloum has 1 extra hit point for each Hit Die he has (included above).

ACTIONS

Mace. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage.

Desidera

Medium human

Armor Class 12 (concealed armor)

Hit Points 38 (7d8 + 7)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)	17 (+3)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)

Skills Arcana +5, History +5, Investigation +5,

Perception +2

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages Ambrian

Challenge 2 (450 XP, proficiency bonus +2)

Manner happily smiling

Shadow silver with dark streaks, like the moon's reflection over the rippling surface of a forest pond (Corruption: 2/10)

Equipment mystical focus, spellbook, 3d6 thaler, 1d4 Runefala roots (page 95)

Ritualist. Desidera can cast *mending* and *prestidigitation* as rituals (she gains no temporary Corruption for casting them as rituals).

Spellcasting. Desidera is a Self-taught mystic (spell attack +5, save DC 15) and she knows the following spells:

Cantrips: *fire bolt* (1), *light* (1), *ray of frost* (1)

1st-level spells: *magic missile* (1d4 + 1), *shield* (1d4 + 1), *thunderwave* (1d4 + 1)

2nd-level spells: *levitate* (1d4 + 2), *ray of enfeeblement* (1d4 + 2)

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

4th-level spell: *illusory correction* (1d4 + 4)

Rituals: *comprehend languages*, *faraway writing*, *mending*

ACTIONS

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d4 + 1) piercing damage.



Klagander or Sibela

Medium changeling

Armor Class 16 (skald's cuirass)

Hit Points 39 (6d8 + 12)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	19 (+4)	15 (+2)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)

Skills Acrobatics +6, Deception +7, Nature +2, Perception +4, Persuasion +5, Sleight of Hand +6, Stealth +8, Survival +4

Senses passive Perception 14, blindsight 30 ft., darkvision 60 ft.

Languages Ambrian

Challenge 2 (450 XP, proficiency bonus +2)

Manner silent, arrogant expressions

Shadow dark green, like leathery leaves, with single blackened veins (0/5)

Equipment 1d8 thaler

Backstab (1/turn). The changeling deals an extra 10 (3d6) damage when it hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of the changeling that isn't incapacitated and the changeling doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

Change Self (1/rest). The changeling can change their appearance (height, weight, features, apparent origin, etc.) but retains its size and general shape. The effect ends at dawn.

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

Marksman. At the start of its turn, the changeling can aim. Its speed becomes 0 and it has advantage on its ranged weapon attacks.

Sixth Sense. The changeling sees in dim light as if it were bright light. It never has disadvantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks due to darkness.

ACTIONS

Hand Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage. *Loading:* only fire once per action

Fencing Sword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage.

Klagander and Sibela

"We are the Dark."

The friends Klagander and Sibela were two of the first changelings to be discovered among the Ambrians, both of them in Yndaros, with Sibela amongst the refugees and Klagander in a merchant's home.

They found each other in Old Kadizar, rejected by their families and forced to steal and sometimes kill to survive. They hate Ambrians and really do not value anything at all besides the dark friendship they share with each other. Erlaber helps them to grow stronger, which is the only reason why the changelings have joined his Midnight Cult.

Tactics: The two changelings always strive to fight two against one in order to use their backstab techniques.

Prince of the Abyss

Large abomination

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)

Hit Points 157 (15d10 + 75)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	11 (+0)	20 (+5)	10 (+0)	17 (+3)	12 (+1)

Saving Throws Str + 10, Con + 9, Wis + 7, Cha + 5

Damage Resistances fire, poison, bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened

Senses passive Perception 13, darkvision 90 ft.

Languages Ambrian

Challenge 10 (5,900 XP, proficiency bonus +4)

Manner upright, calmly furious

Shadow black like the surface of cooling iron ore (thoroughly corrupt)

Equipment The codex for *exaltation* (page 10), the dagger Black Edge (page 9)

Aura of Degeneration. A creature that begins its turn or enters a space within 60 feet of the prince must make a DC 17 Constitution saving throw or take 11 (2d10) necrotic damage and reduce its maximum hit points by the same amount.

Berserker. The prince can use its bonus action to enter a rage. In the rage, it has advantage on attack rolls and attacks against it also have advantage. Its attacks do an extra +4 damage. It loses its rage if it ends its turn without having attacked a creature since its last turn or taken damage since its last turn.

Magic Resistance. The prince has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Regeneration. The prince recovers 9 hit points at the start of its turn, unless it has taken radiant damage since its last turn.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The prince makes three melee attacks.

Black Edge. Magical Melee Weapon Attack: +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. **Hit:** 8 (1d4 + 6) piercing damage (page 9).

REACTIONS

Retaliate. When a creature comes within reach, the prince can make a melee attack.

THE SHOWDOWN

Out on the Crystal Isle, Erlaber Ambreagos has set the stage for his rebirth. His cultists have built him a podium of stacked boulders from the rubble hill, in which six torches have been wedged, pointing in different directions. As the characters arrive, the ritual is nearing its climax and the low-tuned chanting of the sorcerer is accompanied by drawn-out mooing from the skull on the podium.

Precisely what the characters face in the final showdown depends on two things: how quickly they reacted after the fight at the tannery and how long it takes them to pass the cultists standing on guard. The column Reaction in the table below mirrors Phase I to III on page 94, while the column Delay answers to the number of turns the characters need to get past the cultists.

Hence, there is a chance for the characters to stop the ritual before the rebirth process commences. But that requires that they start moving at Phase I and also that they manage to get past the cultists in max two turns. The latter may be achieved either by incapacitating all opposition directly or by the characters pushing past the cultists in their attempt to reach Erlaber. Doing so exposes them to opportunity attacks, mystical interdiction from the cultists, and ensures that the cultists will be available to aid their master in the final showdown.

STATBLOCK	REACTION	DELAY
Erlaber Ambreagos (page 8)	Phase I	≤2 rounds
Prince of the Abyss (below)	Phase I	3–10 rounds
	Phase II	≤5 rounds
	Phase III	1 round
Midnight (next page)	Phase I	≥11 rounds
	Phase II	≥6 rounds
	Phase III	≥2 rounds

Prince of the Abyss

“No, not yet, you... Aaaaaaooo, diiiiiie!”

If the characters arrive before the abomination can gather the Corruption provided by the Isle, Erlaber's transformation is stopped at the stage called Prince of the Abyss. The effect has made his body grow both taller and more massive, and covered it with a thick, leathery skin in shades of deep blue. His head has been deformed, becoming elongated, pointy and crowned with three short horns (at the temples and the neck). The process has erased most of his knowledge and powers of the mind, but strengthened his spirit with the force of rage.

Tactics: The Prince of the Abyss attacks with Black Edge. Since Corruption does not bother the abomination it activates the paralyzing effect of the dagger on each strike.

Midnight

"Nooo... Yees! What!? No, what is happeeeaaaRAAAaaa..." Should the characters be delayed on their way towards the Crystal Isle, Erlaber has time to absorb its Corruption. If so, his body is filled with the combined force of the isle and the dying god, resulting in the complete and utter destruction of his spirit.

In front of the characters, the creature grows exceptionally large, towering and wiry and covered in a coat of gray, hairy scales. The head and face resemble that of a bat, but with the mandible jaws of a spider and curved goat's horn reaching down to the shoulders. The last thing that happens before the creature acts is that it unfolds a set of huge, leathery wings.

Tactics: Midnight's hatred drives it forward without concerns; all that matters are death and destruction.

SHOWDOWN ON THE SURFACE

If the characters are so indecisive (or frightened) that they do not take their wounded allies' call to action seriously, they have placed both themselves and the whole of Thistle Hold in a very dire situation.

The blight born Erlaber Ambreagos rises from the Abyss in the form referred to as **Midnight** (even if the creature itself neither has nor calls itself by any name). Its body and soul are dominated by a voracious appetite, for both warm flesh and general destruction. The player characters have one round to stop it, before the creature realizes that the area around the sinkhole contains an unnecessary amount of armed humans, and that it only has to fly to the neighboring district to be able to quench its thirst without disturbance.

As **Midnight** touches ground, on the side of the sinkhole where the characters will also arrive, the majority of the town guards on post will turn and run while the rest remain standing, as if paralyzed by fear. Moreover, the defense is spread thin along the rim of the hole, which is why the characters only can count on the help of 1d4 + 1 guards (they throw spears - +4 to hit, 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage - and avoid close combat; use **infantry soldier**, Bestiary, page 198 for stats).

The abomination fights for one round. Should the characters fail to incapacitate it, **Midnight** launches backwards over the hole, takes flight and may only be hit with ranged attacks during the second round.

After that, the characters must chase it through the streets. It moves north towards the Toad's Square and strikes at the locations mentioned below, before it feels satisfied enough to begin the journey to the alluring depths of Davokar. Each entry provides a listing of how many rounds **Midnight** spends at the location and the approximate distance from the previous location (the hole for the first entry) that the characters must traverse to reach it.

Midnight

Huge abomination

Armor Class 19 (natural armor)

Hit Points 202 (15d12 + 105)

Speed 20 ft., fly 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
28 (+9)	17 (+3)	25 (+7)	10 (+0)	17 (+3)	12 (+1)

Saving Throws Str + 15, Con + 13, Wis + 8

Damage Immunities acid, cold, fire, necrotic, poison, psychic, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened

Senses passive Perception 13

Languages —

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

Manner pure rage

Shadow the deepest black, a light-consuming stain on the night sky (thoroughly corrupt)

Equipment The codex for exaltation (page 10), the dagger Black Edge (page 9)

Aura of Degeneration. A creature that begins its turn or enters a space within 90 feet of **Midnight** must make a DC 21 Constitution saving throw or take 13 (2d12) necrotic damage and reduce its maximum hit points by the same amount.

Burning Eyes. **Midnight** can use its bonus action to focus its bright eyes on a creature that it can see within 90 feet. That creature must a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw or take 17 (5d6) fire damage.

Flyby. **Midnight** doesn't provoke opportunity attacks when it flies out of an enemy's reach.

Magic Resistance. **Midnight** has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Regeneration. **Midnight** recovers 13 hit points at the start of its turn, unless it has taken radiant damage since its last turn.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. **Midnight** makes two attacks with its claws and one attack with its horn.

Horn. **Melee Weapon Attack:** +12 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. **Hit:** 21 (2d12 + 9) piercing damage and 2 (1d4) temporary Corruption.

Claws. **Melee Weapon Attack:** +12 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. **Hit:** 15 (1d12 + 9) slashing damage.

1 WRATH OF THE WARDEN

Pottery Store (3 rounds, 150 feet): the creature is drawn to a pottery store by the cry of the owner. It rips the owner and her two novices apart and then starts to wreak havoc in the vicinity, leaving death and total destruction in its wake.

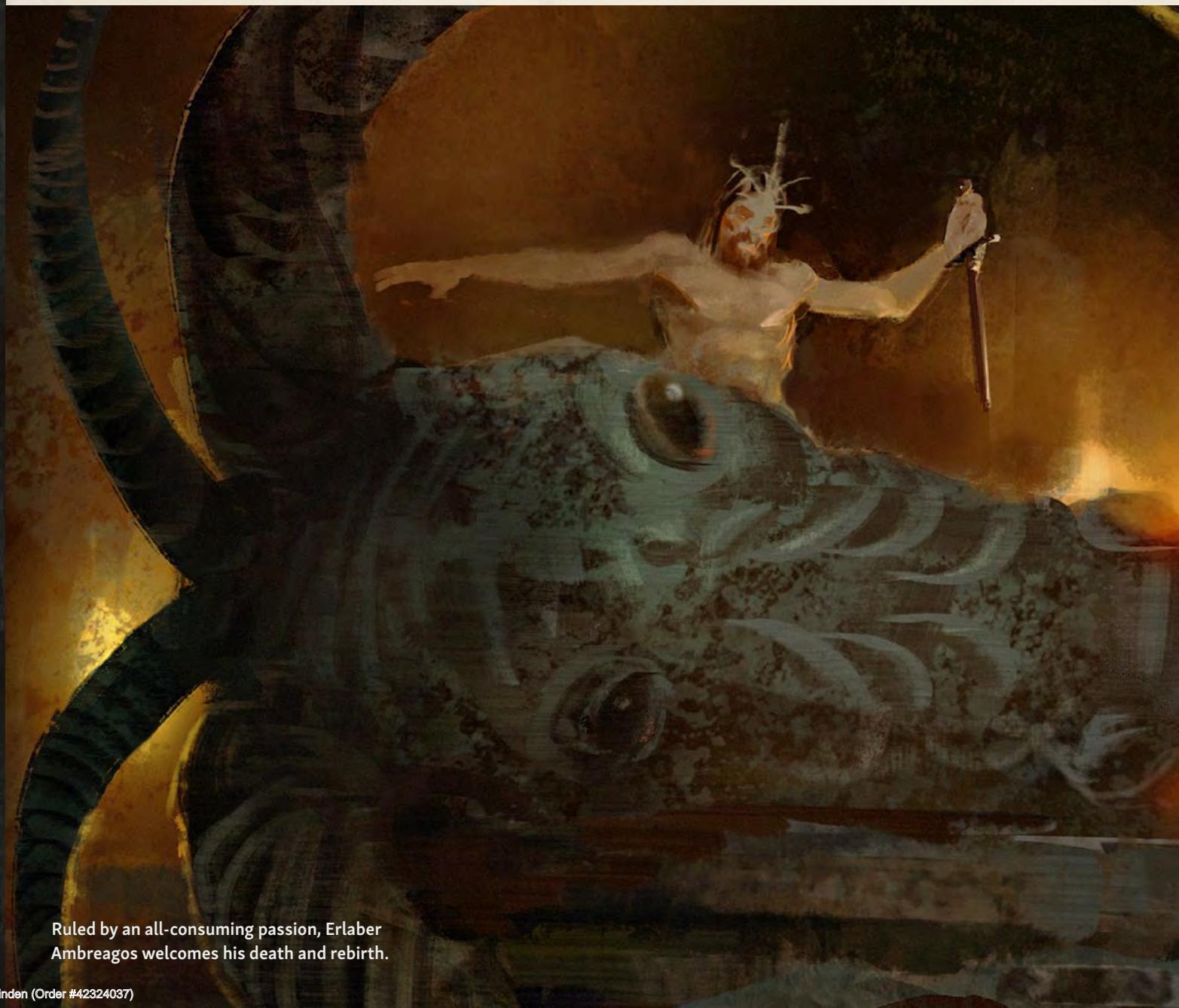
Apartment (4 rounds, 200 feet): the creature is attracted by a small girl staring at it from a window on the second floor of a three-story building. Midnight falls over the apartment and its residents – mother, father, grandfather and five children. If the characters are too late to save the townspeople, the creature leaves a bloodbath behind.

Toad's Square (5 rounds, 300 feet): Midnight is hit by a sudden impulse to smash the lighted statue on the Toad's

Square. It lands nearby, slaughters two foolhardy town guards and attacks the monument wielding the severed legs of its victims.

Salons of Symbaroum (9 rounds, 400 feet): The final stop is at the Salons. The abomination demolishes the entrance and moves with haste through the restaurant, up to the beer hall and on to the gambling booths on level three where it throws itself out a window and flies for the forest. It kills or maims everyone standing in its path.

If the characters reach an area while Midnight is still there, a violent showdown will commence. If not, see *Triumph of the Night*, page 103, which also describes what happens if the characters are defeated by the creature in combat.



Ruled by an all-consuming passion, Erlaber Ambreagos welcomes his death and rebirth.

Aftermath

One can only hope that the characters stand victorious as the dust settles after the final encounter. If not, there is always the hope that the players still had an exciting adventure, also that they have learned a lot about the power factions of Ambria and gained some valuable insight regarding the workings of the world of Symbaroum. Regardless of which, this chapter contains instructions and suggestions on what may happen in the wake of the adventure, both regarding the characters and the people of Thistle Hold.



IT BEARS REPEATING that *The Chronicle of the Throne of Thorns* does not require the players to have the same characters in all episodes. Of course, it can prove to be extra interesting if at least some of the characters are along for the whole ride, but it is not a must! Should all characters die in battle against the cultists of the Hold, the second section of this chapter may provide an indication of what newly generated characters know about what people will call The Tragedy of Thistle Hold.

Healing a God

IF ANY PLAYER characters survive the adventure, it must be decided what should be done about the skull of Eox. Even if the ritual was completed, it appears as if the beast god is still alive.

To carry the skull in full view through the streets of Thistle Hold is hardly an option. The smartest route is probably to take it through the natural tunnels and cracks that lead north from The Pool's Cave, and which finally will take the player characters to the surface about three hours walk into Davokar.

From there, they can send a runner back to contact Gadrämon and Eferneya, who already have received a *dream* from Teara-Téana expressing the wish that the witches will guide the characters to the territory of Eox.

MEETING EOX

Nothing happens during the day and night the journey takes, partly because of the deterring effect of the colossi, partly since the creatures of Bright Davokar can sense the presence of Eox and stay away, out of respect for the dying god. At one point they can glimpse a pack of jakaars watching them from a distance, later they are followed by a group of curious rabbits who finally are scared away when the severed skull gives off a sudden bellowing.

When arriving at Eox's body they meet Teara-Téana and four other elves, two of which seem to weave mystical rituals to keep the creature alive, and two weepers with their wooden bowls brimming with tears. After a wordless greeting

Slaying a God

It is not unthinkable that the characters decide to slay Eox for good. The creature obviously represents a power that is opposed to Ambrian intrusion into the forest of Davokar, which may be in sharp contrast with the characters' goals and alliances. Eox takes damage from mystical powers, as for instance *scorching ray* or *larvae boil*, and it is not able to defend itself.

If the characters choose to slay the ox, its carcass will remain in the forest, leaking and radiating Corruption. A local wasteland spreads around it, where all vegetation dies and which all animals, beasts and even insects steer clear of. However, it will attract both abominations and blight born humans. Within a couple of months, rumors of the site will reach Thistle Hold – speaking of an area in the forest that reeks of Corruption, where unspeakable rituals are staged during moonless nights...

the mystics go silent, receive the head of the ox, and place it so that the sectional planes touch. The flesh and skin start to simmer along the wound and the mooing of Eox grows deeper and stronger so that the bodies of everyone present ultimately tremble in response.

The process does not take more than a few heartbeats, and then Eox rises, almost twice as massive as a normal ox and with his neck proudly and defiantly stretched. The creature gives the characters a furtive glance, then begins to graze in the dry vegetation of the autumn soil.

GRATITUDE

Once Eox has been healed, Teara-Téana offers the characters a seat on some moss-covered stones and tree stumps nearby. She says that the god is grateful and then asks the characters, one by one, how they feel about what they have done – do they feel that they have acted righteously, that all the death and eventual devastation they have caused is justified, given what they have achieved? If someone brings up the promised reward, she lets them know that she has it with her (at least the parts of the reward that are of a material nature and which are possible to take along into the woods), but she also returns the question: “*Would you say that you have earned this reward?*”

Both these questions are part of a test to determine if all or some of the characters may be possible recruits for the Iron Pact. For that to be the case, they first have to express some kind of doubt regarding the righteousness of their actions, since Teara-Téana is no rabid hater of humans but respects all forms of life. Secondly, they must decline the reward they previously asked for, with the argument that the survival of Eox and the lives saved are reward enough.

The characters who respond in that way will still be offered the agreed compensation, but will also hear a telepathic whisper as they depart from the grove: “*So long, my friend in strife and sorrow. Soon we'll meet again, if you truly want and dare. Till then, take care of yourself and keep these words of mine as your secret gift.*”

Developments

MOST OF WHAT happens in the wake of the adventure depends on how Act II played out in your gaming group, and on how the characters conducted themselves in dealings with the other agents in town. The Gamemaster should take some time to contemplate the aftermath of the adventure. If the heroic actions of the player characters have become known among the population in Thistle Hold they will most likely become the subjects of newly composed songs and poems. Should their actions only be known to one or more faction leaders, a private audience may take place, at which the characters are thanked and/or rewarded.

Erlaber's Treasure Chamber

As previously said, Erlaber has acquired a large number of items, curiosities and artifacts over the years. Most of these are stored in a chamber beneath the tannery (#9) but it is highly unlikely that the characters will be able to seize them for themselves. First, they will hardly have time to search for treasures after the battle in the tannery; second, they are probably accompanied by one or more allies who will lay claim to the items for their own sake or for the sake of the town – not least since they all are of such a nature that they should be destroyed or shipped off to some secure location (the monastery of the Twilight Friars, the headquarters of Ordo Magica or the Halls of a Thousand Tears).

However, if the Gamemaster feels that the characters have earned some additional prize, aside from what they will get from Teara-Téana, one of the faction leaders may have put one or more suitable objects aside on their behalf, to be handed over at a private audience.

The paragraphs of this section offer suggestions on more general events and developments that the Gamemaster may use to their liking. Most are based on the premise that the characters won the day and that the town tries to put the tragedy behind it. The exception is the final header, which describes what will happen if the characters decide to make a run for it or if they lose the battle against the cultists and their leader.

THE SINKHOLE

As soon as possible, Building Commissioner Kalio Galeia will initiate the work of filling in and covering up the sinkhole. Queen Korinthia and Mayor Nightpitch provide him with all the resources he needs, and for the following months none of the regions day-laboring goblins or humans will need to go hungry. The rumor of the project spreads all the way to Yndaros' refugee camp and has its residents moving north by the hundreds. In spite of several incidents (strikes, riots in Blackmoor and food rationings during the winter) the whole district is rebuilt during the late fall of year 22.

Something unknown to almost everyone is that Lasifor, pressured by the Queen and Grand Master Seldonio, has allowed Ordo Magica to create a smaller passage down to the Crystal Isle, through cracks in the bedrock. The purpose of this is of course to study the corrupted power node, and one must hope that no one is ensnared by its dark charm or tries to use its power for more hazardous rituals...

THE BEAST CLAN

Helionor leads her subjects deeper into Davokar, pillaging and ravaging barbarian camp sites and free settlements along the way. Ultimately they will establish a new base in the mountains, near the Black Pitch Mire and keep sending warriors south for loot and slaves. Of course, they will appear in future episodes of *The Throne of Thorns*, alone or as allies to the raging representatives of Wratha.

THISTLE HOLD

The Tragedy of Thistle Hold will be kept alive in the memory of all Ambrians, but the anxiety that initially plagues the residents will soon give way to romanticized heroic poems and celebrations in honor of “the victory over the dark.”

What Comes Next?

OF COURSE, THE Gamemaster and his or her players know best what surviving and/or newly made characters should do until it is time for the next episode in the *Throne of Thorns*.

There are probably lots of things left to do in Thistle Hold (as described in *The World of Symbaroum*, pages 8–30), and the fact that it suffers from the aftermath of the Tragedy does not make it less interesting – in the wake of the appearance

Up to the point when the sinkhole is covered up, the security at the gates is heightened and the Legation is very restrictive when it comes to granting Explorer's Licenses – except to heroes who participated in the defense of the town, of course. But when the sun and warmth return, most reverts back to how it was before the tragedy. Human memory is short, more so when concerning bad things...

TRIUMPH OF THE NIGHT

Should the characters choose to run away or if all of them are slain in the showdown with Erlaber Ambreagos, the sorcerer will automatically succeed with the ritual and turn into the NPC called Midnight. The abomination will still head for the depths of Davokar, but in this case it will have time to cause even greater death and destruction before leaving town – buildings are razed and set on fire, hundreds of people are slaughtered and the icy terror that fills the midnight air causes as many deaths from heart attacks and suicides.

The fear lingers, not just in Thistle Hold but in the whole realm as the news of what has happened starts to spread. And with the fear comes anger and hate, aimed at the authorities of Ambria as much as at the abomination. Riots and protests occur in all towns south of Davokar, accusing the mayors, commanders, nobles and the Queen who failed to protect their subjects. Despite the Sun Church trying to mediate, the uprisings must be quenched by force of arms on a couple of occasions, both in Thistle Hold and in the capital city of Yndaros. It takes several months before the anger cools and a weary kind of calm settles over Ambria.

Should it somehow become known that the characters were involved in trying to handle the situation but that they opted to run from the danger, they would do best to assume both new names and new clothing styles. Initially, they will be as hated as the authorities and later they will become the subjects of ridiculing songs, tales and paintings, and known as “the cowardly scaredy-cats who ran off, crying for their measly lives.” Their previous contacts will reject them or at least refuse to see them in any public situations. In other words, the group must fight to restore their honor – something that the Gamemaster can turn into a whole series of interesting and thrilling adventures!

of the sinkhole and, possibly, the rampage of the abomination there are both wounds to lick and a town to rebuild. In short, the events linked to the adventure have opened up new possibilities and job opportunities for the characters.

After a few short words on the allocation of experience points, this section lists a series of plot hooks and circumstances which the Gamemaster is welcome to develop and refine according to their preferences.

EXPERIENCE

If your group uses a strict accounting of experience points, it is likely that they have accrued enough XP to reach level 9 by the conclusion of *Wrath of the Warden*. For important encounters we recommend each character receives proficiency bonus × 1,000 XP for a complete success, or about half that amount as long as they made forward progress. However, the Gamemaster should feel free to make this decision, based on how quickly or slowly they want the characters to advance.

RECONSTRUCTION

A whole district has been devoured by a hole that needs to be covered up. All characters can take part in the reconstruction of the Hold, as laborers or in the capacity of some kind of leader – a foreman, a keeper of the pay packets, or as someone tending to sick/wounded daythalers. Challenges may potentially appear when the workers protest against their meager paychecks and poor working conditions, when some mysterious disease hits the work camps, or while an ancient ruin is found when digging up dirt and gravel for filling the sinkhole.

Another option is that the characters decide to establish an outpost in Davokar to provide the construction site with lumber and/or planks. In that case, the Gamemaster can take a closer look at the header Establishing an Outpost in the *Gamemaster's Guide*, page 82.

HUNTING CULTISTS

The Tragedy of Thistle Hold has made people in Ambria more paranoid than usual. A group of characters with witch-hunting ambitions should have lots to do.

For one thing, the cults of Red Eye and Erok the Dark need to be dealt with. Then there are lots of rumors about suspected “seeds of Corruption” in Thistle Hold and in surrounding villages. Usually the suspicions are unfounded or intentionally fabricated, but not always. Characters who have had dealings with the robber baron Mal-Rogan or the cultist Odako from the *Ruins of Symbaroum Adventure Compendium* may very well be faced with a not so happy reunion...

MEMBERS OF THE IRON PACT

The characters (if any) who pass Teara-Téana’s test after having revived Eox will be contacted by her when the Gamemaster finds it suitable. The elves experience time differently from more short-lived creatures and it may very well be that Teara-Téana waits one, two or even ten years before reconnecting with a potential ally. On the other hand, she has lost her agent in Thistle Hold, so if the Gamemaster does not mind, there is a great chance that the characters will receive an offer.

As agents of Teara-Téana, the characters are expected to find out as much as possible about the happenings in

town which may be of interest to the elves, but they are also pledged not to act in a way which fuels the Ambrian peoples’ hatred for the Elder Folks. This may lead to espionage missions inside the palisade, or stealthy break-ins with the purpose of gaining access to sensitive information and secret documents.

Also, it is not unlikely that the agents are asked to put an end to forest expeditions, to reclaim dangerous artifacts from individuals or auction houses, and to hunt down blight marked humans or beasts which have left the woods and are hiding somewhere in the Ambrian realm.

SLAVES OF THE BEAST CLAN

When the Beast Clan attacked Thistle Hold, many Ambrians were dragged down into the hole to embark on an anything but joyous life-journey as slaves of the Jezites. If the Gamemaster wishes, the characters may be contacted by relatives of these poor souls, willing to pay handsomely for someone to track down their family members. The quest-givers can be commoners of limited means or a wealthy highborn (leaders of the town’s factions or some nobleman of the region).

Whoever hires them, it is recommended that the characters never succeed in finding the main camp of the Beast Clan, since the Jezites are meant to figure in future adventures. But it is fully possible that Helionor has ordered one or more groups to establish smaller camps near the forest edge, to facilitate raids against border settlements. Of course, slaves are needed in those outposts, and maybe the characters are so lucky that the ones they are searching for are in one of them.

FORESHADOWING

If the Gamemaster wants to foreshadow the future, we would suggest that the characters are given reason to visit Karvosti, though without digging too deep into its intrigues and conflicts. An encounter with the explorer **Elmendra** (page 108), on the High Chieftain’s cliff or in Thistle Hold, may prove valuable when it comes to involving the characters in the events of *The Witch Hammer*. Another tip is to provide further hints that there are internal, so far relatively peaceful, power struggles plaguing the Sun Church.

Last but not least, Korinthia’s ambition to fulfil Sakomal’s Prophecy will be of central importance in the next episode. Maybe the characters will come across rumors of a ruin said to contain leads on where to find the lost throne of Symbaroum? If so, the Queen, the Sun Church, Ordo Magica and other power factions will undoubtedly send agents there. The player characters may become involved as allies of one of these or set out to find it on their own. Of course, any viable leads will not be found (those will be saved for future adventures in the series). But maybe it is in this ruin that the Ambrians (and players) learn that the throne of Symbaroum’s last emperor was called... the Throne of Thorns.





IGHT FALLS OVER the *Longhouse*. Teresma's guests instinctively lean closer to the candles on the tavern's rickety tables, conscious of the fact that the faint glow merely accentuates the deepening darkness around them.

Most of the visitors are treasure hunters; some are experienced, others have just taken their first steps into the shadows of the forest. Ambrians often say that there are only two kinds of creatures in Davokar: hunters and prey. Most guests at the *Longhouse* believe themselves to be the former, but they are sorely mistaken, every last one of them. Like so many before them, they will soon learn the truth – in Davokar one is indeed either hunter or prey, but what you are can change in a heartbeat. As the barbarians say: hunter today, hunted by nightfall.

Out in the woods, a breathless shadow moves away from Karvost in tremendous haste. She, if anyone, knows what it means to be hunter and prey, for she is both. She is hunting her dream, and its scent grows stronger with every step she takes. But she is also hunted, by doubt and despair, and by a sinister few who know about the secret she carries.

At the *Longhouse* is a friend of hers, with whom she has shared her discovery. The way this friend is drinking, it will not be long before the shadow in the woods becomes one of the world's most wanted prey...



The Witch Hammer

Introduction

The time has come to truly delve into Davokar! While previously published adventures have offered shorter trips through the woods, *The Witch Hammer* lets the player characters experience the full horror and wondrous glory of the forest. The relationship between, and within, the game world's factions are also central to the story. As the characters will no doubt learn, directly or indirectly, much has happened since the sinkhole appeared in Thistle Hold. For though *The Witch Hammer* can be played as a stand-alone adventure, it is also the second part of *The Throne of Thorns*, the adventure chronicle in which the region slowly moves toward its hour of destiny – the final battle for the verdant throne of Symbaroum.

THIS ADVENTURE TACKLES the overarching themes of Symbaroum: the conflict between the Ambrians' wish to cultivate Davokar and the Elder Folks' unwillingness to let them do so. Queen Korinthia is losing patience with the barbarians' refusal to support her efforts, and when she learns that the information she desires the most – directions to Symbar and its Throne of Thorns – has been kept from her by the witches, she reacts with force. Meanwhile, other powerful factions are drawn to Karvosti; searching for Symbar, or hoping to stop those who do.

But though the theme of the story is political in nature, the adventure itself is full of suspense, action, and epic settings. Depending on who the player characters are and what they decide to do, they may not even notice the plots and schemes of the factions, except as obstacles on the way toward their own goal – whether it be finding a “map to Symbar” or preventing others from finding it. In the end, all gaming groups will probably know more about the ambitions and internal struggles of the factions than they did at the beginning. But how much they understand, and to what extent they get involved, are mostly up to them.

Background

SEVEN DAYS PRIOR to the start of the adventure, a truly historical event took place on Karvosti. Late at night someone burst into the ogre Crueljaw's tent, right next to his shop at the marketplace. As the visitor removed the hood, the ogre recognized her as his friend Elmendra, often called “Elmendra the Senseless” by her fellow fortune hunters, out of both respect and ridicule. Many Ambrians know her story: the great explorer who became obsessed with making the greatest find in the history of fortune hunting – Symbar.

It was clear that something had happened to Elmendra. Apart from looking completely worn out, she had a thin layer of yellow puss covering her eyes, and Crueljaw's nostrils

The Witch Hammer consists of five chapters, the first of which presents the background to the adventure and the overall progress of the story. It offers suggestions on how the player characters can enter the story, and gaming groups who prefer to have their characters guided by a quest-giver are also given more detailed suggestions on how the adventure may unfold. Finally, attention is directed towards the factions of the Davokar region – their current affairs along with their goals, resources and relations.

Then come the three acts of the adventure, each in a separate chapter: a first act that gradually intensifies the situation on the plateau; a second act describing three adventure locations and the groups involved in the manhunt; and a third act that will lead the characters into the cliff of Karvosti itself, through the Underworld.

The fifth and final chapter addresses what happens after the adventure has reached its conclusion, and things the player characters could do before they leave for Yndaros and the chronicle's third episode: *The Darkest Star*.

were immediately assailed by her rancid stench. Elmendra fell to her knees before the ogre and handed him an object: an ornamented war hammer, its head glimmering with gold. “Take it, bring it to the priests,” she hissed. “To the priests, Crueljaw! Only to the priests, promise me that.”

When the speechless ogre nodded and accepted the hammer, Elmendra grabbed his shoulders and pierced him with a puss-coated glare:

“Prios bless me, I did it, deep within Karvosti... Symbar, Crueljaw, I found Symbar!”

A moment later she left his tent and vanished into the stormy night.



A group of Ambrian merchants approach the gate
on the way to the plateau. Woe betide any blight-marked
creature who tries to blend in with the crowd...

The next morning, Crueljaw kept his word and brought the ornamented weapon to Father Piromei. When the priest wanted to know how he had acquired the weapon, the ogre asked him for help: he told Piromei about Elmendra's marks of Corruption and what she had said about having found Symbar, and he begged the priest to look for her. The ogre spoke with a booming voice, and when Piromei finally managed to hush him to silence, it was too late – an Ambrian spy at the temple, posing as one of Aranitra's initiates, had heard everything and quickly sent word to his liege.

The Curia took immediate action, as did House Kohinoor. The Queen's Rangers dispatched two special units to locate Elmendra and/or her great discovery, while the First Father ordered his cousin to join in the hunt. Shortly thereafter, the news also reached Knight Commander Iakobo Vearra. He too decided to send troops to Karvosti. As soon as the Sun Church learned of this, it sparked a terrible feud between the templar commander and First Father Jeseebegai.

The day before the start of the adventure, the Rangers' and the priesthood's forces both arrived on the plateau, ready to get to work – as the player characters will discover when they become involved in the story.

THE TRUTH

Elmendra left the High Chieftain's cliff immediately after her visit to Crueljaw, and people will have little luck finding her on or around Karvosti, as she is on her way to Yndaros.

It is true that she made it into Karvosti, hoping to find the way to the lost city of Symbar. Instead, she found something else – a stone tablet describing how the sarcophagus of the last Symbarian emperor, named Symbar, was found by his descendants and brought to their new home in Lindaros. Apparently, this was in the days of High Chieftain Gothomer,

some fifty years before a terrible, contagious bleeding disorder laid waste to the whole of Lindaros.

The reason why she shows up on the plateau at all is an artifact she grabbed on her way out of the cliff. She had obviously heard of the "Witch Hammer," used in the legendary battle against Karlaban (for more information, see the header *Karlaban's Return* on page 34 in the book *The World of Symbaroum*). When she saw the weapon resting in the reliquary, Elmendra could not help herself – even though she knew it was probably protected by powerful magic. She paid a high price for taking the artifact (the previously mentioned marks of Corruption), but initially, she was very pleased with her magnificent find.

However, it was not long before she came to regret it: perhaps the witches had woven spells over the artifact, runes making it possible for people to track it over long distances – a risk she was unwilling to take, now that she had come so close to reaching her goal. She felt it trembling with power, so leaving it in the woods was simply not an option. Instead, she decided to leave it with the priests – indeed, who needs a Corruption-killing weapon more than the champions of the Sun God?! She chose Crueljaw as her intermediary, even though she had many closer friends on the plateau, knowing that everyone else would probably keep the artifact for themselves.

With the hammer handed over, Elmendra intends to visit her old friend, the Spiritualist Herangoi, who may be able to help her locate the ancient sarcophagus somewhere in the catacombs beneath Yndaros. Her plan is to have Herangoi question the late emperor for more specific directions to the city of Symbar. Whether they succeed or not will be revealed in the next episode of *The Throne of Thorns*, when the time will come for the player characters to have great adventures in (and beneath) the Ambrian capital of Yndaros.

The Structure of the Adventure

THE WITCH HAMMER is divided into three acts, all different in terms of both structure and content. How the adventure is played will no doubt differ from gaming group to gaming group, due to adjustments made by Gamemasters and the player characters' considerable freedom to do as they please. Nevertheless, the overarching story comes with a few major turning points (also serving as act transitions) which practically everyone playing the adventure will get to experience.

Area Map

At the end of this book is a map pinpointing various locations that are relevant to the adventure. You will find it on page 196.

ACT I: THE SEARCH FOR SYMBAR

The adventure begins at the Longhouse, where the player characters (for whatever reason) find themselves. Crueljaw is sitting at another table, next to the liturg Aranitra, and the ogre is clearly becoming increasingly inebriated and upset, eventually flying into a drunken rage. As others come running to avert a brawl, a crying Crueljaw blurts out the whole story about Elmendra, the Witch Hammer, and Symbar.

The information has barely begun to sink in when the door slams open and a young man staggers into the tavern. He keeps one hand pressed against his slit throat, blood gushing between his fingers. The man collapses onto the floor, croaking: "*The High Chieftain! The stronghold is under attack!*" The characters may decide if they wish to get involved in the assassination attempt. Regardless, the attack fails and Tharaban lives, albeit in a weakened condition.

Then, for one reason or another (see *The Player Characters* section, page 112), the characters may start investigating what happened to Elmendra. They have little difficulty identifying her most frequent associates, two of whom can be found murdered on Karvosti in ways which implicate the Queen's Rangers and the Black Cloaks. Her third colleague, Brother Bartho, has fled the plateau, but a friend of his can be persuaded to reveal his current whereabouts: Vearra's outpost. The player characters arrive at the outpost just before it is attacked by warriors of the Sovereign's Oath. They must decide whether to help defend the outpost, or try to escape along with the frightened fortune hunter. Either way, they will obtain the information which leads to Act II.

While the player characters conduct their investigations, ominous rumors will reach Karvosti. The first tells of an army being assembled on the fields west of Thistle Hold, while subsequent rumors provide further details regarding this military force. Finally, there are whispers of a heavily armored column marching from Yndaros, led by none other than the Queen of Ambria herself: Korinthia Nighbane.

It is a serious situation, that much is clear, especially as the High Chieftain triples the number of sentries guarding the way up the cliff and the Huldra isolates herself in her dwelling.

ACT II: TRAILING THE EXPLORER

Thanks to Elmendra's former associate, Brother Bartho, the player characters manage to map out her movements before she disappeared, and identify three locations which together should make it possible for them to retrace her steps. The only problem is that others have done so as well.

Two groups of Rangers, one group of sun knights, one group of theurgs and Black Cloaks, and three groups of fortune hunters have obtained the very same information as the player characters, and will all visit the same three locations, but in a different order. In other words, which route the characters take will determine what potential allies and adversaries they will encounter at the sites.

One of these places is Yeferon Isle in Lake Volgoma, known among seafarers as "the island on the brink of the Spirit World." There, the characters' task will be to go beneath its great Ziggurat, while fighting the wraiths of the isle and dealing with competing treasure hunters. If all goes well, they will leave the isle with information on how to reach the roots of Karvosti through the Underworld.

The second place Elmendra visited before making her famed discovery is a ruin which the barbarians call Faarah Moroun. The characters must explore the ruin, once again competing with other groups and dealing with local threats. Faarah Moroun is home to the liege troll Orangaar, who surrounds himself with rage trolls and various pets and who, mildly put, is not very fond of intruders. The characters must be clever, and triumph in battle, in order to get their hands on the ruin's treasure – information regarding an

ancient locking mechanism identical to the one sealing the gate between the Underworld and the caverns of Karvosti.

Finally, the player characters must find the healer Elida, who has recently returned to the free settlement of New Earthmoor and reconciled with her family. The palisaded village is inhabited by religious and deeply xenophobic fanatics. When the characters arrive, it is also under attack by Fundiber, a warrior of the Sovereign's Oath, and by some of the characters' competitors. Through diplomacy or use of force, they must get to the timid Elida, who has essential knowledge about the underground tunnels of Karvosti.

It is quite possible that the player characters will fail to obtain important pieces of information, but that does not mean that all is lost. Instead, they can try to negotiate with the other factions, provided that they know things their competitors do not. Such negotiations will take place near, or on, Karvosti, which is now under siege by an Ambrian army of almost ten thousand soldiers.

When the Gamemaster deems it appropriate, the thunderous voice of the Queen's herald delivers Korinthia's ultimatum: the witches have until sundown to show their willingness to cooperate; if they do not, Karvosti will be annexed by the Kingdom of Ambria.

ACT III: INSIDE THE MOTHER ROCK

In the final act of the adventure, the player characters – possibly along with one or more rival groups – will try to enter Karvosti in search of what Elmendra found down there. This quest is complicated by the fact that the lower regions of the cliff now belong to someone else – the spider Karathran, with her vast horde of spiderlings, is the new mistress of the deep, and the witches have sealed all

Why on Karvosti?

There can be many reasons for the player characters to visit Karvosti at the start of the adventure. Should your gaming group need inspiration in this area, you are welcome to use the following list. The characters have come to Karvosti...

- ◆ ... to rest/gather provisions before, during, or after an expedition into the woods.
- ◆ ... to deliver/fetch a person or object on behalf of someone in Thistle Hold.
- ◆ ... as messengers or negotiators on diplomatic or business-related errands.
- ◆ ... to trade with the clans, or purchase something from the witches.
- ◆ ... as bodyguardsassistants to a merchant, diplomat, or explorer.

upward passages to give themselves time to negotiate a peaceful resolution with the intruder.

The player characters must first find the entrance to the Underworld, then go to Karvosti and open the gate, which is now sealed. Other more or less successful groups will, naturally, try to stop them and learn what they know. On the other side of the gate the characters find Elmendra's footprints, which are easily followed across the tunnel's dusty stone floor. However, they must be careful not to touch any strands of spider web, or Karathran will be alerted, and so will the deranged former Huldra Oryela (actually the blood elf Iel) who tricked the spiders into freeing her.

After many great perils, the player characters finally reach a cracked stone tablet. The symbols on its weathered

surface, some of which have been destroyed, were inscribed in such an irregular style that not even a master scholar can decipher them all (except for true experts like Elmendra, who has spent half her life studying ancient inscriptions). But the sign for Symbar is easily distinguished, as are those which supposedly mean "city" and "destruction."

The player characters will probably not take the tablet with them, but there are ways for them to copy it. They are then faced with the interesting question of what to do with their newly acquired information. Time is running out on Karvosti, and through their actions, the player characters could determine whether or not the cliff is annexed by the Ambrians.

The Player Characters

AT THE START of the adventure the player characters are, for some reason, visiting Karvosti.

It does not really matter who they are, how experienced they are, or what abilities they have – as always, the Game-master should adjust the difficulty of opponents and challenges to the capabilities of the gaming group. However, it might be useful to know that we created the adventure on the following premise:

- ◆ The characters have achieved 8th level and maybe even 9th level. Thus their proficiency bonus is +4 and they have likely had two chances to increase their ability scores or take feats.
- ◆ At least one of the characters can speak the barbarian tongue, as a result of possessing the Loremaster feature or having been raised by one of the clans.
- ◆ They have a certain reputation (accurate or not) for being bold and capable; faction leaders may not know them by name, but are familiar with their deeds.

If the players decide to create new characters especially for this adventure, we suggest that they make characters of at least 6th level and preferably of 8th level. They must also be provided a suitable backstory – perhaps one (or all) of them knew Elmendra, or maybe they start the game as members of a specific faction? Whatever you decide, the incentives below may serve as inspiration for suitable backstories.

Incentives are always important when roleplaying. The players must feel engaged in the story, for one reason or another – if not, their sense of immersion will most likely suffer and the game will be boring. When writing an adventure like this one, we are mindful of the fact that all players and characters are different, but in the end it can be difficult to take all possible personalities and ambitions into account. Hence, if the suggestions below do not suit your particular gaming group, you will have to give it some extra thought, and perhaps discuss alternative motives with the players.

A TREASURE HUNTER'S DREAM

The player characters are inveterate explorers or treasure hunters whose dream is to find the ancient city of Symbar. This premise should make it quite easy for them to get involved in the story.

The most likely allies for such a group would probably be the other fortune hunters, but the Queen's Rangers may also be a feasible choice.

BAD OMENS

There are many people in the region who are willing to heed the warnings of witches and elves, who are convinced that further intrusions into the ruins of Symbroum will bring death and destruction to the world. If the player characters share this belief, they could very well get involved in order to prevent other groups (such as the Queen, the Sun Church, or thieving fortune hunters) from acquiring directions to Symbar. After all, the witches describe the city as "the Mother of Darkness" – who knows what horrors the humans might awaken as they trample around the ruins!?

Characters with goals of this nature would find a natural ally in the Iron Pact. The theurg Argaton may also be persuaded into taking their side, but not all Black Cloaks will join him (see more on page 137).

PEACEMAKERS

The Queen wants to know the way to Symbar, but the witches will not share their knowledge. With everything else going on, the conflict could soon escalate into full-scale war!

Perhaps the player characters realize that the best way to defuse the situation is to give Korinthia what she wants; and needless to say, it would not hurt to have done the Queen of Ambria such a tremendous favor...

This premise would make the Queen's Rangers their most probable ally.

Adventure Timeline

Should the players in your group have a hard time taking the initiative, or if you as Gamemaster wish to have more control of the story, it is suggested that the characters rapidly are offered a quest-giver – one or more persons to guide them, help them analyze information, and tell them what to do next. This way, there is less risk of the story grinding to a halt, and preparations between gaming sessions should be quicker and more straightforward.

As for quest-givers, Crueljaw would probably be the most obvious choice during Act I (the search for Elmendra), after which Brother Bartho takes over. But there are other central characters that could serve the same purpose. High Chieftain Tharaban, for example, could ask the player characters to investigate Elmendra's doings and what she has found, in the hope of appeasing Queen Korinthia.

If the Gamemaster wants the characters to be able to ask their quest-giver for advice/support during their expeditions, they could be provided with a Mind Stone (see page 43 for inspiration; each use inflicts 1d4 temporary Corruption).

1
The player characters are at the *Longhouse* and witness Crueljaw's outburst

2-3
There is an attack on the Stronghold, and the characters intervene. After interrogating the sellswords, they are thanked by Farvan

4
Amegor is found murdered; his tent is examined

5
The place where Mankel was pushed off the cliff is found, and the player characters leave Karvosti in search of his body

6
The player characters speak to someone who, if persuaded, can tell them where to find Brother Bartho

7-8
Bartho is found at the *Victorious Hawk*. The outpost is attacked by the Sovereign's Oath

9
Deeper conversation with Brother Bartho. The price of his information is negotiated

10-12
Journey to Yeferon

13-20
Yeferia is explored, the entrances are identified. The characters head inside and beneath the ziggurat, deal with rivals and guardians, and encounter High Priest Garathve

21-22
Journey back to Karvosti

23-24
To New Earthmoor

25-31
Somehow the player characters manage to enter New Earthmoor and speak to Elida, while fighting or working together with other agents in the area

32-33
Journey back to Karvosti

34-35
Journey to Faarah Moroun

36-45
The characters explore the ruin, attacked by rivals and the ruin's inhabitants; they find the laboratory and get a chance to study the locking mechanism

46-48
Journey back to Karvosti for the characters to recuperate, gather provisions, and possibly negotiate with rival treasure hunters

49-51
The characters find their way to the rift, travel the Underworld, and proceed to the Undergate of Karvosti

52
The gate is opened

53-55
The road to the witches' reliquary goes through the Plantations, Aravarax' lake, and the Prison

56-57
The characters encounter Oryela in the Reliquary. Somehow they enter the chamber with the stone tablet

58
They escape from Karvosti, possibly hunted by spiders

59+
Epilogue. Up to the players, but meetings with Tharaban, Yeleta, and Korinthia are possible

MOVING UP THE LADDER

Player characters who are, or wish to be, members of organizations such as Ordo Magica, the Sun Church, or the Ambrian army, could take on the challenge in the hope of furthering their careers. Finding directions to Symbar and presenting them to the faction leaders would probably open many doors for the characters.

Alternatively, someone within the organization could give the characters a direct order. Refusing the order would be a sure way of losing the organization's trust; accepting and completing the mission could be exactly what is needed to advance up the hierarchy!

In this case, the matter of forging alliances becomes more complicated. A career-minded character would obviously not want other members of the organization to share their

glory. On the other hand, forming alliances when needed should not be a problem.

FRIENDS AND FAMILY

If none of the incentives above are deemed strong enough, it might be time to get personal. Perhaps a dear friend or relative of a player character went missing while searching for Symbar? Perhaps the player character is a noble who has been disowned by their family and now seeks a way to earn their forgiveness? Perhaps the player characters are close acquaintances of Elmendra and want to follow her trail to figure out what has happened to her?

With personal connections as their incentive, it is possible for the characters to collaborate with more or less anyone, for short or long periods of time.

Scheming on Karvosti

THE FACTIONS, AND the characters' relations to them, form a kind of social playing field in *The Witch Hammer*. The adventure presupposes that this political meta-game is used, as it adds another dimension to the game world, making it a place filled with intrigue beneath the seemingly uncomplicated surface. For the players, these relations become a tactical game where social scenes can determine whether they succeed or fail.

That being said, this element of scheming is purely supplemental and can easily be removed. Gaming groups who

prefer a simpler game can treat the factions as quest-givers or opponents, without rules regarding their reactions to the player characters' deeds. In that case, the Gamemaster decides what is reasonable from the faction's point of view or, when in doubt, lets opposed **Charisma (Persuasion) checks** settle the matter.

Those who want to make full use of the intrigues can find guidelines in the *Ruins of Symbaroum Gamemaster's Guide*, pages 172–174.

The Factions

EVER SINCE SEREMBAR'S election as first joint leader of the clans, Karvosti has been the High Chieftain's cliff. With the Guard of the Slumbering Wrath at his command, he defends and maintains order on the plateau, and though he lacks the authority to judge individual clan members, the wrathguards may detain anyone who exhibits threatening behavior, and use lethal force if they deem it necessary. The same agreement has now been made between Tharaban and the Queen of Ambria, which the Sun Church has reluctantly come to accept.

On a few occasions, a number of clan chieftains have banded together and granted the Lord of Karvosti the power to actually govern them. The most famous example was during the decades of war against the dreaded Spider King, which began with the first High Chieftain and ended with the fifth – a war that involved all clans, except the steppeland folk of Saar-Khan. Presently, there are some who argue that a similar union is necessary; that the people of the clans must once more unite under a common banner in order to meet the threats of this new era.

The darkness spreading through Davokar is one evident reason for joining forces. But unlike the above-mentioned example, this sinister development is a slow and abstract

one, without a clear enemy. This explains why the clan chieftains and large parts of their respective people are opposed to taking such drastic action, despite advocates of the proposition claiming that they are behaving like toads in a slowly warming cauldron – splashing about without a care in the world, while the water grows hotter and hotter, and will eventually scald them to death.

Another perceived threat are the Ambrians. Their queen has already subjugated or destroyed two clans, and will surely not stop there. There is also much to suggest that the darkening of Davokar is linked to the Ambrians scavenging its ruins – that their intrusions have at least accelerated its expansion. Thus, many barbarians are heard mumbling that the children of Davokar must unite in the face of this menace; some speak of taking up arms, while others would rather strengthen their negotiating position. However, many are skeptical about this, particularly the Zareks, Odavs, and Vajvods, who get along quite nicely with Korinthia's people and have benefited greatly from newly established collaborations.

Finally, the growing activity of the Iron Pact must be mentioned, as it affects all clans to some extent. The elves and their allies are attacking barbarian settlements with

LEADING INDIVIDUALS IN THE WITCH HAMMER

Name	Faction	Impressed by	Likes	Dislikes
Tharaban	The High Chieftain	Investigation	—	Nobles, Ironsworn
Captain Marvello	House Kohinoor	Athletics	Ambrians	Witches, Ironsworn, Blight-marked
Captain Lindra	House Kohinoor	Perception	Ambrians	Barbarians, Ironsworn, Blight-marked
Leohan Mekelle	Sun Knights	History	Worshippers of Prios	Barbarians, Non-humans, Heretics, Ironsworn, Blight-marked
Argaton Soleij	Sun Church	Religion	Worshippers of Prios	—
Dagesto	—	Acrobatics	Explorers	Barbarians, Nobles
Ioséfia Dresel	—	Stealth	—	Non-humans
Cleaver	—	Sleight of Hand	Ambrians	Blight-marked
Fundiber	Sovereign's Oath	Athletics	Barbarians	Ambrians, Ironsworn
Malahai	The Iron Pact	Insight	Ironsworn	Blight-marked
Adreanea	The Iron Pact	Stealth	Ironsworn	Ambrians, Blight-marked
Farvan	The Wrathguard	Athletics	Barbarians	Ambrians, Ironsworn

increasing frequency, particularly those which are located near ancient ruins and often host Ambrian explorers and treasure hunters. Few people know that the Iron Pact is plagued by internal conflicts, although the witches have begun to suspect as much. Those aware of the connection between the clans' taboos and the once peaceful relations between barbarians and elves call for the High Chieftain to do something about the greedy Ambrians and the locals aiding them.

This section describes the relationships between powerful factions on Karvosti, and their views on previously mentioned threats. The main focus is on what the leaders of these factions wish to achieve, what allies they have (or think they have), and who they regard as enemies. Gamemasters should familiarize themselves with this before playing *The Witch Hammer*, but are also encouraged to use these plots as the basis for homemade scenarios, to be played before or after the adventure in question.

THE HIGH CHIEFTAIN

When Tharaban closes his chamber door at night, he lets his shoulders slump; his chest deflates, and his forehead creases into a deep frown. Sometimes he even sheds tears. Not of grief, but of hopelessness and despair. The High Chieftain knows that the Ambrians are to blame for the Iron Pact's intensified activity, and is confident that the looming awakening of Symbaroum is their fault as well. As much as four years ago, during the annual autumn gathering at the Thingstead, he suggested that the clans should coordinate their approach to the Queen's people, but the chieftains would not listen – they were more interested in discussing border disputes and individual threats. The decision to join forces can only be made by the clan chieftains, and it must be

made soon! For if the Ambrians are not forced to obey the barbarian taboos, the world will fall into darkness.

The people who Tharaban feels he can trust are very few indeed. First Guard Farvan is one of them, and he is fairly sure that Yeleta shares his goals as well – however, it is unclear whether they could agree on the means to achieve them. He has known the Zarek Chieftain Monovar and Leonod of Yedesa since before he became High Chieftain; they are good friends, but it is far from certain whether they would be willing to grant him dominion over their people – especially as Monovar seems to have found a new friend in the duke of New Berendoria, Alesaro Kohinoor. And he has no real ally among the Ambrians. So far he has gotten on very well with the Queen, or so it seems based on communications with her Legate on Karvosti. But what she really thinks, feels, and plans remain unknown to him.

No, Tharaban is on his own, although he has found some comfort with Lugander Galeia, member of the Queen's Legation and son of social climber and patron Laguboi. The young noble has shown great interest in barbarian history and culture, and is also quite outspoken about his insights into Ambria and its ruling class – which is why they have spent much time together by Tharaban's hearth. At the same time, the High Chieftain does not have many obvious enemies, apart from his incarcerated sister (see textbox). The paradoxical role of the High Chieftain is not to rule, but to maintain friendly relations with everyone and mediate between them, and so far, Tharaban has always done what is expected of him. His friends and enemies will surely show their true colors if he ever loses patience and executes the plan he is contemplating – summoning all clan chieftains and giving them an ultimatum: grant him absolute power over the people of Davokar, or die!

Tharaban's Sister

Shortly after his coronation to High Chieftain, an attempt was made on Tharaban's life. What hardly anyone knows is that the assassin was none other than his Tharaban's sister, Tirba, who since then has been locked away in the catacombs beneath the stronghold, looking for a way out, dreaming of revenge. Read more about this in the book *The World of Symbaroum*, page 103.

HOUSE KOHINOOR

Korinthia and her allied relatives aim to establish an empire north of the Titans, strong enough to withstand all outside threats. For symbolic reasons, she speaks of restoring Symbaroum and fulfilling the prophecy of Sarkomal, and asserts that Ambrians have as much claim to these lands as the barbarians. But these are actually secondary issues; what matters most is that the lush and affluent forest of Davokar is incorporated into her kingdom and that most of the region's populace is persuaded to join her cause.

As for Karvosti, the cliff is important to Korinthia for two reasons. First, it would ease the exploration and cultivation of Davokar considerably if her people could use the cliff as they pleased. Secondly, there is a vast treasure trove of ancient knowledge to gain from the witches and the High Chieftain's stronghold. But since her advisors all agree that Ambria needs the barbarians, particularly the witches, to help them interpret and understand said information, the situation is more complex than it might seem at first glance - the Queen could certainly take Karvosti by force, but not without making enemies of those who hold the keys to the real riches of Davokar.

House Kohinoor, Korinthia included, is still extremely busy making sure that the Ambrian kingdom runs smoothly and satisfactorily - a task that has turned out to be far from simple, as many of the structures and traditions which were the very foundation of Alberetor no longer exist or are yet to be restored. Regarding Karvosti, the Queen has so far been content just to improve Ambrian relations with the High Chieftain and the Huldra, mostly through her legation. Lothar Grendel is her only formal ally on the cliff, but if the situation demands more active efforts, she can rely on the groups of Rangers who take turns on the plateau, disguised as explorers, missionaries, or treasure hunters.

As to enemies, Karvosti is something of a thorn in House Kohinoor's side. The Sun Church's representatives on the cliff are all fervently loyal to the First Father and the Curia, and House Vearra - who throughout history has made many attempts to dethrone the Kohinoors - has established

a growing outpost in close vicinity to the cliff. Moreover, the Iron Pact and its representatives are present all over the plateau, snooping around and meddling in Ambrian interests. There might also be some truth to the Legation's reports suggesting that neither the witches nor the High Chieftain are likely to ever enter an alliance with Ambria; that they firmly believe in the elves' horror stories and doubt humanity's ability to vanquish the darkness. If this is really the case, the Queen must resort to harsher methods, eventually following through with clenched fists and sharp steel.

THE SUN KNIGHTS

A division has emerged within the Curia, and within the Sun Church in general. The Templar commander, Iakobo Vearra, has long since concluded that Prios is dead, and he is sick of the priests' and Black Cloaks' reluctance to face the truth. The Lawgiver must be avenged, and it is the sacred duty of the Sun Church to drop the axe on His killers.

The conflict between these two factions escalates in the months leading up to the beginning of the adventure *The Witch Hammer*. On Karvosti, this is particularly noticeable in the Templars' reactions to Father Piomei's sermons - they turn their backs to the temple, with their jaws clenched in anger. Furthermore, Alisabeta Vearra is seen on the lower ledge of the cliff more often than before, talking to mysterious newcomers at the pilgrim camp (envoys from her father), while father Piomei visits the stronghold with increasing frequency. Locally, the conflict culminates with the Knight Commander sending troops to retrieve "the map to Symbar" and the subsequent banishment of all theurgs, liturgs, and Black Cloaks from Karvosti (page 131).

The Templars have no friends and are not interested in far-reaching alliances, but regard all who fight against Davokar's wildness as potential, short-term partners. As long as one never suggests negotiating with the darkness, as long as one supports their quest to deliver righteous vengeance and punishment, some sun knights can make common cause with infidels (though not with heretics such as witches, sorcerers and blight-marked people).

Their enemies are very easy to identify: abominations and undead, cultists and sorcerers, witches and Ironsworn, and all who stand in their way or do not acknowledge their duty to Dead Prios. According to Templar doctrine, the world is already doomed to darkness, twilight has fallen and the Eternal Night approaches; all that remains is to punish the godslayers - there will be ample time for mourning in the emptiness of the afterlife, kneeling by the ashes of the lifeless Lawgiver.

THE PRIESTHOOD

The Templar's departure will not change the ambitions of the Curia. To First Father Jeseebegai, Anabela Argona and Brother Eumenos, Davokar and its barbarians are not the

most important issue at hand. Their main focus is on turning Ambria into a Kingdom of the Sun – a theocracy where the clergy are superior to the nobles in power and reverence. It is true that their brothers and sisters are persecuting heretics in both Ambria and Davokar, but this is all secondary, and mostly done for propaganda purposes. The same goes for the Sun Church's spreading of their alternative interpretation of Sarkomal's prophecy, which states that the "mistress" who will one day sit upon the throne of Symbaroum could just as well be a man. It also emphasizes the phrase "a peer of the divine," read by the Curia as "God's representative," meaning First Father Jeseebegai.

The Priesthood's only formal allies on Karvosti are Father Piromei and his staff at the sun temple. However, one can usually find competent people among the pilgrims visiting the cliff – pious souls who may aid the theurg in shadier affairs, such as obstructing the efforts of Queen Korinthia and her delegates. And there are always two or three groups of Black Cloaks on missions in Davokar, hunting down heretics, abominations, or dark artifacts. These groups are sometimes available on Karvosti, as they return to the plateau to recuperate and gather provisions.

Outwardly, darkness and Corruption are the Priesthood's greatest enemies – the ultimate enemies – and the primary targets for sun priests and Black Cloaks. But under the surface, things are quite different. As previously mentioned, the Curia is secretly plotting to seize power in Ambria, in order to pursue heretics and the forces of darkness with greater efficiency. Until this ambition is realized, the nobles of Ambria – particularly House Kohinoor – are the Church's most pressing adversaries, possibly along with the so far harmless, yet growing problem of the heretic Sarvola and his blasphemous preaching. In any case, the Priesthood must do whatever they can to make the nobles appear weak, selfish, and incompetent to the Ambrian people – not only throughout the kingdom, but on Karvosti as well.

THE SOVEREIGN'S OATH

The two most northern clans, Saar-Khan and Gaoia, have formed an alliance called the Sovereign's Oath – named after the ceremony through which chieftains Razameaman and Rábaimon pledged allegiance to the Blood-Daughter.

The election of Tharaban as High Chieftain, instead of the Saar Iaholas, created a rift between the northern and southern clans, a rift which has since grown wider, although the Karvosti loyalists have failed to notice it (except that they hear less and less from the Saars, Gaois, and Enoais). But now the Sovereign's Oath is ready to act. With cunning and force of arms, they are secretly trying to coerce Clan Enoai into joining their alliance, and have sent agents south to gather intelligence and sow discord between Ambrians and barbarians. The Sovereign's Oath strives to unite the clans under the red-stained banner of the Blood-Daughter

and reestablish Symbaroum, which cannot be done without a clear common enemy: Korinthia!

There are a few groups of Sovereign agents present on and around Karvosti, and some of them will play a part in the adventure *The Witch Hammer*. Apart from that, they are mostly gathering information and engaging in sabotage – the latter meant to trick Ambrians into suspecting barbarians, and vice versa. The person pulling the strings is Faark of clan Gaoia, who is permanently stationed at the pilgrim camp. He claims to be a paraplegic, and lives entirely on charity. He also pretends to read people's futures, which is really just an excuse for talking to (or questioning) Ambrians and other barbarians.

As for enemies, the Sovereign's Oath is of course in conflict with everyone, but has thus far kept a low profile. The Huldra is probably the one closest to realizing what is going on, as both clans have executed all witches except the Keepers, who have been taken prisoner and are forced to respond briefly and dismissively when Yeleta tries to contact them. Tharaban is another high priority target. Ideally, both of them would be killed in a way that made it look like Ambria's doing, but not before a few more chieftains have taken the Sovereign's Oath, and the mere fourteen-year-old Blood-Daughter is ready to overthrow the High Chieftain.

THE WITCHES

The barbarian witches, led by the Huldra Yeleta, will do just about anything to avert the disaster about to befall the world. They are convinced that the darkness spreading through Davokar is a result of both the Ambrians' and clan-folk's growing efforts to cultivate the forest. However, they cannot agree on what should be done in order to turn this dire situation around. There are simply not enough witches to stop all expeditions from venturing into the woods, and they are well aware that their actions have consequences for all clans. Should they use force against Ambrian fortune-hunters, Korinthia would most likely consider it an act of war and send her armies into the forest, resulting in a massacre which must be avoided at all costs.

Instead, the witches must choose one of two paths. One is the path they are already on, which means influencing the Ambrian government through diplomacy, and fighting the awaking darkness as best they can, or lulling it back to sleep. The second path, which is gaining in popularity, would be to unite the clans and seek an alliance with the elves. That way, the Queen's people could be driven out of the forest, never to return. This is a path Yeleta will not walk until the situation in Davokar has become completely unsustainable and there is no longer even a glimmer of hope.

And there is reason for hope. Whether it is due to the witches' efforts is irrelevant; what matters is that some Ambrians have begun to heed the warnings of witches and elves. Yeleta has arranged secret meetings with a priestess and

lightbringer named Deseba the Old, and though the priestess did not say much, she implied that there are groups within the Sun Church willing to cooperate. The fact that the Iron Pact has begun to take action is also a good thing. Sure, only a small part of Davokar's elven population is active, and some of them have such a rabid hatred for humans that not even the witches are safe in their presence. But if the witches, the sun priests and the more sensible elves could come together and reach an understanding on how to proceed, it might still be possible to avoid a large-scale war - there might even be hope of a brighter future.

On the other hand, there are many forces working against such progress, deliberately or indirectly. The current leaders of the Sun Church describe the witches as "harbingers of the Eternal Night," and large sections of the Ambrian people have embraced this view. Queen Korinthia and her representatives show decency, but do very little to help, and would probably like to seize Karvosti for themselves. Then there is the situation in the north. The witches of Saar-Khan and Gaoia, especially their Keepers, have always been a rather difficult and reserved lot, and Yeleta has never been particularly concerned by their absence. Now it is beginning to trouble her, on the rare occasions when she has nothing else to worry about. Something does not feel right...

THE IRON PACT

The goal of the Iron Pact is quite simple: to stop the raging forces of Wratha, and in extension Symbaroum, from being brought back to life. How to achieve this is more difficult, or at least complicated, to describe. In the Halls of a Thousand Tears, the elven Elders (with Lord Eneáno as their leader) are slow to act, as they have witnessed the fluctuating state of the world for centuries. And while some of them acknowledge the current threat, it will take a lot for the occasionally unstable and unfocused Eneáno to spring into action.

The younger leaders' opinion of humanity ranges from friendliness to pure hatred. The hostile ones have long regarded humankind as a disease, existing only to subjugate and cultivate Wyrhta, which consequently provokes Wratha to awaken. Some even say that the disease of humanity is not of this world; that it has no place among elves and elder folk, as it came to their lands from a place beyond. The less hostile elves are not necessarily friends of humanity, but believe all life to be sacred, and that it is the duty of the elves to help every living being find its place in Creation - as they see it, they do not have the right, nor are they obligated, to destroy some of Wyrhta's children in favor of others.

As for allies, members of the Iron Pact get on well with both the witches and the Ambrians who have realized what dangers their people's violation of Davokar might bring. Humans who aid the Iron Pact, by providing information or operating on their behalf in places where elves cannot, are called Ironsworn. There are not many of them - a couple in

Thistle Hold, a handful in Yndaros, and a few more in the minor cities - but their numbers are growing. And then, there are of course the changelings.

The ritual used to create changelings was developed by the Theourgs, the priest mages of ancient Symbaroum. It is a process teeming with corruption, and entails grave violations against Wyrhta's laws. Nonetheless, the elves of the Iron Pact have reluctantly embraced it, thinking that the goal justifies the means. Deep within the Halls of a Thousand Tears sit seventeen winter elves who would have been thoroughly corrupted a long time ago, had it not been for the protective runes covering their bodies, and the hymns being chanted around them. These elves are the ones who deform fairies into Siraphs, known to humans as Changelings, and they have the power to control and influence their children - see what they see, hear what they hear, even speak through their throats. In this way, the elves have kept an eye on the humans since long before the clans were formed. (Read more about Changelings in the *Create Siraph* sidebar on the next page.)

All whose actions might awaken Wratha - those who through their actions bring about severe Corruption, whether locally or regionally, temporarily or permanently - are considered enemies of the Iron Pact. It is quite possible to live in harmony with nature, as demonstrated by the elves and the clanfolk; unfortunately, the Ambrians' expansionist nature puts them directly at odds with this mindset. And then there is the threat growing in the north, which so far has remained hidden from the leaders on Karvosti. The situation looks increasingly bleak, and the worse it gets, the more members of the Iron Pact abandon diplomacy in favor of violence and war.

THE SACRED OF THE OLD BLOOD

By the age of twenty-four, Lugander Galeia had already fallen out of favor with the Queen. He had not done anything to offend her, but Korinthia was far from happy when she learned that her frisky half-sister was spending lots of time with the lowborn half-noble son of a newly-rich vulgarian who did not win his knighthood until at the final stages of The Great War. However, had the Queen known the truth about Lugander and Esmerelda, her reaction would no doubt have been even harsher.

The cult of nobles known as The Sacred of the Old Blood operates in obscurity. Lead by Korinthia's stepfather, Duke Sesario, and her half-sister Esmerelda, the group seeks to harness the dark powers of Davokar for two specific reasons: ennobling the already noble blood of Ambria, and bringing the undead Queen Mother Abesina back to actual life. To achieve this, they recruit nobles from all corners of the kingdom and convince them that noble blood can never be corrupted; mildly tainted at worst, and only if one's blood is not noble enough.



These ambitious, unscrupulous people never get to meet anyone besides Esmerelda, and are kept unaware of one another (which, for instance, means that Lugander and Agramai Kalfas, also known as the Prince in Thistle Hold, do not know each other). They all contribute in various ways to exploring the powers of Corruption. They also provide Esmerelda and Sesario with dark gifts, either stolen, bought, or uncovered deep within the forest.

Lugander is one of the cult's youngest and most ambitious members. His banishment to Karvosti was no doubt most unfortunate, but also provided him with a great opportunity to study the effects of the dark powers and pick up what he can from the clans' vast stores of ancient knowledge. By divulging a great deal about the Ambrarian elite, he has also found a close friend in the High Chieftain, and it will not be long before he is able to persuade Tharaban into letting him enter the vaults beneath his stronghold. Surely, that would make Esmerelda think even more highly of him, and his dream of being her dark archduke might finally come true!

As a secret member of a secret cult, Lugander has no allies to call upon, nor are there any particular enemies standing in his way. First Guard Farvan seems to be suspicious, if not jealous, of his close relationship with High Chieftain Tharaban, but other than that Lugander does his best not to make enemies. When he needs something done, he recruits agents to do his bidding – preferably without giving away his true identity; otherwise he makes sure to dispose of them once the mission is complete. That way he can remain in the shadows and still accomplish his goals.

CREATE SIRAPH

6th-level transmutation (*ritual*)

Casting Time: 1 hour

Range: Touch

Components: V, S, M (see below)

Duration: Permanent

This spell requires a newborn child, which is both the target and the material component of the spell. The child undergoes both physical and mental changes, becoming eligible for the Change Self feat (they gain the traits indicated in the *Player's Guide*, page 48).

The ritual also weakens the child's vitality. For spring elves, this means that they will never reach the next stage of their elven life cycle, while humans have their lifespan shortened to $30 + 3d6$ years.

As for the mental changes, a mystical link is established between the siraph and the mystic, who can later use it to take control of their creation for up to 1 minute. The victim of the ritual is not aware of this link, not even when it is activated. The victim remains under the mystic's control indefinitely, so long as the mystic allows the host enough rest (i.e. the victim must be allowed to complete a long rest before the mystic can take control again).

There is no protection against the Corruption imposed by such a brutal spell as *create siraph*. Each time the spell is performed, the mystic suffers 1 point of permanent Corruption, and each time a mystic takes control of their creation, they suffer $1d4$ temporary Corruption.

ACT I:

The Search for Symbar

The first act of *The Witch Hammer* begins at the tavern known as the Longhouse, and ends with the player characters meeting and receiving information from Brother Bartho, the fortune hunter Elmendra's former associate. Alongside the player characters' investigations, a number of predetermined events will occur, increasing the suspense. All the while, distressing rumors tell of an army encamped near Thistle Hold, an army, they say, headed for Karvosti.

Game Opening

THE PLAYER CHARACTERS have come to the Longhouse to eat and enjoy the stories, or are otherwise recovering from the rigors of Davokar. Since there are an unusual number of fortune hunters currently present on the plateau, the tavern is packed with customers, and by the table next to the characters are the ogre Crueljaw and the sun priest Aranitra.

No check is required for the characters to realize that Crueljaw is upset – they can tell by his sullen expression, and by the haste with which he quaffs his Blackbrew. Characters who actively try to eavesdrop on what he and Aranitra are whispering to each other must make a **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check** – with advantage because Crueljaw is not being discreet. If successful, the character overhears the following exchange:

Crueljaw: “He promised! You were supposed to find her and take her into your care!”

Aranitra: “We did all we could. When someone like Elmendra doesn't want to be found...”

Crueljaw: “But she was marked! She reeked of... sulfur, or...”

Aranitra: “Be quiet, and calm...”

Crueljaw: “But she may die! All alone, sick and hurt! Die!”

Aranitra: “Lower your voice, or I'm leaving.”

Crueljaw settles down, and their words are drowned by the noise of the other customers. With a successful **DC 15 Intelligence (History) check**, the characters recognize the name Elmendra: An Ambrian fortune hunter, often called Elmendra the Senseless out of both respect and ridicule, who after many years of exploration became obsessed with making the greatest find of all: Symbar.

Suddenly, Crueljaw springs to his feet. He grabs the liturg and raises his fist, roaring with rage. The characters must roll initiative if they wish to intervene. Crueljaw rolls as well ($1d20 + 2$). On his initiative count, he will punch Aranitra,

knocking her unconscious unless he is grappled, convinced – a **DC 20 Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion) check** is required – or takes 11 or more damage before his turn (use the **Plunderer** if needed, *Bestiary*, page 186). Regardless, the ogre unleashes all his anguish and frustration, screaming at the either terrified or unconscious Aranitra, or possibly at the characters (if they managed to stop him). He blurts out the following pieces of information, responding to direct questions or simply to get it off his chest:

- ◆ Father Piromei promised to find and help Crueljaw's friend Elmendra.
- ◆ Elmendra has been blight-marked and looked emaciated when she visited Crueljaw.
- ◆ This was seven days ago.
- ◆ She gave him an artifact, a war hammer she had taken from the caverns deep within Karvosti, and asked him to give it to the priests.
- ◆ Her real reason for going down into the tunnels of Karvosti was of course to find directions to Symbar. And apparently she did: “I found Symbar,” she said.
- ◆ Then she disappeared, and now she probably lies dead somewhere in the woods, half-eaten by jakaars or goblins.

As Crueljaw falls back on his chair, the player characters realize that the entire tavern has gone quiet. Everyone is staring at the ogre in utter amazement. Someone grunts: “Symbar...” while others shake their heads in disbelief.

A player character who turns to face the crowd may make a **DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check** to judge the crowd's reaction; if successful they notice two people (a Queen's Ranger and a Black Cloak, both disguised as fortune hunters) standing relatively far from each other. The expressions on their faces are unlike the others: grim, calculating, and fiercely observant – just like the player character, they are watching their surroundings carefully.

After a long moment of silence, the room erupts in heated argument. Three factions are easily distinguished: one entertaining thoughts like “what if it is true?!”; one assuming the rumors to be false or that Elmendra has lost her mind; and one claiming that there are other rumors regarding the way to Symbar which would be less dangerous to verify: “*Breaking into the heart of Karvosti is about as easy as bedding the Queen!*”

The discussion is becoming increasingly vitriolic, as personal conflicts begin to surface between those claiming to

know best. Many try to elbow their way toward Crueljaw, and soon fists are flying. The player characters can choose to join the brawl, try to put an end to it, or back off.

Before long, the tavern door slams open and a young man staggers into the Longhouse. He keeps one hand pressed tightly against his throat, but cannot stop the blood from gushing through his fingers. It takes a while before the situation calms down enough for the dying man to be heard:

“*The... The High Chieftain,*” he hisses. “*The stronghold is under attack!*”

Under Attack

THE SOVEREIGN'S OATH will stop at nothing to achieve their goal – to sow dissent between Ambrians and the clanfolk. While the player characters contemplate what they have learned about Elmendra and Symbar (or beat up troublemakers), the northern clans make a serious attempt to murder High Chieftain Tharaban, with the help of hired Ambrian cutthroats. The leader of the group is a notorious assassin (see below), and her warriors are all former soldiers who were discharged from the Ambrian army after having sustained serious disabilities from fighting barbarians.

RECENT EVENTS

The attempt on Tharaban's life will not succeed; in fact, the assassin and her accomplices have already started their escape by the time the player characters get involved (if they do). They managed to enter the stronghold as planned, but were detected by grumpy old Lumedo, who came walking after having stopped for a few pints of Blackbrew on his way home. His startled scream was loud enough to alert the wrathguards posted at the outer gate.

The assassin sent half of her warriors to stall the guards, while the others followed her to the throne room where Tharaban was dining with his family. Unfortunately for the assassin, another group of wrathguards had heard Lumedo's cry. She fired a poisoned dart at the High Chieftain and ordered her sellswords to attack, but only half of them did – the rest fled the scene along with their charismatic leader.

The warriors' escape plan is to run towards the way down, and scale the cliff to reach the road on the outer side of the wall. The assassin lets her minions go first; not out of kindness, but hoping that they will draw attention to themselves so that she may escape unnoticed.

THE FIRST ENCOUNTER

If the player characters head for the stronghold, they will soon see a group of warriors running away from it, towards the northern tip of the plateau. A successful **DC 11 Wisdom (Perception) check** reveals that they are wearing dark-yellow coats, similar to those worn by the Ambrian army;

if the character then makes a **DC 15 Intelligence (History) check**, they realize that the coats are of an older model which has not been used for almost ten years.

If the player characters decide to block their path, the aged sellswords will try to fight their way past them. They will focus on characters who are clearly of Ambrian descent, while furiously hurling profanities at them, calling them “traitorous scum,” “savage-humpers,” and “darkness-lovers.”

Veterans

“*For Ambria! For Nightbane!*”

A group of former soldiers in the Ambrian army who were all discharged due to injuries (physical or mental) sustained in battle with barbarians – especially the Jezites and the Karits. They are overjoyed to have been given a chance at revenge and to be serving their country once more, and have done their best to clean themselves up after many years of debauchery and drug abuse.

The veterans have stats as an **infantry soldier** (*Bestiary*, page 198), but each carries a flask of liquor (for the nerves, gives them advantage on saving throws against being frightened and opposed checks to convince them to surrender) and an uncut ruby (value: 50 thaler). There are two sellswords for each player character.

THE ASSASSIN

After having fought the sellswords, the player characters have a chance to spot the enemy leader. If they explicitly state that they are looking for more attackers and pass a **DC 18 Wisdom (Perception) check**, they will catch a glimpse of a shadow heading north, dashing nimbly from bush to bush along the eastern edge of the plateau.

They have no problem cutting her off, and they must succeed at a **DC 15 Dexterity (Stealth) group check** to surprise her. This encounter can unfold in several ways. If the characters attack her immediately, the assassin will fight for one turn in order to assess the strength of her opponents. If she has no hope of beating them, she will commit suicide – either by hurling herself off the cliff or swallowing the poison capsule already resting in her mouth.

If the characters wait for her to react, and some of them appear to be Ambrians, the assassin will try to persuade them to help her. She claims to represent "Ambrian interests" and suggests that it is the duty of all Ambrians to aid her. The characters must answer right away. If they hesitate for too long or turn her down, she will try to escape by firing her crossbow at and assaulting whoever seems to be the easiest target; if she fails, she commits suicide by biting down on a poison capsule.

On the other hand, should the player characters agree to help her, they must act quickly - getting her to safety, keeping her hidden, and when the situation has calmed down, smuggling her off the plateau.

The Night Cape/Violing

"You die, or I die. That is all."

If she still lives, the leader of the attackers is Karenia, alias the Night Cape (page 37). Should the player characters have encountered and killed the Night Cape during a previous adventure, she can simply be replaced by the less famous (but just as skilled) assassin calling herself The Violing (use the same stat block).

INSIGHTS

If the characters have bested the sellwords, the bodies can be examined.

Should they have failed their **Intelligence (History)** check to identify the outdated coats, they may now try again, but this time those with the Loremaster feature or experience of serving in the Ambrian army have advantage.

A successful **DC 13 Wisdom (Medicine)** check reveals that the sellwords are in their late fifties, each with plenty of battle scars and at least one permanent injury each - one of them has a crooked spine, another an indentation on his skull which must give them constant, blazing headaches. A character with the Medicus feature has advantage on the check.

A character who goes through their pockets and passes **DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation)** check will find a leather pouch on each sellword. They are black and tiny, each

containing a small ruby (value: 50 thaler), whose surface looks completely raw and uncut.

A successful **DC 20 Intelligence (History)** check - a character with the Loremaster feature or the Bushcraft trait has advantage - reveals that similar rubies have been used as currency by the northern barbarian clans when visiting the markets of Thistle Hold or trading with traveling merchants.

It is possible to take one or more of the sellwords alive, but when interrogated, they will probably just shower their captors with more insults and profanities. Even if the interrogation succeeds (requires a **DC 20 Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion)** check or mystical powers), they know very little:

- ◆ They were hired in Thistle Hold to assist in the murder of the barbarian High Chieftain.
- ◆ Their employer was the same woman who led the attack; she never mentioned her name.
- ◆ They were to be rewarded with 500 thaler worth of gems, but would happily have done it for free - the barbarians serve the witches, and the witches are creatures of the Eternal Night; moreover, the barbarian savages ruined their lives by making them cripples.

OUTCOME

If the player characters helped hunt down the fleeing attackers, and perhaps turned a few beaten-up sellwords over to the wrathguards, First Guard Farvan will visit them personally to express his gratitude.

Should the characters have drawn any conclusions as to what happened, he would like to hear them, though he does not offer much information in return. He tells them that Tharaban is injured, but alive, and that the assailants arrived on Karvosti disguised as merchants and fortune hunters, in small groups, probably over the course of several days.

If the political scheming (*Gamemaster's Guide*, pages 172-174) is used, all characters who helped defend the stronghold will gain +1 to their relations with the High Chieftain and the Guard of the Slumbering Wrath.

Investigations

REGARDLESS OF HOW the player characters react (or do not react) to the attack on the High Chieftain's stronghold, they will probably want to know more about Elmendra and her activities on and around Karvosti.

Many claim to have seen and spoken to her in the past year, and can testify that she often returned wounded from her expeditions in Davokar. Three people - the ogre Crueljaw, Teresma at the Longhouse, and Edrafin - have seen her meet with specific individuals, who might know more about what she has been up to.

Crueljaw: The retired monster hunter would like nothing more than to join the search for his friend Elmendra, but he simply cannot. He blames old age and various ailments, and the fact that he has angered the Sun Church's representatives on the plateau. In reality, Crueljaw's greatest problems are his drunkenness and the crushing guilt eating away at him. Should the characters go to him for guidance and advice, he suggests that they ask the barbarian sellword Amegor, who was very close to Elmendra - in fact, Crueljaw suspects that they were lovers.

Teresma: The hostess of the Longhouse does not like to talk about her guests. It takes a successful **DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check** for her to admit that she sometimes saw Elmendra share a booth with Mankel, an independent explorer, schooled by Ordo Magica. A character that succeeds by 5 or more will make her confess to having seen them hunched over a map which clearly depicted the northern archipelago of Lake Volgoma.

Edrafin: Money talks, as they say. Edrafin has seen Elmendra with Brother Bartho on several occasions, and he is certain that they went on at least one expedition together, little over a moon ago. But this information will cost the characters ten thaler, or possibly a favor (the nature of which is for the Gamemaster to decide). If it becomes a matter of coin, some clever haggling and a successful **DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) check** may cut the cost in half.

AMEGOR'S TENT

The barbarian Amegor raised his tent at the outskirts of the pilgrim camp, in part because most of his customers were Ambrians, and also because he had “a serious appetite for southern she-folk.” His tent is easily found by asking around, but when the player characters come calling for the owner, no one answers.

The dome-shaped hide tent is not high enough to stand in and roughly four paces in diameter. Despite the darkness inside, no light is needed to realize what has happened. Anyone with a **passive Perception of 13 or higher** can smell the iron and urine in the air – the foul stench of the recently deceased.

Amegor is lying on his back, arms stretched to the side, his throat slit. He was contacted by one of the Black Cloaks present at the camp, who was willing to pay for information about his expeditions with Elmendra. When Amegor had told the stranger everything, the anonymous buyer offered him a cup of wine spiked with a sleeping elixir, before cutting his throat.

When asked, Amegor's neighbors will say that they have seen nothing out of the ordinary. The barbarian was often visited by people wishing to hire him for various missions, and he probably was these past few days as well. Still, no distinct visitor comes to mind.

The following observations can be made inside the tent:

- ◆ A **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check** – the Medicus feature grants advantage on the check: Amegor died about a day ago. The deceased shows no signs of struggle; he must have been unconscious when the killer slit his throat.
- ◆ A **DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine) check** – proficiency with the Poisoner's kit gives advantage: His tongue is red and his breath smells of mint – clear indications that the elixir Sleeping Drops was used.
- ◆ A **DC 20 Intelligence (History) check** – proficiency with the Poisoner's kit gives advantage: Sleeping drops are expensive, illegal to sell, and therefore only used by real professionals, such as the Black Cloak's witch hunters and the Queen's spies.
- ◆ A **DC 20 Intelligence (Investigation) check** – the Medicus feature grants advantage: It seems that the deceased was holding a cup or a glass in his right hand as rigor mortis set in. None of the goblets found in the tent show signs of recent use.

Sleeping Drops, ELIXIR

The sleeping drops consist of a syrup-like liquid which can easily be mixed with another beverage without significantly affecting its taste. Brewing it is a time-consuming process, so difficult that only a master alchemist can manage it. But many of them would never even attempt it, as the powerful elixir will not only induce sleep, but corrupt its victim.

Those who ingest the sleeping drops will inevitably pass out within a round or two – once ingested they must make a **DC 20 Constitution saving throw** against the poison's effect at the beginning of each round, a character who imbibed alcohol or a large meal at the same time has disadvantage on the saving throw. Once unconscious, they continue to make **Constitution saving throws** at disadvantage (due to being unconscious) at the same difficulty until either a minute passes or they succeed at the saving throw. On a success, the creature wakes up but their speed

is halved, they have a -2 penalty to their AC and Dexterity saving throws and can't use reactions. On their turn, they can use a bonus action or an action but not both. Regardless of their traits or features they can't make more than one attack or cast a spell with a casting time of an action (or longer) on their turn. Once conscious, the victim can repeat the saving throw, ending the effect entirely on another success.

If a minute passes without a successful saving throw, the creature is asleep for an hour. They wake up after the hour passes and gain the benefits of completing a short rest. Another creature can use their action to wake the asleep creature before the end of the hour but they are affected as above until they succeed at their saving throw.

The victim receives 1d6 temporary Corruption, enough to blightmark the feeble-minded.

MANKEL'S RESTING PLACE

The former Novice of the Order, Mankel, is not as easy to find. If asking around persistently among the pilgrims and fortune hunters, the player characters will learn that he has been seen by many these past days, and that he was cheerful and generous, insinuating that a brilliant future lay ahead. Apparently, he was last seen roughly one day before the beginning of the adventure, by two witnesses – the wrathguard Ranata of clan Karohar and a fortune hunter named Lisel. Both will say that Mankel left the camp accompanied by two people dressed as Ambrian merchants, headed northwest towards the edge of the cliff.

If the characters follow these directions and keep their eyes open, they will soon find traces left behind by Mankel – but to do so, they must not only search the plateau itself, but also the mountain wall. With a successful **DC15 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Survival) check**, one of the characters discovers a piece of cloth flickering in the wind, stuck on a protruding twig further down the face of the cliff – it must have gotten there recently, or it would have blown away by now.

With another successful check, this time with disadvantage, they discover a fairly fresh footprint by the edge of the cliff. A **DC 10 Intelligence (History) check** – characters with the Loremaster feature or who served in the Ambrian army have advantage on the check – allows them to know that the footprint was made by a standard army boot.

Should the characters leave the plateau to investigate the ground below, they will find the place where Mankel landed, but no body. They must pass a **DC 20 Wisdom (Survival) check** in order to track down the corpse, which has been dragged away and feasted upon by a pack of jakaars. This is what happens to those who, like Mankel, always think the best of the Queen's lackeys – in this case two Rangers who, after he had told them all he knew about Elmendra's activities, pushed him over the edge.

When the jakaars (twice as many as the player characters) have been driven away, the following conclusions can be drawn from examining the corpse:

- ♦ **DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine) check:** Mankel died from the fall. There are no signs of any poisons or wounds inflicted by weapons.
- ♦ **DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check:** In a pocket inside his tunic is a freshly-made money pouch containing 20 pristine thaler coins.

BROTHER BARTHO'S HIDEOUT

When Bartho returned from a trip into the woods the other day, he went straight to his friend Amegor hoping to share a flagon of wine. He found Amegor dead in his tent; his throat slit and his hand clutching a goblet. Recognizing the scent of sleeping drops, the Black Cloak deserter feared that his former brethren had come to Karvosti looking for him. Bartho took the goblet to have a closer look at it, and then he left Karvosti.

He fled to House Vearra's outpost and sought refuge with his lover, Erella, who works as a cook at the *Victorious Hawk*.

Edrafin, or someone else, can show the player characters to Brother Bartho's tent. It is empty, of course, and the neighbors say that its owner has not been seen since yesterday, when he returned from a brief expedition into Davokar.

The characters can figure out where Bartho is hiding by speaking to the wrathguards at the wall – one of the patrols saw him leave the plateau by himself, without any camping gear – or revisiting their previous sources: Edrafin, Teresma, and Crueljaw all know that Brother Bartho frequently visits Vearra's Outpost to enjoy the food. If asked, the cooks Iarlo and Salvia can also be of some use: Bartho constantly compared their food with the “Sun God’s cuisine” served at *The Victorious Hawk*.

The guards and staff at the outpost know nothing of Brother Bartho's whereabouts; the only ones who do are his lover Erella and her son Arold, who, as part of the outpost's guard force, was able to smuggle him inside. Erella will not tell the player characters anything until they convince her that Bartho's life is in danger, and that they only wish to help him (requires convincing arguments and a successful **DC15 Charisma (Persuasion) check**). Alternatively, the characters may of course ignore the cook's protests and search *The Victorious Hawk* anyway. However, in that case, Erella will scream and summon a squad of four guards led by Arold.

Bartho is hiding in the establishment's attic, accessible from the storage room through a hatch in the ceiling. He is suspicious and scared, and wise enough to realize the importance of what he knows (see below). Before the characters have had more than a few words with him, they are interrupted by the palisade's alarm bell – the outpost is under attack!

The outpost guards have the same stats as **infantry soldiers** (*Bestiary*, page 198) but they also carry Horseman's Bows (+3 to hit, 4 [1d6 + 1] piercing damage).

Brother Bartho

“Elmendra was my friend! MINE!”

Brother Bartho is a Black Cloak who on his missionary travels through the woods fell in love with a barbarian woman and, when faced with the decision of returning to the Titans or staying in Davokar, chose the latter. He spent many years in the woman's settlement by the shore of River Eanor, hoping to one day win her affection. But eventually he gave up, and has since put his acquired knowledge into practice as a treasure hunter – angry and bitter, at first, until Erella restored his fondness of life.

The chubby yet agile Bartho has but one great fear in life: that, because of his life choices, he has been branded a heretic by his former colleagues; that they would put him in chains if they had the chance, or perhaps even kill him on sight. For this reason, he keeps quiet about his past and does his best to avoid contact with the champions of Prios.



He has lost all faith in the Sun God; all that matters to him now is leading as good and comfortable a life as possible.

Bartho might join the characters on their travels through Davokar (see suggestions on page 128).

Tactics: Bartho was once a skilled and eager warrior, but while the skill is still there, he now does his best to avoid combat. If bloodshed is inevitable, he will take the offensive, targeting the opponent he dislikes the most.

THE OATH ATTACKS

Just as the player characters have started speaking with Brother Bartho, the Sovereign's Oath launches its assault on Vearra's Outpost. The purpose of the attack is to hit Ambrian interests in the forest and increase tensions between Ambrians and barbarians. They wear a type of studded leather/ring mail armor common among many of the southern clans, and use none of the special weapons for which the Saars and Gaois are known (bolas and throwing spiders).

The attacking force comprises a large number of **village guards** and **village warriors** (*Bestiary*, page 192), divided into five groups. A “**witch**” (see below) and the **lindworm** Adraselva will also enter the fray if/when the palisade falls. Adraselva's stats can be found in the *Bestiary*, page 35.

The player characters may choose between three main strategies.

Continuing the Interrogation: If the characters decide to keep interrogating Bartho, the Sovereign's Oath will have entered the outpost before they are finished. In that case, we recommend that they encounter a group of barbarians (two village guards for each character and one village warrior per character) inside the *Victorious Hawk*, and a “witch” and the lindworm on their way across the courtyard. The defenders will prevail if the characters defeat their opponents.

Should they win, all characters will have earned +1 to their relations with the factions House Kohinoor, the

Brother Bartho

Medium human (Ambrian)

Armor Class 17 (studded leather, parrying dagger)

Hit Points 52 (7d8 + 21)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (-1)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)	11 (+0)	15 (+2)	13 (+1)

Skills Deception +5, Insight +4, Medicine +4,

Persuasion +3, Religion +4

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages Ambrian

Challenge 3 (700 XP, proficiency bonus +2)

Manner rubs his bald head

Shadow silver, with a few stains of black, like an old dinner plate (Corruption: 2/6)

Equipment clay pipe and tobacco, Healing Spider, Explorer's Pack, 2d6 thaler and 1d6 + 3 shillings

Medicus (2/extended rest). Brother Bartho can

spend an action to bind a creature's wounds, restoring 1 Hit Die.

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

Shadow-sight. Brother Bartho can spend his bonus action to gain 2 (1d4) temporary Corruption, select a target creature he can see, and compare his passive Insight (14) to the creature's Charisma (Deception) check. On a success, he can determine if its shadow is normal, blight-stricken, blight-marked or thoroughly corrupt.

ACTIONS

Multiaction. Brother Bartho makes two attacks; one with his fencing sword, one with his parrying dagger.

Fencing Sword. *Magical Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8 + 5) piercing damage. *Anathema:* the sword does 1d4 bonus damage against abominations.

Parrying Dagger. *Magical Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d4 + 5) piercing damage. *Anathema:* the sword does 1d4 bonus damage against abominations or undead.

Priesthood, and the Sun Knights. Characters who become known to the Sovereign's Oath get a modifier of -1 in future negotiations with its agents, and another -1 if they slay Adraselva.

Aid the Defenders: If the characters head for the palisade to assist the guard force, they might stop the attackers from breaching the gates. A group of barbarian warriors (as above) gets past the wall and heads for the gate. Should the characters manage to defeat them in ten rounds or less, the assault is called off and the remaining attackers retreat.

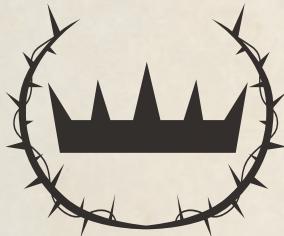
All player characters will have earned +1 to their relations with the factions House Kohinoor, the Priesthood, and the Sun Knights. Characters who become known to the Sovereign's Oath get -1 in future negotiations with their agents.

Escape: If they act quickly, the characters can flee across the palisade in the south, along with Bartho (and possibly Erella). A group of barbarian warriors (as above) block their path, trying to enter the outpost from that direction. But if they are defeated the characters can escape successfully.

If the characters leave Erella behind at the outpost, and she knows who they are, they all get -1 to their relations with the factions House Kohinoor, the Priesthood, and the Sun Knights.

During the attack, especially if the characters choose a strategy that involves melee combat at the outpost, the following insights can be drawn about the attackers – insights which might be of interest to Ambrian factions, as well as the High Chieftain and Huldra:

- ◆ A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check focused on the attackers' witch (during combat): The woman has adopted the garb and manner of a witch, but weaves no mystical spells; instead she throws or administers elixirs.
- ◆ An action spent making a successful DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check focused on a fallen barbarian warrior: They all have a symbol tattooed on the inside of both wrists: a crown entwined by thorns.
- ◆ A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check, focusing on a fallen guard warrior – the Medicus feature grants advantage: Anyone can tell that all warriors have the same red scar tissue on various parts of their bodies (arms, neck, chest). With a check, a character can conclude that the scars are the result of burnt-off tattoos.
- ◆ If a character knows about the scars, a successful DC 20 Intelligence (History) check – the Loremaster feature grants advantage: It is common among many northern clans to wear a tattooed symbol of one's god or guardian spirit.



The mark of the Sovereign's Oath, in one of its variations.

Sovereign Witch

Laughing deliriously while hurling firebombs

The Sovereign's Oath blames mystics and their twisted practices for the darkening of the world, which is why almost all Saarian and Gaoian witches have been executed. They do not mind alchemy, however, and knowing that Ambrians view the witches as fearsome symbols of the barbarian people, they have had their skilled alchemists dressed up like witches.

The Sovereign Witches wear masks of natural material; wide, flowing, many-colored dresses or robes; and various talismans, animal skulls, and braids. Unused to the horrors of battle, they often use drugs to bolster themselves to extreme – not to say mad – levels of courage and confidence.

Tactics: The Sovereign Witch stays in the background. Should someone attack them, they will simply try to dance away, laughing. If they are about to be captured, they will try to blind the enemy with Lightning Dust before hiding behind their allies.

THE ROAD IS REVEALED

Regardless of when and under what circumstances the player characters learn what Bartho knows about Elmendra's travels, he will not share his information without being given something in return. If he is pressured during the Sovereign's Oath's attack, Bartho demands that he and Erella are brought to safety (her son does not matter to him); if he is interrogated under less chaotic circumstances, the characters must make him a promise: that whatever they find on their expedition will first be shown to him – and that everything related to Elmendra's disappearance will be left in his care.

The Importance of Brother Bartho

The Witch Hammer presupposes that the player characters meet and speak with Brother Bartho. However, if they for some reason should not, there are other ways into the adventure. The leaders of the various groups competing for the map to Symbar, as well as their superiors, all know about the three places visited by Elmendra (see Act II). Perhaps the player characters are contacted by one of these leaders (representing the Rangers, the Priesthood, or the Sun Knights), and enlisted as a reserve force? Or perhaps some greedy member of a certain group wants the map for himself/herself, and pays the characters to assist? It is highly unlikely that this would become necessary, but as Gamemaster, it would not hurt to prepare for all eventualities...

Sovereign Witch

Medium human (Barbarian)

Armor Class 14 (witch gown)

Hit Points 39 (6d8 + 12)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	17 (+3)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Int +4, Wis +3

Skills Insight +3, Perception +3, Sleight of Hand +5

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, poisoned

Senses passive Perception 13

Languages Barbarian

Challenge 1 (200 XP, proficiency bonus +2)

Manner sweeping, dancing movements

Shadow dark gray, like shale on the bottom of a river (Corruption: 0/4)

Equipment 2d4 Mistballs, 1d4 doses of Lightning

Dust, 1d4 + 2 Boom Stones, 1d4 Acid Orbs (see *Alchemical Bombs*, to the right)

Drug-addled. The sovereign witch has ingested drugs that give the above immunities and resistances.

Graceful Movement. The sovereign witch can use their bonus action to Disengage and then move up to their speed.

ACTIONS

Dagger. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage.

Mistball. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 30/90 ft., one target. *Hit:* 1 bludgeoning damage and the creature must make a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or be stunned until the end of its next turn. See *Alchemical Bombs*, to the right.

Boom Stone. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 30/90 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (2d6) thunder damage and the creature must make a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or be deafened until the end of its next turn. See *Alchemical Bombs*, to the right.

Acid Orb. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 30/90 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (2d6) acid damage. At the start of its turn, the creature takes 1 acid damage unless it spends its action to wipe the acid away. See *Alchemical Bombs*, to the right.

REACTIONS

Lightning Dust. A creature that comes within reach of the sovereign witch must make a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or take 7 (2d6) thunder damage and become blinded until the end of their next turn. See *Alchemical Bombs*, to the right.

Alchemical Bombs

These special elixirs work much like those given in the *Player's Guide*, pages 180–183. See that section for rules on producing them.

Mistball (DC 10/15/20)

The Mistball is small enough to fit in the palm of one's hand, and consists of dried leaves wrapped around a dazing powder made from drone spores. On a hit, the target takes 1 bludgeoning damage and must make a **Constitution saving throw** with a DC equal to the one required to make the Mistball. On a failure, the creature is stunned until the end of its next turn.

Lightning Dust (DC 10/15/20)

Lightning Dust consists of unstable substances encased within the thin shell of the alum nut. When it breaks, the dust explodes in a blinding flash of light. Any creature within 5 feet must make a **Constitution saving throw** with a DC equal to the one required to make the Lightning Dust. On a failure, the creature takes 2d6/4d6/6d6 thunder damage and is blinded until the end of its next turn.

Boom Stone (DC 10/15/20)

The Boom Stone is best described as a smaller, weaker, more primitive version of the alchemical Thunder Ball. Unstable substances are formed into a paste and placed inside a hollow sandstone roughly the size of a fist. A creature hit with the Boom Stone must make a **Constitution saving throw** with a DC equal to the one required to make it. On a failure, the creature takes 2d6/4d6/6d6 thunder damage and is deafened until the end of its next turn.

Acid Orb (DC 10/15/20)

The alkaline liquid of the Acid Orb is contained within a spherical flask of acid resistant porcelain. A creature hit with the Acid Orb must make a **Constitution saving throw** with a DC equal to the one required to make it. On a failure, the creature takes 2d6/4d6/6d6 acid damage. At the start of its turn, the creature takes 1 acid damage unless it spends its action to wipe the acid away.

At first Bartho can reveal the information below, but he has more to offer when asked about the specific locations; pieces of knowledge which are described under the sub-headings beginning with “The Way To...” (pages 143, 153, and 161).

- ◆ Considering Karvosti’s history, Elmendra was convinced that the cliff must hold clues about where to find the city of Symbar – possibly even its exact location. For the past three years she has been obsessed with finding a way into the caverns, preferably some type of back door.
- ◆ Brother Bartho only accompanied her on one expedition, to the ruins which the barbarians call Faarah Moroun. They went there to study the locking mechanism of an ancient gate, but ran into a pack of rage trolls; Bartho was injured and had to stay at the camp. Elmendra entered the ruin on her own and returned two days later, breathless and white as a ghost. She had found what they came for, but said that she had also *“disturbed something which should have been left asleep.”* What it was she never said, perhaps because she eloped before the creature showed itself.
- ◆ As they travelled to and from Faarah Moroun, Elmendra told him about a previous expedition. She claimed to have visited Yeferon Isle in Lake Volgoma, as it had once been home to religious fanatics who were at war with the High Chieftain of the time. She described the journey as *“the bloodiest, most gruesome she had ever experienced,”* but also claimed to have met someone who had shown her a hidden passage into the cliff.
- ◆ He also recalls that Elmendra wished to speak with a girl named Elida. Bartho told her that the girl was most likely with the witches. But that was then. More recent

Brother Bartho as a NPC

If the Gamemaster so wishes, Brother Bartho could offer (or even demand) to accompany the characters on their journey, which may be particularly appropriate if the gaming group is a small one, or the characters lack some of his abilities. In that case, we suggest that Bartho is played by the Gamemaster, but that one of the players takes over during combat and other situations that require die rolls.

An interesting alternative would be to let Bartho use the characters for gathering clues, and later betray them in the beginning of Act III. For example, he could contact his good friend Cleaver, who would settle for a considerably smaller part of the treasure, or collaborate with the Queen’s Rangers in exchange for a small fortune?

rumors suggest that Elida left Karvosti, mumbling something about going home to seek forgiveness. This probably means that she has returned to New Earthmoor – the extremely religious free settlement in which she was raised.

- ◆ If the player characters ask about Amegor, Bartho will admit to having taken the goblet from the dead man’s hand. He examined its content, and according to a reliable source (the Adept of the Order, Madar), the beverage had been spiked with Sleeping Drops – which indicates that “higher powers” were involved in the barbarian’s murder.

The Course of Events

WHEN SHE LEARNED about Father Piomei’s meeting with Crueljaw, Queen Korinthia reacted with white-hot fury. She was particularly enraged by the fact that directions to Symbar can be found in the witches’ dwelling. If this is true, it means that the Huldra has repeatedly lied to her Legate and envoys.

She ordered Lothar Grendel to demand a statement from Yeleta about Elmendra’s alleged discovery. Not only did the Huldra refuse to answer; she clearly demonstrated her lack of respect by sending one of her Keepers to meet with the Legate!

Now Korinthia’s patience has worn thin. Even if the reports of a map to Symbar are incorrect, the barbarian Arch Witch has gone too far, and the High Chieftain has proven to be no more than a docile lackey on Yeleta’s leash. Obviously, she hopes that the leaders on Karvosti will bow to her show of strength, but if they do not, she is fully prepared to wage war on them – annexing Karvosti would certainly ease Ambria’s exploration of Davokar, and would also be a

great symbol of Korinthia’s supremacy, to barbarians and elves as well as her own people.

As the player characters conduct the previously described investigations, distressing rumors have already started to reach the people of Karvosti. The characters can learn of this information themselves or from someone else; either way, they cannot fail to notice the ever-growing tensions on the plateau.

RUMORS FROM THE SOUTH

We recommend that the Gamemaster distributes the rumors according to the rough schedule below, in which Crueljaw’s outburst at the Longhouse counts as day 0. Should the player characters be on the move, they could of course be brought up to speed upon returning to the cliff.

Day 1: Something is about to happen! Two merchants arrive from Thistle Hold, claiming to have spotted soldiers on the fields west of the city. They were raising tents and

pavilions; a handful of large tents were already in place when the witnesses passed the area.

Day 2: A group of pilgrims brings news of military activity in Narugor. They travelled by boat from Kurun towards the Arch Bridge, and as they were leaving port, they noticed that several barges had arrived during the night. The ships had come from the south, carrying equipment and soldiers – most likely archers from Agrella.

Day 3: Several newcomers can tell of a military encampment having been established east of Thistle Hold. They say that there were roughly five hundred men, with more on the way. The purpose of the army remains unclear, but there is much speculation on the subject. Some think that Korinthia and her uncle, Duke Alesaro of New Berendoria, have finally had enough of each other. But most believe that the army is headed elsewhere: to Karvosti.

When the Characters Have Visited Their First Adventure Location in Act II: The army outside Thistle Hold continues to grow. Most recent to arrive was a cavalry unit of roughly one hundred soldiers from Seragon. The total number of soldiers must be close to five thousand.

When the Characters Have Visited Their Second Adventure Location in Act II: A hot rumor begins to circulate the plateau, even though no one really knows who first brought the news. The army outside Thistle Hold is now more than seven thousand strong, and a column of more than two hundred Pansars is apparently marching north from Yndaros. What is more, at the head of the column rides Queen Korinthia herself!

THE WITCHES WITHDRAW

Yeleta and her aids must deal with two separate threats. At roughly the same time as Elmendra visited Crueljaw, the witches learned that the lower parts of their caverns had

been colonized by spiders; shortly thereafter, the Ambrian Legate presented Queen Korinthia's threatening demands.

Through dream sights and divination, the Huldra realized that the situation would only get worse, so when the stronghold was attacked she had already isolated herself inside the mountain. She did this for several reasons. The spider situation must be handled delicately, as it is never wise to make enemies of the ancient forces of the forest, but also because people on the plateau would panic if they felt threatened from below as well as from outside (Ambria). Furthermore, she has little hope of being able to negotiate with a hostile Korinthia; no, better to stay away and not give the southerners the opportunity to stab her in the back – not until the problem with the spider princess is resolved.

In short, from the beginning of the adventure it is impossible to contact the witches. The Arch Witch can sometimes be seen standing in the entrance to her dwelling, wearing a white mask painted with red symbols (see the cover of the book). But no matter how much they beg, no matter their relations with Yeleta or her aides, neither the characters, the High Chieftain, nor anyone else, will be allowed inside.

THE KEEPERS ARRIVE

A few days after Crueljaw's outburst at the Longhouse, the Keepers start to arrive on Karvosti, summoned by the Huldra who needs all the help she can get in dealing with both the spiders and Ambrians. There are only eight of them, since the witches of Saar-Khan and Gaoia are missing, and clan Enoai is occupied with the situation in the north.

The player characters could witness the arrival of a Keeper or two – preferably Yarofal and/or Miralba – and hear of the others whenever they visit Karvosti between their expeditions.

THE KEEPERS ARRIVE

Clan	Name	Mode of travel
Godinja	Amanmaar	Rides a deer with fur red as fire and antlers resembling the sparse, leafless crown of a tree
Yedesa	Yarofal	Is carried up the mountain wall by her coloss, who later withdraws to Aloéna's grove
Baiaga	Makaba	Walks unnoticed past the pilgrim camp, follows the fault scarp, and reveals herself right before entering the mountain
Zarek	Miralba	Shapeshifts into an eagle and flies; assumes human form as she lands just outside the entrance
Varakko	Mardok	Appears suddenly, having used plane shift to walk the Spirit World and then emerges right next to the entrance
Odaiova	Lobaya	Arrives in a litter, carried by four barbarian warriors
Karohar	Yerola	Uses the elixir Transforming Draught to grow wings and comes flying
Vajvod	Kathman	Walks across the plateau flanked by two grim-looking, elderly symbolists who are completely covered with tattoos



THARABAN'S ACTIONS

It will take several weeks for Tharaban to recover from the assassin's poison, and knowing that the witches have shut themselves away from everyone does not make him feel any better. His agents in Thistle Hold keep him informed of the development; they give regular reports of newly-arrived troops, and bribe informants within the army to gain valuable insights into their plans.

A few weeks into the adventure, it is confirmed that the Ambrian army is mobilizing to annex Karvosti. Tharaban realizes that his only viable option is to submit to Korinthia's demands – Karohar is plagued by internal conflicts;

Baiaga is without a leader; Odaiova, Vajvod, and Zarek are practically allied to Ambria; and the warriors of the northern clans would hardly arrive in time, if they would answer his call at all. And since Yeleta – the only person who might be able to avert this crisis – will not leave her dwelling, there is only one thing left for the High Chieftain to do: save face.

When it becomes clear that Karvosti is under threat, the High Chieftain sends carrier-pigeons to the clan chieftains to explain the situation and request military assistance, thereby shifting some of the responsibility to them. Apart from the exceptions mentioned below, he receives exactly

the answers he was expecting – some do not answer at all; others can (regrettably) only spare a few hundred warriors, which would hardly make any difference; a few chieftains advise him to flee and buy enough time to prepare a counter-attack when winter comes.

Reinforcements: About three weeks into the adventure, two hundred barbarian warriors arrive to help defend the cliff. They were sent by Chieftain Leonod of Yedesa, Tharaban's old clan. Having marched through the gates, they encamp on the plateau west of the stronghold.

Expulsion: Some time later, when the size of the Ambrian army becomes evident, High Chieftain Tharaban decides to expel all Ambrians from the cliff, except for the Queen's Legation (through whom he must negotiate with Korinthia) and the residents of the sun temple, whom he does not wish to offend.

Other Ambrians (including player characters) who are on good terms with the witches, the High Chieftain, or the Guard of the Slumbering Wrath, may also be allowed to stay on, or reenter, the plateau.

The Gates Are Sealed: When Tharaban hears that Korinthia's army is marching north from Thistle Hold, he orders his men to seal the gates to the plateau – something the player characters will discover when they return from their third expedition in Act II.

One may still be allowed through, but not without good reason, especially if one happens to be Ambrian (as described above). It will normally take a **DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check** with disadvantage for Ambrians to convince First Guard Farvan to open the gates, but if the player characters already have good relations with Farvan and/or convince him that they are trying to prevent an Ambrian annexation then they can negate the disadvantage or even gain advantage with sufficient promises of favors owed in the future.

THE SUN CHURCH'S SCHISM

At some point during the adventure, a templar will come to the sun temple – preferably before the expulsion of the Ambrians. Shortly thereafter, the theurges, liturgs and black cloaks on the upper plateau come walking down, one after another, carrying what seem to be all their personal belongings.

They remain on Karvosti for a few days before setting off for Thistle Hold. They are accommodated in the guest wing of the stronghold, and some spend their days at the Longhouse. The player characters can go there to have a chat with some Black Cloak, Aranitra, or her initiates. A successful **DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check** will reveal the following information:

- ◆ Either Alisabeta Vearra is misinformed, or her father has gone mad: she claims that the Sun Knights have left the Curia and aim to establish their own church.

Sun Knight Player Characters

All templars will be summoned to Templewall to swear a new oath of allegiance before the Knight Commander, this time to Dead Prios. All sun knights must make a decision – either to take the oath, or be excommunicated by the newly-formed Templar Church. Both the Priesthood and the Twilight Friars will welcome defectors with open arms, but many will leave the church entirely and find other ways to practice their faith.

Player characters who are faced with this decision may put off their visit to Templewall until the adventure *The Witch Hammer* has been completed. Until then, they have a bit of leeway: they can make their stance clear, or lie when asked about it. Eventually, these players should seriously consider having their characters leave the templar organization – the level of fanaticism which will be expected from them will most likely make it difficult to be part of a group of heretics (i.e. other characters).

- ◆ She claims that all templars have been summoned to Templewall to pledge allegiance before the Knight Commander; a sacred oath to someone called Dead Prios.
- ◆ Alisabeta says that Karvosti's sun temple now belongs to the Church of Dead Prios, and will act as a base as they take vengeance upon the darkness of the forest.

VOLUNTEER DEFENDERS

If the Gamemaster so wishes, they can emphasize the gravity of the situation by having former residents return to Karvosti – barbarians who have lived in Ambria and are convinced that Queen Korinthia plans to attack their people. If so, these would be people with good reason to dislike, or even hate, Ambria.

Perhaps they tried to establish a business in some town or village, but were ruined by xenophobic locals? Perhaps they hoped to find work, but were rejected in favor of refugees, or were abused like slaves? Perhaps they simply wished to learn more about, and from, the Ambrians, but were taken for spies and forced to endure many years in some freezing dungeon?

This motley crew begins to arrive roughly one week after Crueljaw's outburst at the Longhouse, one by one or in larger groups. Many claim to have useful information regarding the Ambrians' activities, and they are all armed and ready to defend Karvosti – as warriors, healers, or scouts. They think they have a pretty clear picture of how the clans would be treated as subjects of Queen Korinthia, and most would rather die than let that nightmare come true.

ACT II:

Trailing the Explorer

Through the events of Act I, it is clear that the famous fortune hunter Elmendra has made a tremendous discovery, probably in the caverns of Karvosti, most likely something that reveals where one may find the throne of the last Symbarian emperor. The player characters can hardly be anything but determined to get to the bottom of it all – and they are not alone in that ambition.

ONE OF THE greatest treasure hunts in the history of the region, if not the greatest, is about to begin. In addition to the characters, there are seven groups involved in the hunt, all led by competent and ruthless individuals who will do whatever it takes to succeed.

Luckily, the members of these seven groups are far from the best of friends, so the characters have a good chance of playing them against each other and forming temporary alliances when the hunt becomes particularly intense. Cunning and sneaky maneuvers will probably be at least as important as strength of arms – something that, hopefully, the players and their characters will be very quick to realize. Making allies is key, and so is playing the rival groups against each other.

This chapter begins with a description of the seven competing groups and their members, followed by presentations of three adventure landscapes which contain local challenges and one or more rival groups to fight or join forces with.

Traveling in Davokar

During the course of the adventure, particularly in Act II, the player characters will travel between various places in Davokar. Inspiration for what transpires during these journeys can be found in the *Gamemaster's Guide*, pages 62–81. Any unused events from the characters' journey to the Halls of a Thousand Tears (page 80) can be used, and adding to that you will find two more scenes below, on pages 152 and 161.

Note that in this adventure, all journeys go through Bright or Open areas of the forest. Expeditions into the wild and the dark will have to wait until part four of *The Throne of Thorns*, when the time comes to visit Symbar.

Before embarking on Act III, the characters should have acquired the following:

- ◆ Information regarding an entrance to the Underworld somewhere near Karvosti, and how to navigate the Underworld in order to reach the roots of the cliff.
- ◆ Information on how to open the Undergate and enter Karvosti.
- ◆ Information regarding the caverns of Karvosti, especially where not to go.

The Hunting Parties

THE PLAYER CHARACTERS' competitors are definitely no amateurs and should not be taken lightly, especially the leaders of the Ambrian factions.

All of them are determined to win, and will not hesitate to call upon their subjects and allies to achieve this goal. They are not merely in it for the reward which supposedly awaits the winner, but also for the glory and prestige, and of course the status such a success would bring to their organization or faction.

HOUSE KOHINOOR

Korinthia and her kin are neither convinced that Elmendra has really found directions to Symbar, nor that she has managed to enter Karvosti. Still, this is the best lead they have come across in their search for the Symbarian Throne of Thorns, and besides, they do not mind displaying their military might in front of the witches and the High Chieftain – on the contrary: it is time the barbarians learned their place in Korinthia's growing realm.

The two groups hunting in the name of the Queen have orders to trail Elmendra and figure out what her discovery was and where she made it. Should it prove to be something of great value, they are ordered to secure the treasure; that is, bring it back to Ambria or to the nearest Ambrian military garrison (the one that eventually will besiege Karvosti, for example).

The Factions' Sources of Information

All groups gain information about Elmendra's activities from the dead fortune hunters on Karvosti, firsthand or through someone else. The Priesthood interrogated and killed Amegor, and House Kohinoor did the same with Mankel. The information was then brought to the Sun Knights by a Black Cloak who happened to share their world view.

As for the fortune hunters: one of the groups (Dagesto) got to Mankel before the rangers did, but never considered killing him; another (Ioséfia) approaches and purchases the information from a young ranger at the *Victorious Hawk*. The third group will only come into play if the player characters spare Brother Bartho's life, and if they refuse to share their treasures and information with him (see *The Road is Revealed*, page 126).

Each of the two squads are commanded by a seasoned officer (see below) having experience from woodland expeditions and a profound knowledge of the region's history, and is comprised of carefully selected **rangers** (*Bestiary*, page 190, as many as the player characters) and one **wizard** (see *The Wizards of the Order*, below). Reinforcements in the form of more rangers are available on Karvosti, but if the leaders or the mages are killed, there will not be time to replace them during this adventure.

The two groups will split up and assume a wait-and-see approach. They prefer to stay hidden in the background and let others handle the challenges waiting at the various

adventure locations, and then show up to take the uncovered information by force. But they are also open to forming alliances; should two or more groups clash with each other at the location the rangers are surveilling, they may reach out to one of them and extend an offer of collaboration. However, they will most likely dispose of their partners later on, if it can be done without significant risk.



Captain Marvello

"I act in the name of the Queen."

When the sinkhole opened up in Thistle Hold, spewing out beastly warriors, Captain Marvello excelled in the defense of the town. He became widely acknowledged as a great soldier, a reliable leader, and a man of action, which is why he was later chosen to command a company of rangers. When it was time for Ambria to join the hunt for Elmendra's treasure, Marvello was handpicked to lead one of the groups and got

Captain Marvello

Medium human (Ambrian)

Armor Class 17 (studded leather)

Hit Points 66 (12d8 + 12)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	20 (+5)	13 (+1)	11 (+0)	15 (+2)	17 (+3)

Skills Intimidation +6, Nature +2, Perception +4, Persuasion +6, Survival +4

Senses passive Perception 14

Languages Ambrian, Barbarian

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

Manner grumpy, hot-tempered

Shadow a dull gray, like an unpolished iron bar (0/9)

Equipment 2 doses of Antidote (moderate), 4 Herbal Cures, 1 Elixir of Life, 5 Flame Arrows, 5 Whistler Arrows (see *Special Arrows*, next page), 4d6 thaler and 2d6 shillings

Marksman. At the start of his turn, Captain Marvello can aim. His speed becomes 0 and he has advantage on his ranged weapon attacks.

Recovery (Recharge 5–6). Captain Marvello spends his bonus action and gains 4 (1d6 + 1) temporary hit points.

ACTIONS

Multiaction. Captain Marvello makes three attacks with his longbow or fencing sword.

Longbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8 + 5) piercing damage.

Fencing Sword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8 + 5) piercing damage.

REACTIONS

Parry. Captain Marvello adds 3 to his AC against one melee attack that would hit him. To do so, he must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon.

Special Arrows

Captain Marvello and others carry some arrows that are custom designed to produce special effects. The listing below gives their cost when bought at a market that carries them, a very unusual circumstance except for those that ask around the Marketplace in Blackmoor. The listing includes a price (per arrow) and a rarity, in case the Game-master wishes to assign difficulties to finding, crafting, or researching the arrows.

Flame Arrow (1 shilling, Uncommon). If the user spends their bonus action to light this arrow on fire, it does

1d4 fire damage in addition to its normal damage. If it strikes an inanimate, flammable object, the object catches fire. A creature within 5 feet of the fire can use its action to put out the fire.

Homing Arrow (5 shillings, Rare). This arrow is precisely balanced and crafted to be true in flight. When you fire a homing arrow you have advantage on your attack roll.

Whistler Arrow (8 ortegs, Uncommon). When this arrow is released it produces a loud sound that can be heard by any creatures within 500 feet of the archer or their target.

to choose his own men, with the exception of the brash and cheeky Master of the Order Loreanda, who he could have done without. The rest are well-trained rangers who have earned his trust in the past.

The roughly fifty-year-old Marvello is prepared to use just about all means at his disposal to complete the mission, but he is not completely heartless. If the player characters already know him, it will take a lot for him to resort to violence instead of negotiation. In other words: if Marvello wants something from the characters, he will first demand it, then use threats of force, and finally follow through with his threats.

Note that if Captain Marvello died when your gaming group played the first part of *The Throne of Thorns (Wrath of the Warden)*, or if there are other reasons for him to be absent,

the Gamemaster can simply change the name of the man leading House Kohinoor's first group of treasure hunters.

Tactics: Marvello stays back whenever possible, assisting his companions with well-targeted arrows. If he deems it necessary, he does not shy away from joining the melee himself, armed with his two fencing swords and all the experience he gained during The Great War.

Captain Lindra

"No one escapes me. No one!"

Despite being relatively young (38 years old), Captain Lindra has become famous for hunting down robbers in the Titans and around Yndaros. But as the situation in the south is beginning to stabilize, and all forces of good are needed in Davokar, she was relocated to the Kastor garrison two years

Captain Lindra

Medium human (Ambrian)

Armor Class 19 (laminated armor, shield)

Hit Points 82 (11d8 + 33)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	13 (+1)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)

Skills Acrobatics +4, History +3, Investigation +3, Perception +6, Survival +6

Senses passive Perception 16

Languages Ambrian, Barbarian

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

Manner staring gaze, relaxed gestures

Shadow dazzling like sunlight reflected off newly-sharpened steel (0/6)

Equipment 3 Herbal Cures, 1 Elixir of Life, 2 doses of Poison (moderate), 4 doses of Antidote (moderate), 2d4 thaler and 3d6 shillings

Poisoner. Captain Lindra can use her bonus action to apply moderate poison to her blade, adding 3 (1d6)

poison damage to her damage until the end of her turn.

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

ACTIONS

Multiaction. Captain Lindra makes three attacks with her longsword.

Mastercraft Longsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) slashing damage or 9 (1d10 + 4) slashing damage when wielded with two hands. *Deep Impact:* the sword does 17 (2d8 + 8) slashing damage on a critical hit or 19 (2d10 + 8) slashing damage when wielded with two hands on a critical hit.

REACTIONS

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



ago. There she became renowned as an excellent strategist, utterly fearless before the darkness of the forest.

Her greatest strength is her tactical brilliance and an icy composure bordering on intrepidity – she will always choose the most effective strategy, even if it is also the most dangerous. And she has no moral compass to speak of; all that matters is getting the job done, no matter who stands in her way or what agreements have been made!

Tactics: Lindra fights swiftly and relentlessly. She trusts her ability to evade enemy attacks, and that her shield and armor will protect her from the few that actually hit. If she knows that the opposition will be tough, she will not hesitate to apply a thin layer of poison to her already deadly blade.

The Wizards of the Order, Loreanda and Alessina

"Move aside, or I shall move you."

Loreanda comes from Ordo Magica's chapter in Kurun, where she studied under the prominent Davokar expert Argoi – something that made her boastful as well as arrogant. She thinks, with some justification, that she knows best in all matters related to the forest, which would not be a problem, did she not also assume everyone else to be as stupid as they are ignorant.

Alessina is one of the younger Masters of the Order, but few have as much experience of travelling through Davokar. She is covered in scars from head to toe (caused by cuts, acid, and fire) from countless encounters with wild beasts and abominations. That she is even alive is a testament to her power, and one can tell by the simple pearl necklace around her neck that she has lost many friends – each of the seventeen pearls represents a fallen comrade.

Tactics: The wizards stay in the background and support their allies with fiery scorching rays, using their Spark Stones if necessary. If an enemy still manages to reach them, they will use levitate to flee, and attempt to keep some distance

Wizard of the Order

Medium human (Ambrian)

Armor Class 14 (order cloak)

Hit Points 76 (8d8 + 40)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	17 (+3)	20 (+5)	19 (+4)	13 (+1)	9 (-1)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Int +7, Wis +4

Skills Arcana +10, Nature +7, Perception +4

Senses passive Perception 14

Languages Ambrian, Barbarian

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

Manner cautious, condescending

Shadow shiny bronze with streaks of gold (Corruption: 1/14)

Equipment Spark Stone, Field Library, Excavation Tools, 1d6+2 thaler

Spellcasting. The wizard's spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell attack +7, save DC 15) and they know the following spells:

Cantrips: *firebolt* (0), *light* (0), *message* (0), *minor illusion* (0), *prestidigitation* (0), *ray of frost* (0)

1st-level spells: *burning hands* (1d4 + 1), *shield* (1d4 + 1), *sleep* (1), *thunderwave* (1)

2nd-level spells: *levitate* (1d4 + 2), *scorching ray* (2)

3rd-level spells: *counterspell* (1d4 + 3), *fireball* (1d4 + 3)

4th-level spell: *faithful hound* (4, Alessina) or *wall of fire* (4, Loreanda)

Rituals: *alarm*, *detect magic*, *identify*

ACTIONS

Dagger. Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. Hit: 6 (1d4 + 4) magical piercing damage. **Returning:** if the wizard misses with a thrown attack, the dagger returns to their hand at the end of their turn.

Loremaster. The wizard makes an Intelligence (Investigation) check to determine the properties of a magic item. See *Player's Guide*, page 124 for specifics and the DC for the check.

between themselves and their foes. They each carry a magical dagger earned by their service to Ordo Magica, and will use them in a last desperate attempt to protect themselves if an enemy gets close to them, or use their mystical returning property to throw the dagger at an enemy and have it return almost immediately to their hand.

THE TEMPLARS

The Templars' biggest dream is to find Symbar, but not to claim its Throne of Thorns. No, where others seek treasure and symbolically significant castles, the Knights of Dead Prios are trying to find "the Mother of all Darkness." When they do, their sole purpose will be retribution: Prios' killers will be crushed, annihilated, ground to dust! Even if the rumors of a map to Symbar are false, they expect to gain a great deal from following Elmendra's trail, not least by punishing the darkness standing in their way.

The sun knights in question are commanded by Leohan Mekele, and with him are several young but experienced templars, all previously stationed at the temple ruin east of Karvosti. Reinforcements are standing by in both of these locations, but will not be summoned until more than half the group has fallen in battle.

As for their strategy, the avengers of Prios care little for subtleties and finesse. They demand (and expect to be given) whatever they want, and all who refuse or obstruct them are branded cultists, or worse. But they are not stupid; when encountering overwhelming odds, they will wait for the

power balance to shift or look around for acceptable allies. If they have already entered a partnership, they will honor that agreement, until it becomes evident that the partner in question is an agent of darkness...

Leohan Mekele

"There is nothing but the laws of the Lawgiver."

Leohan lost his mother and two sisters on the journey through the Titans, and now his two brothers have been taken by the dark. His hatred for Davokar and its darkness has burned like a beacon ever since his mother was slain by elves, and he often weeps, long and bitterly, over his dead god, over his failure as a defender of the sun. Leohan's brothers died honorably in battle, and now they are with Dead Prios, as he too shall be one day. That day is probably, and hopefully, coming soon.

If the player characters encountered Leohan and his brothers during *Wrath of the Warden*, it will obviously affect their relations. If they are on reasonably good terms with each other, Leohan will be open to cooperation, as long as he has nothing to lose by such agreements. But honestly, it

Leohan Mekele

Medium human (Ambrian)

Armor Class 18 (hallowed full plate)

Hit Points 67 (9d8 + 27)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	12 (+1)	17 (+3)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)	11 (+0)

Saving Throws Str +8, Con +6

Skills Athletics +8, Insight +5, Religion +4

Senses passive Perception 13

Languages Ambrian

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

Manner smiles menacingly, baring his teeth

Shadow shimmering gold with stains of black, as if burned by acid (Corruption: 2/6)

Equipment component pouch, 2d10 thaler, book of the Lightbringer, templar symbol

Action Surge (1/day). Leohan can take an extra action.

Holy Aura. Leohan can choose to gain either 1, 1d4 + 1, or 1d4 + 2 temporary Corruption when he makes a successful attack roll. He can then add 3 times the Corruption gained as radiant damage to the attack.

Indomitable (1/day). If Leohan fails a saving throw he can reroll the saving throw.

Noisy. While wearing his armor Leohan has disadvantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks.

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

Spellcasting. Leohan's spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell attack +5, save DC 13) and he knows the following spells:

Cantrips: *accurate strike* (1), *guidance* (1), *sacred flame* (1), *spare the dying* (1)

1st-level spells: *bless* (1d4 + 1), *command* (1d4 + 1), *cure wounds* (1d4 + 1), *sanctuary* (1d4 + 1)

2nd-level spells: *hold person* (1d4 + 2), *spiritual weapon* (1d4 + 3)

3rd-level spells: *dispel magic* (1d4 + 3), *protection from energy* (1d4 + 3)

4th-level spell: *death ward* (1d4 + 4)

Witchhammer. Leohan adds 1d8 radiant damage to his melee weapon attacks, included below.

ACTIONS

Multiaction. Leohan makes two attacks with his longsword.

Mastercraft Greatsword. **Melee Weapon Attack:** +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. **Hit:** 12 (2d6 + 5) slashing damage plus 4 (1d8) radiant damage.



is more likely that Leohan has every reason to detest, or even hate, the player characters...

If Leohan was killed when your group played *Wrath of the Warden*, he can be replaced by one of his brothers. And if they too are dead, or if the Gamemaster would rather have someone else leading the group, he or she may simply change the name of the templar commander.

Tactics: If possible, Leohan fights back-to-back with his companions; otherwise his only concern is destroying the darkness, always with his mastercrafted greatsword glowing with his holy power.

Templars (as many as the player characters)

"I am the Light in a dying world."

Leohan is accompanied by a group of young, hot-blooded templars eager to prove themselves in battle against the hordes of darkness. They have all been stationed on Karvosti or at the new temple east of the cliff for a long time, and they all know what awaits them - filled with grief, but with burning hearts, they are ready to avenge their dead god.

See *Bestiary*, page 170, for statblocks.

THE SUN CHURCH

First Father Jeseebegai is just as eager as Korinthia to find Symbar, for exactly the same reason. The people of Ambria love their queen and are probably not ready for the upheaval the First Father intends to bring about. But if he was the one who fulfilled Sarkomal's prophecy... Well, it would change everything!

The group of hunters he has sent comes from the Twilight Monastery in the Titans, and is led by his cousin, the Black Cloak and theurg Father Argaton Soleij. Argaton's orders are crystal clear: find the way to Symbar and eliminate all enemies of the Sun Church. What Jeseebegai does not know

is that his childhood friend is having doubts, to such an extent that he (and the black cloaks following him) may start acting against the Curia's interests.

The Black Cloaks have always preferred to work in the shadows, rather than engage in open violence. They are quite open to collaboration, and Argaton, being a man of his word, will not lightly betray an ally. As the hunt progresses, he becomes more and more convinced that the heretic Father Sarvola is right in saying that humans should stay clear of Davokar. Eventually, this causes him to have a change of heart: any directions to Symbar must be destroyed, and all who have seen them must be disposed of - even if it means stabbing an ally in the back.

Also worth mentioning, is that the First Father has provided his cousin with a mighty artifact - the weapon which Elmendra gave to Crueljaw, who then handed it to Father Piomei. The theurges have examined the artifact closely and been able to determine its powers.



Father Argaton Soleij

"I believed I knew; now I know that I believe..."

The Confessor Argaton experienced The Great War from the medical tents; he witnessed horrendous suffering, and often had to intervene when his patients arose as ravenous undead. He believes in the Ambrian project - the kingdom's goal of growing so strong that no external threats would dare approach its borders. At the same time, he is increasingly worried by the internal threats which seem to grow by the day. And if truth be told, he secretly longs for the loving Sun God of his childhood.

Tactics: Argaton surrounds himself with allies, while letting the might of Prios incinerate his enemies (*guiding bolt*) and heal his friends (*mass healing word*). He carries Spiderbane in the form of a mace, but will not use it unless he has no other choice.

Spiderbane, ARTIFACT

The artifact that Elmendra mistook for the legendary Witch Hammer is actually nothing less than the weapon High Chieftain Maesticar thrust into the heart of the Spider King. Ever since Angatal Taar was slain, the weapon has been in the witches' custody, as they wait for the next hostile spider creature to emerge. Spiderbane is, whatever form it takes, a magical weapon (+3) with a special property (see below).

Transfiguration

The artifact can take different forms, according to its master's will. The master can use their bonus action and choose any simple or martial melee weapon. If the chosen weapon has the Thrown property, Spiderbane gains the Returning property. If the weapon normally has the Heavy property, it gains Massive instead. If neither applies, it gains Deep Impact. The transfiguration is completed at the end of the master's turn and cannot be used to make an attack until then. The form is set until the master wishes otherwise.

Requires: Bonus Action

Corruption: 1

Cleansing of the Blood

By cutting or pricking their own flesh as a bonus action, and letting Spiderbane come into contact with the blood, the master gains resistance to poison damage and immunity to the poisoned condition for one hour.

Requires: Bonus Action

Corruption: 1d4 temporary Corruption

Scourge

The master uses their bonus action and must make a **DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) check**. On a success, Spiderbane does 1d8 necrotic bonus damage against any beast for one minute.

Requires: Bonus Action

Corruption: 1d6 temporary Corruption

Father Argaton Soleij

Medium human (Ambrian)

Armor Class 15 (robes, shield)

Hit Points 93 (11d8 + 44)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	15 (+2)	19 (+4)	12 (+1)	20 (+5)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Intelligence +4, Wisdom +8

Skills Deception +6, Insight +8, Intimidation +6, Nature +4, Perception +8, Religion +4

Senses passive Perception 18

Languages Ambrian

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

Manner confident and superior

Shadow whitish yellow with a few dark spots, like the broiling summer sun covered by wisps of stormclouds (Corruption: 6/16)

Equipment 2d6 thaler, Prios symbol (Mystical Focus), the book of the Lightbringer

Spellcasting. Argaton Soleij's spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell attack +6, save DC 16) and he knows the following spells:

Cantrips: *accurate strike* (0), *acid splash* (0), *guidance* (0), *sacred flame* (0), *shocking grasp* (0), *thaumaturgy* (0)

1st-level spells: *bane* (1d4 + 1), *bless* (1d4 + 1), *command* (1d4 + 1), *guiding bolt* (1), *healing word* (1d4 + 1)

2nd-level spells: *aid* (2), *spiritual weapon* (2)

3rd-level spells: *mass healing word* (1d4 + 3), *judging bonds* (1d4 + 3)

4th-level spells: *banishment* (1d4 + 4), *guardian of faith* (4)

5th-level spells: *dispel evil and good* (1d4 + 5), *hallow* (5)

6th-level spell: *heroes' feast* (6)

Rituals: *anathema*, *atonement*, *divination*, *exorcism*, *holy smoke*, *lifegiver*, *purging fire*

ACTIONS

Mace (Spiderbane). *Magical Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d6 + 5) bludgeoning damage. *Deep Impact:* Spiderbane does 17 (2d6 + 10) bludgeoning damage on a critical hit.

Seasoned Black Cloaks

(as many as the player characters)

"May Prios have mercy on you, heretic!"

As his companions, Argaton has chosen a group of **Experienced Black Cloaks** (*Bestiary*, page 169) familiar with hunting both witches in Ambria and abominations in the Titans. They are certainly loyal, but to Prios rather than to their human leader. So when the priest begins to lose his conviction, half of them will leave the group, declaring the others to be heretics.

FORTUNE HUNTERS ×3

The wild cards in *The Witch Hammer* are three groups of independent fortune hunters who, for different reasons, have decided to follow Elmendra's trail. In short, they are after the map to Symbar, and two of them are quite willing to share the treasure with others - if the legendary ruined city of the last emperor is found, there should be more than enough for everyone.

Note that the third group only exists if the player characters does not make a deal with Brother Bartho (see *The*

Road is Revealed on page 126). This group is also open to cooperation, but not with the player characters: if involved, Bartho has made it perfectly clear to the ogre Cleaver that the characters are his primary enemies!

These fortune hunting gangs are not very strong on their own, but might tip the balance in fights between other groups. Furthermore, the leaders of each group have special skills which other factions might benefit from, through negotiation or by force.

In addition to the leaders, each group consists of **fortune hunters** (twice as many as the player characters) with the stats described in the Bestiary, page 185.



Dagesto

"Out of my way, that one is mine!"

Up until the battle against the Jezites in year 10, Dagesto was employed by the Ambrian army to construct and operate siege machines. During the attack on Haloban's fortress, everything seemed to go wrong – his catapults missed their targets, the breaching pots would not explode, and the fog from his Smoke Bombs dissipated within seconds. Dagesto went berserk and broke the jaw of one of his assistants.

Facing demotion, he resigned from the army and has since made a living as a fortune hunter in Davokar, with some success. Dagesto is ready to give his life for a chance of finding Symbar; he tried once before, and was nearly killed as his group walked straight into a monstrous, blight-born hunger wolf. He does not care much for the Queen's representatives, the Rangers in this case, and would love an opportunity to give them a rap on the knuckles. Or break them.

Tactics: Dagesto's first move is usually to trigger his firetube. Then, if he manages to keep his distance, he will throw a grenade or two before going berserk and throwing himself into melee combat, wielding the firetube as a two-handed weapon.

Dagesto

Medium human (Ambrian)

Armor Class 17 (laminated armor)

Hit Points 105 (14d8 + 42)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)

Saving Throws Dex +7, Int +3

Skills Perception +3, Survival +3

Senses passive Perception 13

Languages Ambrian

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

Manner boisterous, bobs his shoulders

Shadow grey as lead, with streaks of fiery copper
(Corruption: 0/7)

Equipment 1d6 + 1 burning powders, 1d4 + 1 flash powders, 1d6 + 1 bang powders, 1d4 + 1 grenades, locket with a portrait of a young Korinthia, Trapper's Manual, 2d6 + 2 thaler and 1d6 + 2 shillings

Alchemical Weapons. Dagesto is trained in alchemical weapons.

Backstab (1/turn). Dagesto deals an extra 24 (7d6) damage when he hits a target with a melee or alchemical weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of his ally and that ally isn't incapacitated and Dagesto doesn't have disadvantage on his attack roll.

Fast Work. Dagesto can use his bonus action to throw a grenade.

Siege Expert. Dagesto is trained in siege equipment and his attacks do double damage against structures.

ACTIONS

Firetube (Portable, Alchemical Weapon). When Dagesto fires the tube, each creature in a 20-foot cone must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking half damage on a success. The damage is based on the powder loaded: *Bang*: 5 (1d10) thunder; *Burning*: 6 (1d12) fire; *Flash*: 3 (1d6) fire + the creature is blinded until the end of its next turn.

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

Grenade. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 30/90 ft., one target (*Player's Guide*, page 166). *Hit:* 5 (1d10) fire damage to each creature within 5 foot of the target.

REACTIONS

Two-handed Force. If Dagesto misses a melee attack, he can reroll his attack.



Ioséfia Dresel

"Taste my crimson kiss..."

The barely thirty-year-old Ioséfia of the House Dresel comes from a family who, despite its lowborn status, has many

representatives at Korinthia's court. But there is something odd about House Dresel and its tendency to breed individuals of dubious character. Ioséfia grew up idolizing her much older cousin, Doriano, and was one of a few people with whom he shared his secret – that the notorious burglar known as "the Silver Lily" was in fact him.

Ioséfia listened to her cousin's tales, learned his tricks, and eventually began to follow in his footsteps. Instead of leaving a silver lily at the places she robbed, she left a kiss mark of red lipstick, which is why she would soon be called "The Crimson Kiss." But for Ioséfia, burglarizing Yndaros was not enough. When Doriano disappeared, she decided to take on another challenge, and has since spent all her time and resources trying to find Symbar. She will not rest until she has proved to her fawning relatives that there are other ways to power than kissing the Queen's feet.

Tactics: Ioséfia never goes to battle without first having rubbed poison on her stilettos, one of which she holds in each hand. And when the fight begins, she makes full use of her acrobatic ability – dancing in and out of melee combat, while using her enemies as shields to avoid being hit.

Ioséfia Dresel

Medium human (Ambrian)

Armor Class 17 (mastercraft lacquered silk cuirass)

Hit Points 97 (13d8 + 39)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	20 (+5)	17 (+3)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)

Skills Acrobatics +8, Deception +4, Perception +5, Persuasion +4, Stealth +8

Senses passive Perception 15

Languages Ambrian

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

Manner always smiling menacingly

Shadow dazzling like sunlight reflected off a shield of white gold (0/6)

Equipment 2d4 + 2 doses of Poison (moderate), Excavation Tools, 4d6 + 20 thaler

Backstab (1/turn). Ioséfia deals an extra 21 (6d6) damage when she hits a target with a melee weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of her ally who isn't incapacitated and she doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

Blade Work. If Ioséfia uses her bonus action to make an off-hand melee weapon attack, she adds her Dexterity modifier to the damage.

Cheap Shot. Ioséfia does 1d6 bludgeoning damage with her unarmed strikes. She can use her bonus action

to make two unarmed attacks or a single strike that the target must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw against or be stunned until the end of her next turn.

Cunning Action. On each of her turns, Ioséfia can use her bonus action to take the Dash, Disengage, or Hide action.

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

Marlit Cape (1/day). Ioséfia has advantage on one Dexterity (Stealth) skill check.

Opportunist. Ioséfia has advantage on opportunity attacks. If she deals damage to a creature with an opportunity attack its speed becomes zero.

Poisoner. Ioséfia can use her bonus action to apply moderate poison to her blade, adding 3 (1d6) poison damage to her damage until the end of her turn.

ACTIONS

Stiletto. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d4 + 5) piercing damage. *Deep Impact:* a critical hit with this weapon does a total of 20 (2d4 + 10) piercing damage.

REACTIONS

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



Cleaver

"You're not friends! You're enemies!"

In Thistle Hold, Cleaver is known as a capable and reliable leader of woodland expeditions. So far he has mostly run missions for Ordo Magica and Ambrian nobles, often to establish outposts or investigate ruins along the outskirts of Davokar. He might have bitten off more than he can chew when he accepted his friend Bartho's mission to follow Elmendra's trail, but the thought of one day getting to see Symbar makes his usually hazy eyes glitter with excitement.

Cleaver has the utmost respect for Bartho's wishes; if he says that the characters are the enemy, then that is what they are! He will not attack them on his own, but is happy to form alliances with others who wish them gone.

However, his companions are more concerned about their own skin than their leader's promise to some former monk - if Cleaver falls, it is unlikely that they will stay and fight.

Tactics: Cleaver despises ranged weapons, and regards mystics as outright cheaters. The enormous ogre rushes straight into melee combat and likes to demonstrate his awesome power against enemies by tripping them or shoving them across the battlefield. Should the enemies be outnumbered, he will instead knock a target prone and let his allies stab them.

THE COMPETITORS' MOVEMENTS

The Gamemaster is of course free to use the competing groups as they please; still, we would like to offer a bit of guidance. The rest of this chapter describes three adventure locations where the player characters will go looking for information. Each section includes the subheading Competitors in the Area where you will find suggestions on which rival groups are present in each location, depending on when the characters arrive - that is, on whether the site in question is the first, second, or third waypoint on their journey. There are also descriptions of what has happened to each

Cleaver

Medium humanoid (ogre)

Armor Class 16 (crow armor)

Hit Points 78 (12d8 + 24, see below)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	16 (+3)	13 (+1)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	9 (-1)

Damage Resistances Fire (see below)

Senses passive Perception 12 (darkvision)

Languages Ambrian

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

Manner blinks too often

Shadow reddish-brown, like ferrous soil (1/5)

Equipment Excavation Tools, 2 doses Elixir of Life,

Mind Stone (linked to Bartho), 1d6 thaler and
4d6 shillings

Brutal Trip. Cleaver can use his bonus action on a successful hit to cause the target to take 5 bludgeoning damage and become prone.

Calmness. Cleaver has advantage on Wisdom saving throws against enchantments and other mind-altering magics.

Cumbersome. While wearing his crow armor, Cleaver has disadvantage on all Dexterity checks.

Frostriven. While Cleaver wears this ornate ring he discovered on an expedition into dark Davokar he has resistance to fire damage and has advantage on any saving throws to resist gaining exhaustion due to heat.

Pariah. Cleaver has disadvantage on Charisma checks with other origins.

ACTIONS

Multiaction. Cleaver makes three attacks with his great flail.

Great Flail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (1d12 + 5) bludgeoning damage. *Ensnaring:* on a critical hit, a creature is knocked prone in addition to taking damage.

REACTIONS

Capture Weapon. When an attacker fails their attack roll, Cleaver can make an opposed Strength check. If successful, the attacker is disarmed.

Whip Back. When Cleaver misses an attack roll he can make a second attack roll.

group so far - if they have suffered losses or injuries, or if they have managed to call for much-needed reinforcements.

The table labelled *The Competitors' Routes* gives a first overall view of the groups' suggested movements, so that the Gamemaster, even at this early stage, can get an idea of what they could be like. However, the player characters' actions might cause unexpected changes, which is

why the Gamemaster must be ready to improvise – for example, if the group led by Ioséfia Dresel is vanquished during the characters' visit to Yeferon, they are out of the running and will obviously not show up at New Earthmoor or Faarah Moroun.

THE COMPETITORS' ROUTES

Group led by...	Stop 1	Stop 2	Stop 3
Captain Marvello	Yeferon	New Earthmoor	New Earthmoor
Captain Lindra	Faarah Moroun	Faarah Moroun	New Earthmoor
Leohan Meleke	New Earthmoor	Faarah Moroun	Yeferon
Father Argaton	Faarah Moroun	Yeferon	New Earthmoor
Dagesto	New Earthmoor	Yeferon	Faarah Moroun
Ioséfia Dresel	Yeferon	New Earthmoor	Faarah Moroun
Cleaver	Faarah Moroun	New Earthmoor	Yeferon

Yeferon Isle

YEFERON ISLE is famous to all who travel the waters of the region. Known as “the island on the brink of the Spirit World,” it is said to be a place where wraiths howl and the undead hold court. According to legend, the island’s unnatural state is explained by ruptures in the fabric of Creation, or by deep tunnels to the Darkness Below, but this is not really the case. Actually, the people of Yeferon crafted their own doom and current predicament.

This adventure landscape is about gathering information regarding a way down into the Underworld and how to navigate its caverns in order to reach the roots of Karvosti. The information can be found in a cave beneath a temple, with the old High Priest whose body has merged with his toad-like master. There are many ways to the priest, and the characters may have to face their competitors in the darkness below the island’s towering ziggurat.



Since the island's glory days, only a few groups of treasure hunters have made their way to the inlet of Yeferon Bay. Fewer still have returned.

BACKGROUND

At the time when the barbarians crowned their first High Chieftain, Yeferon and its surrounding islands were ruled by Queen Iasmial. While most other rulers in the region supported Serembar, Iasmial merely pretended to, while secretly trying to form a profitable alliance with the enemy, the Spider King Angathal Taar. For Iasmial and her people worshipped the god Oroke, or rather his self-proclaimed descendant – the toad creature Manaud, whose hunger for power and other appetites were insatiable.

Things did not turn out quite as the Queen had expected – the Spider King, while grateful for her services, had no interest in forging alliances. Iasmial kept her part of the bargain: her warriors and mystics found a way into Karvosti through the Underworld, stormed the cliff, and nearly slew Serembar. They did so empowered by Angathal's gift. He called it "Oroke's blessing," but in reality, the ancient scroll contained a powerful curse – one of the Symbarians' many failed attempts to "elevate humanity." Everyone present at the ritual was indeed strengthened in body and spirit, but then their bodies began to undergo a slow and unstoppable transformation. Those who returned from the attack on Karvosti were no longer human; little by little, they turned into monstrous abominations whose mere touch would kill their victims and raise them as undead.

From the top of the Yeferon ziggurat, Iasmial watched her people fall as a result of her greed. When the undead came swarming up the pyramid, she entered the crypt of her ancestor, Yefer, sealed the doors behind her, and took her own life on top of his sarcophagus. In the depths of the ziggurat was her high priest, Garathve – unaffected by the "blessing" he had bestowed on the warriors, and desperate with guilt. He kneeled before Manaud and begged him to hide and shield the world from the abominations he had created. The creature heard his request, and answered: "*There shall be a tear in the world, and in it the children of Garathve and Iasmial will be hidden. But at great cost; it requires sacrifice, and that sacrifice shall be Garathve's.*"

The High Priest, consumed with guilt and shame, had no objections. He let himself merge with Manaud, and his life force fueled a ritual which concealed Yeferon Isle from the world, and vice versa. The place has remained isolated ever since, and only a few know of its exact location. Over the centuries, a number of plunderers have managed to reach the island and some have even returned with their life. But these were mostly clan members who, having violated sacred taboos, never spoke of their expeditions.

THE WAY TO YEFERON

The effect of the spell which Manaud weaved over Yeferon Isle is much like that of a *hallucinatory terrain*, except that it affects a larger area. Those approaching the island will not notice it in any way, nor realize that something is missing

– their eyes will simply see a placid lake surface, unremarkable in any way. Those inside the area of effect find that they are unable to perceive the outside world, all seems cloaked in a grey fog beyond the Isle.

Brother Bartho knows the following about why Elmendra went to Yeferon and how she managed to get there:

- ◆ According to barbarian chroniclers, about five centuries ago the High Chieftain's cliff was attacked from below, by the raging hordes of the warrior queen Iasmial.
- ◆ As a result of her failed attack, the Queen brought a curse upon herself and her people, and the gods banished all of Yeferon to the spirit world (GM: not true). However, certain scriptures in the High Chieftain's vault indicate that the island can in fact be reached, as long as one does not trust one's senses.
- ◆ One must travel by boat, directly east through the passage between the islands that the Zareks call Vaer and Heanan. Set the course, bind the rudder, and have faith.
- ◆ Elmendra was reluctant to talk about her stay on the island, saying only that she lost four traveling companions to its less than hospitable inhabitants.
- ◆ She claimed to have met Iasmial's High Priest. Once again she did not say much, but apparently he told her about a way through the Underworld, leading to the roots of Karvosti.

The easiest way to reach Yeferon Isle is to first head for one of the Zarekian fishing camps on the western shore of Lake Volgoma, either by foot along the shoreline or by boat across the bobbing waves of the lake (from the free settlement of Jakaar, for example). There one can receive further instructions or pay someone to show the way to the passage between Vaer and Heanan, from which – as mentioned earlier – one must head directly east.

On the far side of the passage is a small stretch of open water, surrounded by islets in the Volgoma archipelago – a stretch which seems far too small for an island large enough to hold the palace of a queen. But if one has not strayed too far off course (requires a **DC 15 Wisdom [Survival] check**; those with the Bushcraft trait or the Loremaster feature have advantage), one will eventually pass through the barrier where one's perspective changes. The islets increase in number and suddenly seem very remote, and in their place, Yeferon Isle emerges before the sailor's bewildered eyes.

COMPETITORS IN THE AREA

If the player characters choose Yeferon as their first stop, they will encounter the groups led by Marvello and Ioséfia. These two may very well team up against the characters, but in that case, Marvello will try to dispose of Ioséfia's group as soon as the information has been obtained. On the other hand, it is also possible for the characters to form a temporary alliance with one of these groups.

Should Yeferon be the characters' second stop, Argaton's and Dagesto's groups will be present on the island. These groups are unlikely to collaborate with each other, but the characters might be able to join forces with one of them.

If Yeferon is the last stop on the characters' journey, they must confront Leohan and his templars, and possibly Cleaver as well if he has not already been eliminated. Collaborating with the ogre is obviously impossible, and there is a strong possibility that he will approach the templars for a chance to really give the characters a serious beating.

OVERVIEW

Yeferon Isle is about a mile and a half long from east to west, with a maximum width of about half a mile. The main island is comprised of two parts, one eastern and one western, separated by a ridge in the north and a deep bay in the south. The western peninsula is dominated by what was once the

Queen's city, Yeferia, now a vast ruin haunted by forlorn wraiths – most sung to rest by the winter elf Eliael; some still desperate for warmth and comfort.

The eastern part of the island used to be the religious center of the Kingdom of Yeferon; a kingdom whose population lived in relative safety and prosperity due to their pact with the ancient Manaud – the revered creature brought vigor to the people and their lands, in exchange for regular human sacrifices (usually foreign slaves or prisoners of war). Today, all that remains is the massive ziggurat with its partially wrecked wall. Manaud has long since fallen into hibernation, but the peninsula is still inhabited. Queen Iasmial has been raised as undead by a weak but constant aura of Corruption (see the box *The Power of Corruption*, next page) – an effect of Manaud's protective spell. Sitting on the top of her ziggurat, she commands the undead legions which were created when her corrupted warriors returned from Karvosti.

The character's task will be to enter the ziggurat where High Priest Garathve still lives, merged with his sleeping master. There are three ways in, which they can learn in the ruins on the western peninsula: through the horde of undead in the courtyard, through a tunnel from Galdag's Isle, and through a crack in the innermost coast of Yeferon Bay (connected to said tunnel). On their way there, and during their investigations, they must watch out for both affection-seeking wraiths and competitors hunting for the map to Symbar.

YEFERON OVERVIEW

- | | |
|-----------------------|------------------|
| 1. Eliael | 4. The Ziggurat |
| 2. The Plunderer | 5. Galdag's Isle |
| 3. The fortune hunter | 6. The Crack |



The Power of Corruption

What Manaud did to Yeferon constitutes, without a doubt, a crime against Creation. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that the place is plagued by lingering, corruptive energies. Every hour, everyone present on the island must make a **DC 15 Constitution saving throw**. Failing the save means that the character gains 1 temporary Corruption.

Yeferon Wraiths

"Join us! Aid us! Warm us!"

The black, shadow-like figures drifting around Yeferon Isle, alone or in groups, are drawn to living creatures like flies to rotting meat. They seek affection, sympathy, help, or just someone willing to listen, without realizing that their desperate touch is lethal for the living.

As long as the player characters are on the island, they risk catching their interest. At the start of each hour and the beginning of any round when a wraith is within 90 feet of a character, roll 1d6. On a result of **1 or 2**, 1d4 Yeferon Wraiths appears 90 feet away from a character. A Wraith that can seek a living creature will approach it and attempt to use its Wraith Touch on it, persisting at this until the creature is dead, or escapes.

YEFERIA

The once magnificent city of Yeferia is better preserved than many other ruin complexes from the same era, since it is not particularly overgrown due to the island's dry and meager soil. The city was once home to Iasmial's most privileged subjects and their servants, and there they have remained – **Yeferon wraiths**, awakened by the corruptive energies keeping the island hidden from the world outside.

Among the ruins are a few places of relevance to the adventure. However, the Gamemaster should give some thought to what the other buildings are like, perhaps with inspiration from the guidelines in the *Gamemaster's Guide*, pages 78–81. It should be mentioned that some plunderers have actually reached Yeferon through the centuries. This means that there are remnants of dead fortune hunters scattered across the island, and that most of the treasures have already been snagged by someone else (this becomes particularly evident if the player characters arrive to Yeferon after Ioséfia's and/or Dagesto's groups).

During their stay in the city, the players attract wraiths on a result of **1-3** on the d6, instead of just 1-2.

Eliael: In the middle of the city, at the base of a great toad monument of withered, red-speckled, black granite sits the winter elf Eliael. She sings a billowing, melancholy tune,

Yeferon Wraith

Medium undead

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 49 (9d8 + 9)

Speed 0 ft., fly 60 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	15 (+2)	11 (+0)

Damage Resistances acid, cold, fire, lightning, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained

Senses darkvision 120 feet, passive Perception 12

Languages the languages it knew in life

Challenge 3 (700 XP, proficiency bonus +2)

Manner moaning, sighing, and wailing with hunger

Shadow as dark as deep water in shadow (thoroughly corrupt)

Equipment —

Incorporeal Movement. The wraith can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. It takes 5 (1d10) force damage if it ends its turn inside an object. If the object is a creature, that creature takes 2 (1d4) temporary Corruption.

ACTIONS

Wraith Touch. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 12 (2d8 + 3) necrotic damage plus 1d4 temporary Corruption.

while hundreds of wraiths dance and whirl around the statue, as if hypnotized by the song.

It is possible to reach her, but the wraiths cannot be avoided. Any who try to approach Eliael must make a **DC 15 Wisdom saving throw** or be frightened of the wraiths. A character can repeat the save at the end of their turn. A character that succeeds at the save is immune to this effect for 24 hours. A frightened character must use their movement to head towards the edge of the square and must use the Dash action if possible or the Dodge action if they cannot move.

Eliael is almost three meters tall, emaciated, and dressed in a simple, knee-length, off-white tunic. She sits at the base of the statue, her hands resting on the stone, and those who come close will notice thin mycelium strands stretching from her lower arms and naked legs to the ground beneath her. She keeps her eyes shut until someone approaches, but she will not stop singing unless a character speaks to her in elvish.

She begins with a clarification, and a question: “*The song must go on, the pain must be eased, or Eliael shall suffer its torment, and then, so shall the world. Tell me, can you be persuaded to leave Yeferon, now, at once?*” Realizing that they cannot, she whispers: “*Do not disturb the Queen; choose the underground path, from Galdag’s Isle; from north of the temple into its womb. But be warned – if blind, you will fall victim to unseen snares; if foolish, your road will be short and incomplete. My advice: leave the kingdom of Manaud, or you will remain forever.*” Then she starts singing again, and the wraiths, no longer moving, their faces contorted with rage, resume their dance.

Note: Captain Marvello (stop 1) and Dagesto (stop 2) will speak to Eliael. She will not comment on this or answer questions (for every moment she does not sing, she risks losing the wraiths’ attention), but the footprints from their shoes and boots are clearly visible on the dry and dusty ground around her.

The Plunderer: On the shore of the stream which runs through Yeferia lies the skeletal remains of a plunderer who died on the island almost a decade ago. There is not much left of his clothes, only a dried and shrunken cuirass of studded leather and an equally age-worn knapsack. But in order to get close enough to examine the corpse, one must first deal with the wraiths circling it (as many as the characters).

A parchment scroll can be found in one of the knapsack’s pockets. The lines drawn on the parchment have almost faded, but can be detected with a successful **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check** (characters proficient with Cartographer’s instruments have advantage on this check). If successful, the players gain access to the handout about Yeferon, where the crack in the innermost coast of Yeferon Bay, through which one can reach Galdag’s tunnel, is marked out (page 201).

A character can make a **DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine) check** – the Medicus feature provides advantage – notices that many

of its ribs are broken, as if the deceased received an incredibly heavy blow to the chest, or fell from great height and landed on a rock. If the check succeeds by 5 or more, the character also manages to identify what looks like great claw marks on the ribs; the injury is definitely the result of a brutal blow from a clawed and abnormally large hand or paw (see *The Crack*, see below).

The Fortune Hunter: In a cellar below one of the ruins hides the **fortune hunter** (*Bestiary*, page 185) Serema, who was left behind by her colleagues less than a week before the first of the groups following Elmendra’s trail arrives on the island. She is absolutely terrified, will not trust anyone, and is slowly starving to death. A player character with a **passive Perception of 15 or higher** walking through Yeferia will notice her footprints – someone has moved, repeatedly and hastily, between a nearly dried-up well and one of the better-preserved ruins.

If the characters treat her gently, and especially if they offer her something to eat, Serema may be talked into lowering her loaded crossbow and sharing the information listed below. But getting her to leave her hiding place is much more difficult – good arguments and a successful **DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check** are required to save her from meeting a horrible end.

Note: if Yeferon Isle is the second or third stop on the character’s journey, Captain Marvello will already have found Serema, talked to her, and replenished her food supply. However, he could not persuade her to leave with him.

- ◆ She came to the island with her newly-wedded husband and his gang of treasure hunters; they had purchased information about the place from a penniless Zarek in Thistle Hold.
- ◆ After having unearthed some trinkets in Yeferia, they set off for the ziggurat; her husband, Darask, and one of the others approached it from the north. They ran the last stretch and were seen by the “stiffs,” but as they finally got inside, the pursuers backed down.

The Toad Monuments

The city’s architecture gives an indication as to what awaits inside the ziggurat’s caverns. Both outside and inside the pyramid, there are monuments, statues, statuettes, and little figurines in the shape of toads – some fat and stubby, others more frog-like; some with curled horns, others with near-human features; some with menacing fangs, others expressing serene authority. These variations came about as artistic styles changed over the centuries, along with Manaud’s temperament.

It should also be noted that Manaud-crosses (see the illustration to the right) in various sizes can be seen on most of the monuments; some separate, others carved into or painted on the sculptures.



Manaud-cross.

- ❖ Serema let out a terrified scream so that she and her group were detected as well. They fled, hunted by at least fifty undead. Running through the hills, she fell into a crack, and the undead hunters kept going after her friends.
- ❖ When she had finally mustered the courage to continue, she headed for their ship, but it was gone. She went back into the ruined city and found the cellar, where she has stayed ever since.

THE ZIGGURAT

The over three-hundred-feet-high step pyramid of red-speckled black granite has a rectangular base, each side almost two hundred paces wide. It was built in Symbarian times, when Yeferon was a flourishing province in the kingdom, formed around their ancient deity, Manaud. The structure itself has begun to crumble, as has the nearly fifteen-foot-high wall surrounding the ziggurat and its courtyard – many cracks mark its surface, some large and deep enough for someone to squeeze through.

At the top level of the ziggurat are about a dozen crypts where some of Yeferon's greatest rulers had the honor of being buried. The most striking element is the throne placed by the southern edge of the plateau, at the top of the stairs which are carved into the pyramid. Upon the throne sits Queen Iasmial, eagerly waiting for a reason to defend her kingdom. Her troops are perfectly lined up by the foot of the stairs, awaiting instructions – a thousand or so **dragouls** (*Bestiary*, page 156) whose creators are long dead, who have volunteered to join the queen's army.

The Courtyard: The area inside the cracked wall spans about a third of a mile wide and a quarter of a mile deep. The dragouls are standing in twenty rows with fifty individuals in each, the foremost row positioned about 150 feet from the base of the pyramid and, more importantly, from the two openings located on both sides of the bottom stairs. The dragouls will not follow the characters into the ziggurat; the challenge is to get inside.

The best way is to jump over the northern wall and sneak along the base of the pyramid. Reaching one of its southern corners without being detected requires a **DC 11 Dexterity (Stealth) group check**. If it fails, the undead guards will suspect that something is wrong, and an extra 1d4 will be added to the number of dragouls standing in their way. As the group runs from the corner to one of the openings (a distance of about 300 feet), each round at initiative count 0, 1d4 additional dragouls enter the area, each $(2d4 + 2) \times 50$ feet away from the characters' current position.

Alternatively, if the group jumps over the eastern or western wall, there will be about 650 feet between them and the openings. In that case, they must make a **Dexterity (Stealth) group check** when passing the wall and then

another check to reach the corner. Due to the greater distance, add 1d6 dragouls each round instead. Should any of the Stealth checks fail, the group would do best to turn back, as there will be a horde of dragouls standing between them and the pyramid.

If the player characters are detected, or try to lure the undead warriors away from their posts, Queen Iasmial will send ten groups of dragouls (each comprising twice as many undead as the characters) to hunt them down. One possible solution to this problem could be for a character (or an ally!) to sacrifice themselves by standing in the southern gate of the courtyard and drawing Iasmial's attention. That would cause her dragouls to turn around and march south, allowing the other characters to enter the ziggurat unnoticed. Alas, the brave person acting as bait will have a tougher time trying to evade the undead pursuers.

Note: If Yeferon Isle is the second (or later) stop on the player characters' journey, there will be gaps in the dragoul ranks, as Captain Marvello has already passed that way and used two of Ioséfia's fortune hunters as bait. Ten or so undead warriors lie slain in the courtyard, by the openings and near the western wall, along with some of Marvello's and Ioséfia's fallen companions.

The Temple Hall: On both sides of the bottom stairs are openings leading into a vast marble hall (300 feet on each side), with forty-feet-high pillars sculpted into naked, sexless humans with toad-like faces and arms stretched upwards. In the back of the hall is a podium on which Garathve once stood, informing people of Manaud's will. In the middle of the podium is a hatch through which human sacrifices were sent to appease the ancient one.

A player character with a **passive Perception of 15 or higher** who gets up on the podium will notice the edges of the hatch on the dusty floor. Otherwise, a character on the podium must make a **DC 15 Dexterity saving throw** or fall 30 feet into Manaud's chamber. Other characters within 5 feet may try to help their unfortunate companion by grabbing them: providing advantage on the saving throw.

A rope or rope ladder is needed to safely reach the lower levels through the hatch. Another way is through a rear alcove, found by going through an arched opening in the inner western corner of the hall. There is a short corridor leading to the priests' quarters, completely bare, as all furniture has moldered into dust. Among the large number of open doorways is a corroded copper gate; behind it is a zig-zagging staircase leading to the cellar. However, due to corrosion, the gate is sealed shut and can only be opened with a successful **DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check**. Also, before the gate lie two corpses – Serema's husband and his associate agreed to stab each other with their swords, rather than go back through the main exit to face the undead horde.



Note: If Yeferon Isle is the second (or later) stop on the player characters' journey, they will detect the hatch automatically, as Captain Marvello's group has already been there. If it is their third stop, there will be a broken spear on the ground and marks on the copper gate, indicating that someone tried to bend it open (Argaton's men did just that, before rappelling down the hatch).

GALDAG'S ISLE

For hundreds of years, the little islet north of Yeferon, once part of the main island, was home to a witch named Galdag. It was Manaud who kept her from dying, as she was his most treasured servant, charged with the care of his body and soul. She sang to her master, listened to his deepest thoughts and dreams, and rubbed ointments on the self-inflicted wounds he received during his many fits of rage. Needless to say, Galdag was tormented by her duties and took it out on her surroundings – to such an extent that one of the early rulers of Yeferon eventually sacrificed two of his more than thirty children to Manaud, urging him to separate Galdag's home from the rest of the island.

There is nothing on Galdag's cliff, except for a small ruin – a modest villa surrounded by a wall. The place was stripped of all treasures a long time ago, but the old witch's corpse is still there, sitting in her rocking chair, exactly as she did when Manaud fell into hibernation and his life-supporting powers finally abandoned her. Galdag's body is well preserved, albeit yellowed and withered, and her fiery mane still sprawls around her head.

In the cellar is a corridor with runes around the entrance and a toad statue the size of a moose's head hanging above it. The runes can be deciphered with a **DC 20 Intelligence (Investigation) check** – the Loremaster feature provides advantage on the check: "You who enter, know that no one under the heavenly sun governs Manaud."

The tunnel is a steep slope which goes under the bay and leads to Manaud's chamber. But in order to get that far, one must overcome the following obstacles:

The Saw Blade Trap: There is a trap just where the slope levels out. The tunnel is divided by an arched portal with runes carved along the top of its frame. The signs can be deciphered by a **DC 20 Intelligence (History) check** – the Loremaster feature grants advantage on the check: "Worship mighty Manaud, your protector." A **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check** reveals that the signs for "Manaud" are somewhat broader and deeper, as if they have been subject to more wear than the others (namely, from Galdag's finger, which she ran along the lines every single day for many centuries).

A character can make a **DC 19 Wisdom (Perception) check** to detect six narrow slits in the ceiling and on the floor north of the portal. The person noticing them may try to block the trap, which requires a **DC 19 Dexterity (Thieves' Tools) check**. If not, the trap must be deactivated by having everyone who passes run their finger along the runes representing Manaud's name.

Should the trap be triggered, each creature within 5 feet of the trap must make a **DC 19 Dexterity saving throw** when the long saw blades emerge from the floor and ceiling. Each blade deals 5 (1d10) slashing damage and a creature that makes a successful save takes only half damage.

Note: Captain Marvello's group will trigger the trap; hence, if the player characters arrive after them, there will be bloodstains on the walls and floor, and the slits will be easier to detect (advantage on the Perception check to notice the slits). If they arrive after Dagesto, he has run his finger along the Manaud runes and also set a trap of his own on the other side of the portal – a tripwire connected to a moderate Alchemical Mine (see the *Player's Guide*, page 186). The trap can be detected by a **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check** or a character with a **passive Perception of 15 or higher**.

The Pit: About halfway through the tunnel waits another trap – a simple pitfall concealed by a mystical illusion. A

character with a **passive Perception of 13 or higher** will notice that the air appears to be flowing in a way that seems odd for such an isolated tunnel. Identifying the exact location of the pitfall requires a successful **DC 17 Wisdom (Perception) check**, unless the players expressly state that they are testing the ground before them as they go, which gives them advantage on the check.

If the characters fail to notice the trap, a character might plummet 15 feet into a crack in the mountain; a crack with sharpened stakes at the bottom. They take 13 (2d12) piercing damage and 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage from the fall and the stakes. The character can make a **DC 13 Dexterity saving throw** to hold onto the edge of the pit, preventing the fall.

Note: If the characters arrive after Marvello, his group's footprints will give a clear indication as to the location of the trap. Someone has already walked straight into it (footprints in the middle of the corridor end abruptly), while others, as revealed by their tracks, advance through the tunnel by keeping to the western wall. A dead ranger can be found in the pit.

The Gate: There is a massive double gate at the end of the tunnel, made from black, red-brindled granite. It is completely bare, except for sixteen stone plates on the right half of the door, each about the size of a person's palm and carved with Symbarian symbols. A successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check** reveals a tiny hole in the middle of each plate. If one is pressed, it will sink an inch into the door.

The door can only be opened by pressing four of the plates in the correct order. The solution is found in the writing above the entrance to the corridor in Galdag's cellar – first you press the symbol for “heaven,” then “sun,” followed by “ruler/governor” and finally “Manaud.” While it would be fun if the players figured this out on their own, a successful **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check** – the Loremaster feature grants advantage – will grant them a hint: “There should be some sort of clue nearby...” – and the entire solution if they succeed by 5 or more.

If someone presses the wrong plate, or the correct ones in the wrong order, there is a deep clicking noise and the locking mechanism is blocked for a full day. Furthermore, when pressing the wrong plate with a bare hand, the character will be stung by a poison needle protruding from the plate as it slides into the door. The poison is a Strong one and deals 14 (4d6) poison damage or gives the character the poisoned condition for 1 minute (Gamemaster's choice).

With a successful **DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check**, one can determine which four blocks are the most worn. Then there are 24 combinations to choose from. The players must either make a guess or make a **DC 30 Intelligence (Investigation) check** – a successful Perception check to discover the most worn blocks grants advantage. On a success, the door opens, otherwise there is a click and they must try again after 24 hours.



Note: If the characters arrive after Captain Marvello, a character with a **passive Perception of 13 or higher** notices that a group has moved around the area for quite some time (they pressed the wrong plates and had to turn back, going over the courtyard instead). If they arrive after Dages-to, there will also be tracks in the dust which clearly show that the door has recently been opened.

THE CRACK

In the innermost coast of the Yeferon Bay is a crack, which connects to the tunnel between Galdag's Isle and the zigzag south of the gate. The only problem is that the cave closest to the opening is inhabited by half-a-dozen of **garougs** – huge, amphibious bears (*Bestiary*, page 140). They ended up on Yeferon by an unfortunate accident ten years ago, when the spring ice gave way and left them stranded on an ice float which drifted straight through the barrier.

Should the characters try to go that way, they will most likely have to fight their way through. It would be wise to approach the opening with caution, by scouting from a distance or sneaking closer to assess the situation. Each morning, roll 1d6. On a result of 1, 1d4 of the bears are out hunting in the waters around Yeferon. At night they are asleep and can be taken by surprise if the characters manage to sneak up on them.

Farthest in are the Garougs' cubs – six playful creatures with fur as white as snow. They are not large enough to pose a threat to the characters, but some will snarl threateningly

at them if they come too close, while the others let out heart wrenching calls for their parents. If the characters do not silence the cubs within 2 rounds, and some of the grown Garougs is out, roll 1d6. On a result of 1-3, they hear the call of the cubs and enters the area in 1d4 rounds. Finally, it should be mentioned that characters can make a **DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) check** to appraise the cubs' rare and beautiful fur at 50 silver thaler a piece. A character with the Bushcraft trait has advantage on this check.

Note: No other group will be taking this route, as only the characters can find the dead fortune hunter and his map.

MANAUD'S CAVE

Creating the barrier which surrounds Yeferon required more effort than Manaud's body and mind could bear. The ancient creature has now spent five hundred years in hibernation, still alive thanks to the power he draws from the Spirit World and the fluids his body soaks up from the moss around him. And all this time, High Priest Garathve and a handful of other unfortunates have been awake, their bodies merged with their slumbering deity.

Manaud's almost circular cave is approximately 300 feet in diameter and borders on an underground pond, in turn connected to the waters of Lake Volgoma. The cave walls and ceiling, as well as the bottom of the pond, are covered with blue and green shimmering algae that provides dim light throughout the area. The air is very humid, which explains why large parts of the ground are overgrown with lush, dark-green moss.

The southern parts of the cave are all desolate. The High Priest mentioned by Elmendra is nowhere to be seen, but in the north, on a bed of emerald moss, lies the great Manaud. The enormous, toad-like creature is about thirty feet long from nose to tail, and nearly fifteen feet tall, even while lying flat on the ground. His reddish skin looks almost black in the green-shimmering light, and the slow movements of

his body show that he is breathing. Manaud will not wake up, no matter how much noise the player characters make – but, of course, the players do not know that. Nor are the characters supposed to fight him, but should they consider it, you could have them all make a **DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check** to realize the foolishness of doing so. Should they insist on fighting him, use the stats of a **primal blight beast** (*Bestiary*, page 125) but remove its Recover legendary action and replace it with "**Slimy Skin**". Manaud excretes slippery pus from its skin and melee attacks against it are at disadvantage until the end of its next turn."

Between the characters and Manaud are four extremely well-sculpted statues of blackened silver, standing in a half circle, each on a plinth of granite – a gift from King Yefer, which was hardly needed when the toad creature was active, but now serves a defensive purpose.

Looking at the guardians, one will clearly see that they are not really statues, but rather full suits of plate armor. A character with a **passive Perception of 15 or higher** will also notice two interesting details: their armor displays many cuts and gashes, as if hit by bladed or pointed weapons, and the eyes of their masks are not blackened at all; on the contrary, they seem meticulously polished.

Since the magic which was once infused in these Ice Guardians has lost some of its potency, one might actually get past them. They react to sound and movement, but all who pass a **DC 10 Dexterity (Stealth) check** can sneak past without activating them. Should the check fail, all four will come to life, determined to slay the intruders. In that case, the characters must either fight or flee; the guardians never leave the cave, and will return to their plinths after an hour, when a second attempt can be made.

Ice Guardians

The occasional snapping or cracking sound, as if from pack ice in the spring

Ice Guardian

Medium construct

Armor Class 16 (full plate)

Hit Points 68 (8d8 + 32)

Speed 15 ft

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	11 (+0)	18 (+4)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)

Damage Immunities cold, necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 feet, passive Perception 10

Languages —

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

Manner relentless, mechanical movements

Shadow bluish-black, like congealed ice near the bottom of a lake (thoroughly corrupt)

Equipment —

False Appearance. While the frost guardian remains motionless, it is indistinguishable from an ice-coated suit of armor.

Gravely Cold. Each other creature that starts its turn within 120 feet of the ice guardian must pass a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or take 8 (1d6 + 5) cold damage and lose 10 feet of its movement speed until the end of its turn.

ACTIONS

Frost Lance. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 11 (1d12 + 5) piercing damage and 7 (2d6) cold damage.

REACTIONS

Sidestep. The frost guardian can move up to half its speed when another creature comes within its reach without provoking an opportunity attack.

The four guardians patiently wait to defend Manaud from any threat. When the creatures are activated, the eyes of their masks begin to glow with ice-blue light, while frost emerges on the armors and spreads towards their lances.

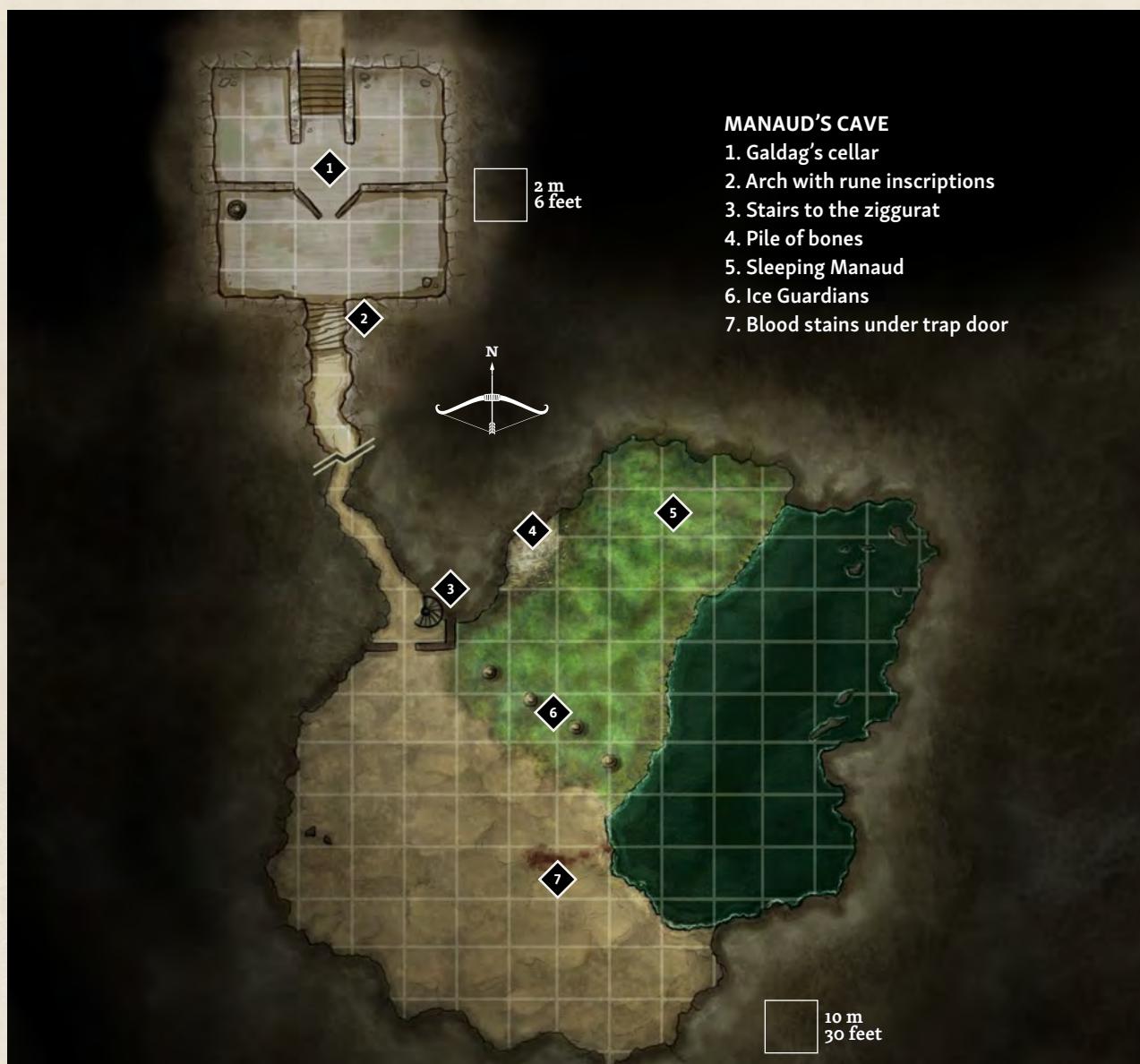
Tactics: The Ice Guardians attack the nearest intruder until that person is dead. They split up according to the number of enemies, but are otherwise uncoordinated and act mechanically.

Once the player characters have gotten past the guardians, they may examine Manaud more closely. The first thing they notice is that what appeared to be large warts are in fact something else entirely – human faces, pressed tightly against the inside of Manaud’s thin, moist skin; as if at least twenty people had merged back-first with the creature. Soon a muffled, hissing sound is heard. A successful **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check** reveals that the sound was the hush of a human, and the characters

can see one of the faces twitching under the skin, high up on Manaud’s side.

In total, there are four faces moving under the skin and one that is not covered by it. Garathve’s face is completely exposed, as is the headband he is wearing – an exquisitely engraved gold headband embellished with gems, with a Manaud cross at its front. The ancient High Priest glances sluggishly at the characters from a place near his deity’s right shoulder. If they make a lot of noise or raise their voices, he will hush them yet again, and say, in an old barbarian dialect: “Wake not the god that sleeps.”

Characters that know the Barbarian language may address Garathve without any checks; others can attempt a **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check** to communicate through simple phrases (“Karvosti,” etc.), gesture and pantomimes. To be given the same information as Elmendra, the characters must assure the priest that they mean to attack the abhorrent cliff of Karvosti – a successful **DC 15**

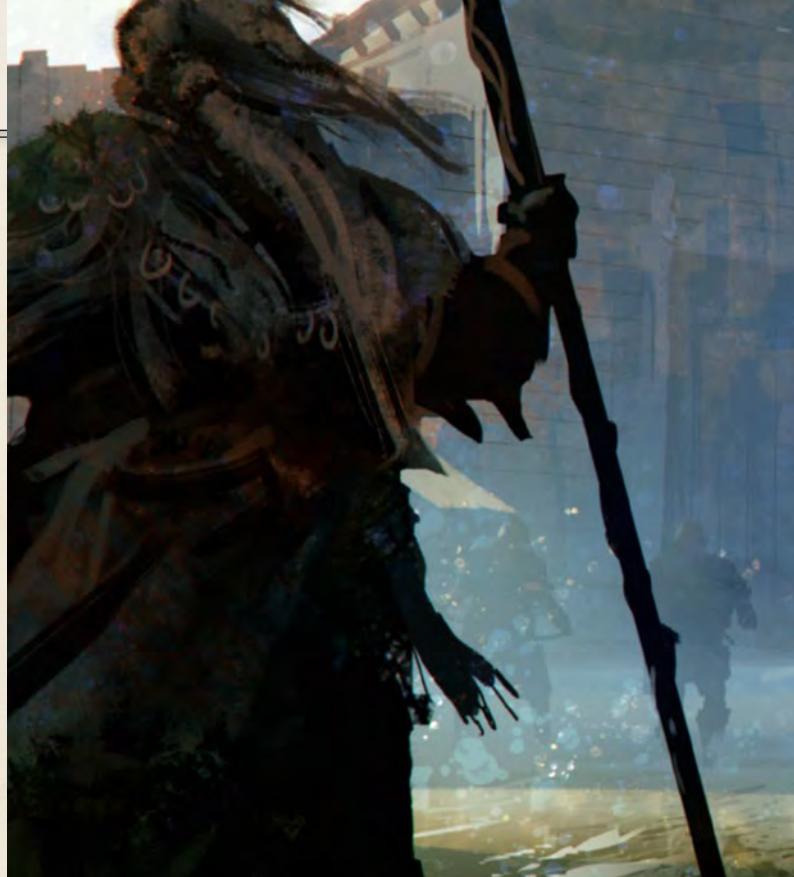


Charisma (Persuasion) check is required from a character fluent in his language. (Someone who does not speak Barbarian can attempt the check at disadvantage.)

If the character is deemed worthy of help, they will receive an answer; not with words, but in the form of a mental image. What the character sees is the actual map which Yeferon's Commander presented to Jasmial and her priest a few days before the attack, and it can easily be reproduced, if the character is quickly provided with some sort of writing utensils. The Gamemaster can hold up the map on page 202 in this book and instruct the player to draw a copy of it; perhaps setting a time limit, without specifying the exact amount of time available.

After a while, the image begins to fade. Garathve hisses a few words ("Avenge me! Destroy Karvost!"") and, sighing sleepily, he shuts his eyes and dozes off.

Note: If this is the character's second stop, there are two dead fortune hunters next to the entrance, struck down by swords (Marvello betrayed Ioséfia's group after sneaking ahead and acquiring the map himself). If Yeferon is their third stop, Dagesto's group has smashed one of the guardians to pieces – three of his fortune hunters were killed before the rest fled. However, there are tracks left by Father Argaton, who reached and spoke to his "colleague": On the cave wall in the direction where Garathve is looking, someone has painted the setting sun of Prios with brush and ink.



Despite repeated attempts, Fundiber's warriors have serious difficulties getting past the palisade of New Earthmoor.

Optional Journey Event: The Monster Hunter

A long-shafted arrow suddenly impales the ground near a player character's feet. Looking up, they see a person crouched in a nearby tree, holding a longbow – a middle-aged woman, dressed in what looks like a cross between a hunter's attire and the armor of a warrior. She looks annoyed, to say the least.

She slides down the tree trunk, introduces herself as Ingril, and informs the player characters that they are about to walk right into her monster trap. It turns out that Ingril is a monster hunter who has not only managed to track her

game, but also identified its movement pattern: each night, the beast visits a creek not far from there.

The characters could offer to help Ingril, who will accept – as long as they stay back and keep quiet, she will happily let them witness her masterful catch. When the beast (for example an **aboar**, Bestiary, page 136) later arrives, things immediately get out of hand – the monstrous creature tears the hunter's trap to shreds, and if the player characters do not intervene, it will do the same to Ingril.

Righttime in New Earthmoor

TWELVE DAYS WALK upstream from the mouth of River Malmor lies one of the most isolated free settlements in the region. New Earthmoor was established in year 5 by a group of families from Earthmoor – a village in the Ravens whose remaining residents were later massacred by sun knights and theurgs for their heretical ways.

Today, New Earthmoor is populated by almost two hundred men, women, and children. Life in the village is characterized

by strict obedience to the laws of the Earthmother, which after contact with Davokar were strengthened to deny individuals the right to express, or even have, any feelings or urges. The only exception is the urge of self-preservation; it is the duty of all villagers to safeguard their own lives, as these are the rightful property of the Earthmother.

The player characters will face a number of challenges in New Earthmoor. The village is beset by the fearsome warriors



of the Sovereign's Oath, led by the war hero Fundiber who is determined to send Ambrian corpses floating down River Malgomor. Reaching the palisaded core of the village will not be easy, nor will the task of getting to see the troubled and anguished Elida. But if they succeed, the characters stand to gain a detailed description of Karvosti's interior, including its lower levels.

BACKGROUND

Elida was the first child ever born in New Earthmoor, and it soon became clear that she had been chosen by the Earth-mother to perform miracles. Already as a toddler, she had a calming effect on her surroundings. Destructive feelings like anger, anxiety and general unease seemed to vanish in her presence and, naturally, her family became the very heart of the community. While her parents accepted and relished their status, Elida was increasingly burdened by being "chosen," even though her powers diminished over the years. At fourteen years of age, she escaped the village and headed west along the river, eventually ending up on Karvosti.

On the High Chieftain's cliff she was taken in by Edrafin, who sensed that she was special. She helped a number of residents at the pilgrim camp – including the much weakened and angst-ridden Elmendra – before rumors of her ability began to spread. Piromei, the head of the sun temple, immediately sent a squad of templars to "apprehend the heretic," but Yeleta got to her first and brought Elida to the witches' dwelling. And when the Huldra realized what powers the girl possessed, she decided to ask her for help.

Elida was alone and afraid, and dared not refuse. She was taken deep inside the cliff, where her task awaited – try to

help the deranged former Huldra Oryela regain her sanity, or at least keep her calm.

Elida spent a year in the darkness, but when her desperation finally exceeded her fear, she fled back to New Earthmoor, traumatized by what she had seen in the depths of Karvosti. She only agreed to share her knowledge with Elmendra because they knew each other from before, and because the fortune hunter lied about her intentions. The question is: what must the player characters do to obtain the same information?

THE WAY TO NEW EARTHMOOR

The easiest way to reach New Earthmoor is obviously to go by boat along the Malgomor River. Still, it will be an arduous journey. While the wind can at times be strong

Elida's Gift

Thanks to the fluctuating, magical node located in the marshes south of New Earthmoor, the newborn Elida was blessed with a powerful mystical gift; a gift that was spontaneous during her childhood, but which became increasingly difficult to activate as the years passed. The gift is like *cure wounds*, but heals feelings instead of physical damage. Pressure to help others has meant that Elida has taken on much Corruption and now balances on the edge of madness, especially right after having treated someone.

Inspiration for the Journey

On the way to New Earthmoor, the characters will pass the area thoroughly described in the adventure *Tomb of Dying Dreams*, featured in the *Ruins of Symborium Adventure Compendium*. The Gamemaster could take a closer look at this adventure and use it as inspiration for the journey. It would of course be particularly interesting if the player characters have already experienced the events of *Tomb of Dying Dreams* and thus had an impact on the location's current status.

enough to fill the sails, travelers will mostly be rowing upstream through swirling waters. Also, where the river is too shallow or too rapid, the vessel must be dragged on land. Traveling the river is about as time consuming as going on foot along its shores: roughly 12 days without any lengthy stops.

If they prefer to walk, there are shortcuts which could save a few days, but it might not be worth the risk. There is a good chance that those taking shortcuts through the forest will encounter packs of predators and other dangers, and without the river as an escape, they will have no choice but to stay and fight.

Should the player characters wish to learn more about New Earthmoor before setting off, Brother Bartho or some of their other acquaintances on Karvosti can reveal the following:

- ◆ Elida spent a long time in the witches' dwelling, and except for the witches themselves, she is probably the one who knows most about its layout and what lurks down there.
- ◆ The settlers of New Earthmoor worship a strict and unforgiving version of the Earthmother, which explains why they decided to leave Ambria.
- ◆ No one knows the size of New Earthmoor, but its population would have to be quite large to defend itself against predators, elves, and other threats – probably more than 200 people.
- ◆ Free settlements tend to be hostile towards strangers, and rumor has it that New Earthmoor is no different – more or less everyone who claims to have gone there for help or shelter says that the settlers would not let them through the gates.

NEW EARTHMOOR

The free settlement is located a few miles from the river Malgomor, north of a vast wetland where the settlers grow rice and breed amphibians. A log palisade, high as five men, surrounds the village center except where it borders on the

swamp. The palisade has two gates, in the east and in the west, as well as an opening blocked by wooden bars, through which a small creek flows from the fault line in the north, through the village, into the wetland.

Life in the village is completely ritualized, and consists of hard work interspersed with communal meals and prayer. Strangers are not welcome inside the palisade, regardless of hunger or need.

1. Palisade & Gatehouse

The almost thirty-feet-high log palisade has two gatehouses, one in the west and one in the east. Along the inside of the wall runs a balustrade, from which patrolling guards can fire arrows at attacking enemies while benefiting from three-quarters cover.

2. Barred Opening

The creek which comes crashing down the fault and flows through the village passes the palisade through a grate of sturdy, wooden bars.

3. Chapel

The chapel is the largest building in the village, with enough room to accommodate the entire population. There are no benches inside, nor any podium; visitors kneel directly on the raked earthen floor, with Karala leading them in prayer from her spot amongst the others. The only indication that the building is a place of worship is the full-size, wooden statue of a voluptuous woman suspended from the ceiling in the back of the room; in summer it is covered by greenery, in winter by leafless, withering stalks.

The Earthmother

According to the villagers' interpretation, the Earthmother is a strict and unforgiving goddess, who is disappointed with mankind's failure to manage her gifts and now expects them to do all they can to right the wrongs of previous generations. Everything in nature has a divine function, and it is up to the humans to unlock each object's potential. This task requires total submission and a willingness to put the objects (material, plants, and animals) before their own urges, feelings, and desires. The boar's piglets are not supposed to be petted or cuddled, but to be bred and eaten. Stones and trees are not meant to be carved into sculptures or other so-called artworks, but to be used as firewood or building material. Meat and plants are not there to bring pleasure, but to fill bellies!

NEW EARTHOOR

- 1. Palisade & gatehouse
- 2. Barred opening
- 3. Chapel
- 4. Elida's family home
- 5. Pigsty
- 6. Frog farm
- 7. Stilt houses

- A. Fundiber's camp
- B. Guard posts
- C. Armed villagers



4. Elida's Family Home

The village's most prominent family lives in a two-story building near the chapel. The furniture is simple and functional; there are no decorations whatsoever. Elida spends her days and nights in her room on the second floor. The door can be bolted from the outside, if needed, but these days it is no longer considered necessary.

5. Pigsty

A rectangular building where the villagers keep their domesticated wild boars, which are constantly grunting and screaming. If the player characters try to get hold of Elida through stealthy maneuvers, the boars can be used to create a diversion. In that case, no checks are required to reach her house unnoticed.

6. Frog Farm

Apart from the boars, the people of New Earthmoor get their protein from the frogs reared inside this fenced-in pen.

7. Stilt Houses

With no room for more buildings inside the palisade, people started raising stilt houses in the swamp. Simple, creaky plank bridges connect the houses with each other and with the shore.

Villagers

"Go away, there is nothing for you here!"

The village's deeply religious population lived in isolation even before they crossed the mountains. Most of them are physically deformed due to inbreeding, with abnormally high foreheads; hollow eyes; wide, gap-toothed mouths; and short, stubby arms and legs. They all wear the same earth-brown pants and tunics, the men with matching hats, the women with matching coifs.

Tactics: The villagers stick together. When fighting in open field, they will do so in pairs, usually men with shields and axes along with spear-wielding women. But they prefer to use their bows from a distance.

THE SIEGE

Whether New Earthmoor is the character's first, second, or third stop, they will find the village under siege. The Sovereign's Oath do not differentiate between Ambrian outposts and free settlements; their mission is to hit the Ambrians hard and sow discord between Ambrians and barbarians, and for that purpose, New Earthmoor will do just as well as any other village.

The person targeting the settlement is none other than the legendary Fundiber; he intends to raze New Earthmoor to the ground and send its people floating down the river. He does not have enough men to surround the entire palisade, and they have not yet been able to breach the gates. But

Villager

Medium human (Ambrian)

Armor Class 14 (shield, men only) or 12 (women)

Hit Points 15 (2d8 + 6)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	11 (+1)	9 (-1)

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages Ambrian

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP, proficiency bonus +2)

Manner sullen-faced, staring suspiciously

Shadow rust-brown with streaks of green, like a bronze plate overgrown with vines (0/3)

Equipment 10 arrows, 2d10 ortegs

Marksman. At the start of their turn, the villager can aim. Their speed becomes 0 and they have advantage on their ranged weapon attacks.

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

ACTIONS

Handaxe. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) slashing damage.

Horseman's Bow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

Spear. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60, one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage or 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage if used with two hands to make a melee attack.

as reinforcements arrive, he continues to launch assault after assault, and the villagers will hardly be able to hold him off forever.

Note that if Fundiber is defeated or driven way, something interesting can be found in his tent (A) – small pieces of paper which have been carried by birds from clan Gaoia's territory. The messages contain demands for reports and express a growing anger at Fundiber for not following orders. They are all signed with a single R – both the High Chieftain and the Huldra would recognize the handwriting as belonging to the Gaoian chieftain, Rábaimon.

Another interesting detail is that both Fundiber and his warriors wear the Sovereign's Oath tattoo – a crown entwined by thorns – on the inside of both wrists.

Fundiber

"Now you diiiie!"

Fundiber – a red-bearded, long-hammer-swinging, heavily scarred giant of a man – has fought countless battles on behalf of his clan, without ever wishing to be chieftain himself. He loves to fight, and to bask in the admiration of his Gaoian brothers and sisters when the battle is won. His opponents are usually beasts of the more or less blight-stricken variety, but after having spent a few moons in the south, he has come to appreciate human prey – in many ways, their cleverness and outbursts of emotion make defeating them so much more satisfying.

Fundiber has not come to the south to make friends, and consequently, he is virtually impossible to reason with – and in order to succeed, one better bring along an interpreter as his Ambrian vocabulary is limited to a few words, all related to killing. Maybe, just maybe, he would consider entering an alliance if it would increase his chances of crushing New Earthmoor. But in that case, he is likely to turn the hammer on his allies as soon as the battle is won.



Fundiber

Medium human (Barbarian)

Armor Class 16 (double chain mail, Man-at-Arms)

Hit Points 76 (9d8 + 36)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	12 (+1)	18 (+4)	11 (+0)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Strength +8, Constitution +7

Skills Athletics +8, Intimidation +5, Nature +3,

Perception +5, Survival +5

Senses passive Perception 15

Languages Barbarian

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

Manner arms folded across his chest

Shadow brown with stains of black, white, and yellow, like granite gravel (2/6)

Equipment wooden spider figurine (Oroke), belt garnished with the fangs of slain beasts

Brutal Critical. If he is raging, Fundiber does 20 (3d8 + 8) bludgeoning damage on a hit or 23 (3d10 + 8) bludgeoning damage if he wields it with two hands (these values include the bonus damage from rage).

Great Weapon Fighting. If Fundiber rolls a 1 or 2 on a damage die for a weapon he is wielding with two hands he can reroll the die (he must use the new result even if it is a 1 or 2).

Tactics: Fundiber runs at the forefront of his troops, utterly convinced of his superiority. He attacks the biggest, most fearsome enemy around – anything else would be unthinkable.

Indomitable (1/day). If Fundiber fails a saving throw he can reroll it (he must use the new result).

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

Mindless Rage. If in a rage, Fundiber is immune to being charmed or frightened. If he was charmed or frightened when he entered the range, the effect is suspended as long as the rage lasts.

Noisy. While wearing his armor Fundiber has disadvantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks.

Rage (3/day). As a bonus action, Fundiber can enter a rage that lasts for 1 minute. While in the rage, he has advantage on Strength checks and saving throws. When he makes a melee weapon attack he adds 3 bonus damage. Fundiber has resistance to bludgeoning, piercing and slashing damage while in the rage. The rage ends early if Fundiber ends his turn without having attacked a hostile creature since his last turn or taken damage since then. He can also use a bonus action to end the rage.

ACTIONS

Multiaction. Fundiber makes two attacks with his long hammer.

Long Hammer. **Melee Weapon Attack:** +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. **Hit:** 9 (1d8 + 5) bludgeoning damage or 10 (1d10 + 5) bludgeoning damage if wielded with both hands.

Grap

"I fight, I kiiiill!"

The rugged rage troll Grap was a gift to Fundiber from one of clan Enoai's troll tamers, whom he saved from a newly woken liege troll. Grap has been whipped to perfection; he is just as loyal and obedient as a battle-trained jakaar, at least when his master is watching.

Fundiber still prefers to keep him on a leash, and when the master stops, the rage troll sits down beside him, grumbling until he is scratched on the head.

Tactics: Grap fights by his master's side and attacks whoever is at hand. Having learned many painful lessons from previous battles, he will not attack the enemy Fundiber is fighting, even if he seems to need assistance.

Grap

Medium humanoid (Troll)

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 85 (10d8 + 40, tough)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	14 (+2)	17 (+3)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	6 (-3)

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages —

Challenge 3 (700 XP, proficiency bonus +2)

Manner submissive like a dog

Shadow bright-red, like arterial blood full of life
(0/2)

Equipment —

Rage (1/day). As a bonus action, Grap can enter a rage that lasts for 1 minute. While in the rage, Grap has advantage on Strength checks and saving throws. When he makes a melee weapon attack he adds +2 to its damage. Grap has resistance to bludgeoning, piercing and slashing damage while in the rage. The rage ends early if he ends his turn without having attacked a hostile creature since his last turn or taken damage since then. Grap can also use a bonus action to end the rage.

Tough. Grap has 1 extra hit point for each Hit Die he has.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Grap makes two attacks with his claws.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) slashing damage.

Gaoian Warriors

(four times as many as the player characters)

"We shed our blood for the Blood-Daughter."

The elite warriors under Fundiber's command are as scarred and experienced as their leader, to whom they are utterly loyal. To them, war is not only a duty, but a pleasure. Karline, a Master of the Order from Kurun who has visited the clan on many occasions in the hope of meeting Uncle Lint, once said about its warriors: *"They would rather die than stop fighting, which says a lot about their behavior in battle..."*

Over the course of the adventure, more and more warriors will join Fundiber, but since many will die trying to storm the settlement, the Gamemaster can assume their number remains constant – whenever the characters arrive at the village, there will be PC×4 Gaoian warriors present. They all wear the mark of the Sovereign's Oath – a crown entwined by thorns (page 126).

Tactics: When entering battle, or moving towards a new target, a Gaoian Warrior will first throw a spider. Then they set upon the enemy with an axe – usually stunning them before striking them with a powerful blow.

Throwing Spider, WEAPON

Much can be said about the northern clan Gaoia's relationship with the various spider creatures of Davokar. They worship the spider god Oroke, both etterherd and tricklestings are central to their diet, and their witches and spider priests consume spider poison to get closer to the power and spirit of their eight-legged deity. Moreover, they breed a certain kind of spider to be used as a throwing weapon.

The throwing spider is slightly smaller than a man's palm, covered with rough hairs, and can curl its legs into a small ball. In the wild, in their natural woodland habitat, they drop from the treetops and spread their legs just before landing on their prey. But if one knows how to handle them correctly, they can also be caught and thrown at oncoming (or retreating) enemies.

To prepare a spider for throwing, the user must first use their bonus action to make an **Intelligence (Nature) check** with the DC calculated as below. On a failed check, the user is instead poisoned until the end of their next turn.

The user then uses their action to make a thrown weapon attack (spiders have a range of 10/30). On a successful hit the target must make a **Constitution saving throw** against a DC of 11 plus the user's proficiency bonus. On a failure, the target is poisoned until the end of their next turn.

Gaoian Warrior

Medium human (Barbarian)

Armor Class 13 (studded leather)

Hit Points 16 (3d8 + 3)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)

Skills Athletics +5, Nature +3, Perception +2, Survival +2

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages Barbarian

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

Manner quiet, grim

Shadow a bright shade of reddish brown, like an autumn bog (0/4)

Equipment 1d4 + 1 throwing spiders, 1d4 Whistler arrows

Spider Wrangler. The warrior must use their bonus action to ready a spider in order to throw it as their

action. They must succeed at a DC 13 Intelligence (Nature) check to do so or become poisoned until the end of their next turn.

Stunning Blow. Gaoian warriors have perfected the art of hitting their opponents with the blunt side of their axes. On a successful attack they can force the opponent to make a Constitution saving throw to avoid being stunned (see below) instead of doing damage.

ACTIONS

Axe. Melee Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 6 (1d8 + 2) slashing damage or the creature must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or be stunned until the end of their next turn.

Horseman's Bow. Ranged Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. Hit: 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

Throwing Spider. Ranged Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, range 10/30, one target. Hit: the target must succeed at a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned until the end of their next turn.

COMPETITORS IN THE AREA

If New Earthmoor is the player characters' first stop, Leohan and Dagesto will already be there. Dagesto will probably offer to construct a ballista for the villagers in exchange for information from Elida. Leohan is not likely to collaborate with the barbarians, nor with the settlers, and will try to fight his way into the village during one of the Sovereign's Oath's attacks.

Should New Earthmoor be the player characters' second stop, Marvello, Ioséfia, and possibly Cleaver, will have arrived at the scene. The first two are no doubt hostile to each other after what happened on Yeferon Isle, but it might be possible for the characters to enter a pact with one of them. Marvello's strategy is probably the same as Leohan's, while Ioséfia will try to sneak inside and look for Elida on her own.

If New Earthmoor is the last stop on the characters' journey, Marvello will still be there after a failed attempt to contact Elida, and he has been reinforced by Lindra's group. Argaton and his black cloaks will also have come to the village. Perhaps the characters could form an alliance with all of them for the purpose of defeating Fundiber? Alternatively, they could of course help defend the village (possibly along with Argaton) when it is attacked from two sides - by the Sovereign's Oath from the east and the Queen's Rangers from the west?

ENTERING THE VILLAGE

In order to speak with Elida, the player characters must obviously find a way to reach her. This task is complicated by the ongoing siege and the anxious atmosphere it has caused

inside the palisade. The characters will have to be creative, and the Gamemaster must make sure to reward all good ideas (and, of course, punish the bad ones).

Below are five suggested challenges to start with. For them to be viable at all, the player characters must get past the guard posts which Fundiber has stationed around New Earthmoor, marked  on the map. Each of these guard posts has a garrison of two Gaoian warriors, ordered to signal if someone approaches and stop anyone from reaching the village. After having fired their Whistler arrows (page 134), they will try to stall whoever approaches until reinforcements arrive from the main camp or other guard posts.

As usual, sneaking past them requires a successful **DC 13 Dexterity (Stealth) group check**. An alternative could be to have some characters (or allies) attack a guard post so that the others can rush inside as the other guards abandon their posts to help their colleagues.

Negotiation: Once they have reached the palisade, the player characters will most likely receive a cold welcome. A successful **DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check** is required to convince the guards on the balustrade to fetch whomever the characters wish to speak to - whether they ask for the village leader, Elida, or her parents.

Karala, Elida's mother and the true leader of the village, refuses to let some unknown outsider meet her frail daughter, but she might be persuaded to make a deal (see *Trade* below). A player character with a **passive Perception of 15**

or higher will notice the father, Morio, gesturing discretely to them, as though he wishes to meet them outside the palisade, if they only move a bit further away.

Should the characters follow Morig's instructions, he will show up at their camp a few hours later, accompanied by four villagers armed with spears. He apologizes for Karala's hostile attitude and asks what interest they have in his daughter. If they are honest about their intentions, he will present a proposal: if they help defend the village during the next assault, they may have a brief chat with Elida. He can smuggle them into the village through the swamp and hide them in a shed near the eastern gate, where they must wait for the attack to commence – everyone except the stubborn Karala will be in on the plan and appreciate their aid.

Trade: Standing above the western gate, Karala makes the player characters another offer. Like her husband, she wants to know why they are so interested in her daughter, and like him, she could not care less about the caverns of Karvostti. So, she suggests a trade: if the characters kill the leader of the barbarian warriors and bring her his severed head, Karala will let them see and speak to Elida.

Getting to Fundiber is certainly difficult, but not impossible. As mentioned previously, he has at least four times as many warriors as the number of player characters at his disposal; eight of these are stationed around the village, and the rest are at their camp (half of them asleep). Consequently, should the characters manage to sneak up on those awake and take them out, they will have a couple of rounds to attack Fundiber and his domesticated rage troll before reinforcements arrive – first those who were sleeping, then those who come running from their guard posts. The situation should be manageable, especially if the characters bring some allies.

Through the Swamp: It is also possible to sneak past the palisade at night, for example via the swamp. Armed **villagers** (page 156, twice as many as the player characters) are posted near the areas where the palisade ends (◆). In order to get past them, they must first pass a **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check** to detect and avoid the tripwires deployed across the swamp, then find a way to distract the guards and pass a **DC 12 Dexterity (Stealth) group check** to remain undetected.

A small group of stealthy individuals could slip between the stilt houses instead. In order for them not to be detected by the guards on the balustrade, they must first pass a group check as above to leave the swamp and get up on dry land, and then another one as they begin to sneak from house to house.

Through the Bars: Breaking the bars where the creek flows under the palisade, and doing so without being detected by the guards on the balustrade, requires two successful tests: first a **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check**, to understand exactly where to break them, and then a **DC 15**

Strength (Athletics) check to actually do it (the checks can be made by different people if they are working together). Then they will have to pass at least one **Dexterity (Stealth) check** (as above) as they move between the houses.

Attack: A last and desperate option could be to fight their way into the village, preferably while Fundiber is attacking from the other side. This could be done via the swamp, through the bars, or through the western gate if it could somehow be opened.

In this case, the characters will not have to pass any **Dexterity (Stealth) group checks**, as the villagers are busy defending themselves against the Sovereign's Oath. However, there are still a number of villagers (twice as many as the player character) guarding the gatehouse, and another group of the same size by the wetland at the end of the palisade.

FORBIDDEN KNOWLEDGE

Elida can always be found on the second floor of her parents' house, in the middle of the village. But in order to find her, one must know where to look. This will not be a problem if the characters have made a deal with one of her parents; if not, they must extract the information from one of the villagers – either through a **DC 20 Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion) check**, or through the use of mystical powers.

Once the characters have found her, they must get her to talk. This can be achieved with a successful **DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check**. If her father is present, he grants advantage on the check. Elida feels no loyalty towards the witches and tells the characters everything she knows as quickly as possible, just to make them leave her alone.

Aside from general information about the inside of Karvostti she has the following to say, provided that the characters reveal that they will use the Undergate (if not, the info may be disclosed in a different order):

- ◆ “I have never seen the Undergate, but I know where it is.” And if the player characters specifically ask for information about the location of Symbar: “Perhaps in the Reliquary; perhaps among the tapestries, or in the Sculpture Hall. Unless there is something near the witches’ power node, of course...”
- ◆ If they ask her to clarify: “I don’t know. I told Elmendra to seek out the former Huldra, Oryela. She is locked inside a chamber above the Undergate – the gate between the Underworld and Karvostti’s tunnels. I am sure she can help, as long as she is... herself, if only to punish Yeleta. If she isn’t herself, leave; she is possessed by something. Something powerful and terribly dangerous.”
- ◆ “Follow the wider tunnels, avoid the cracks. There are markings at most of the intersections, triangles pointing up, down, left or right. Up and down means just that, right means north, left means south.”
- ◆ “Should the air in a tunnel feel unsound, pungent, or sickly, turn back. Also, I was warned of the deepest, northern parts of the cliff – everything beyond the plantations. Why, I don’t know.”

Optional Journey Event: The Hunting Party

As the characters travel through Davokar, they suddenly hear a coarse laugh from up ahead. A successful DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals that there are at least five people, conversing in the barbarian tongue (a character can make a DC 15 Intelligence [History] check – character with the Loremaster feature gain advantage on the check – recognizes that they speak with a northern accent).

The characters can try to sneak up on them, but must pass a DC 13 Dexterity (Stealth) group check to not be detected – if they are, they must either fight or flee. Those who speak the barbarian tongue can make out the following exchange:

Speaker 1: "... that we've been too soft on children."

Speaker 2: "You mean we should make reality out of the Ambrians' lies?"

Speaker 1: "Why not? Let the kids suffer the same as their parents."

Speaker 3: "Aye, that should get the Bitch Queen's attention!"

Speaker 2: "But... Not without the chieftains' say-so, right? I mean..."

Speaker 1: "Oh, shut up Olor! If everyone was as soft-hearted as you, nothing would ever get done!"

The group is composed of one **village guard** and one **village warrior** for each player character (*Bestiary*, page 192). They all have the mark of the Sovereign's Oath (a crown entwined with thorns) tattooed on the inside of their wrists, and they will fight to the death!

Faarrah Moroun

THE GREAT PALACE ruin which the clanfolk call Faarah Moroun is located in an area rarely visited by the clans, bordering on the deeper and wilder parts of the forest, about three days' march north of the temple where Sarkomal's prophecy was found. Only a few Ambrian expeditions have ever reached it; none of them had time to dig very deep, and none of them returned to Ambria alive.

In this adventure landscape, the player characters' task will be to explore and map the labyrinthine ruin, with lots of unpleasant surprises lurking behind every corner. Elmendra accidentally awoke the liege troll Orangaar when she visited the ruin, and the old troll singer has since summoned numerous beasts and lone-wandering rage trolls to his side. Added to these threats are the two or three competing groups present in the area, as well as an elvish warband prowling nearby.

BACKGROUND

The Palace of Fehara, as the ruin was once called, was built by Prince Herbalag in the twilight years of the Symbarian Empire. Allegedly a gift to his wife, its true purpose was quite different. Herbalag, who worshipped the daemons of the Yonderworld as gods, was convinced that the dark arts recently outlawed by Emperor Symbar could in fact save humanity, tame the darkness, and enslave the abominations that plagued their lands. Down in the palace catacombs, his foremost mages and theourgs worked to physically and mentally unite their prince with the daemonic Lord Jeberaja, to give him the power to dominate all. They succeeded, and so another immensely powerful abomination was born. It

clawed itself out of the vaults, slaughtered everyone living in the palace, and proceeded to spread death and destruction wherever it went.

About a thousand years later came Elmendra. She had reached the roots of Karvosti and found a gate of Symbarian design. Having broken into the vaults beneath the High Chieftain's stronghold, she concluded that Karvosti's Undergate had been made around the time of Symbaroum's demise, to defend against the growing darkness of the Underworld. She also found songs mentioning the Palace of Fehara, described as grand, built during the twilight of Symbaroum, and as a place where a raging god had escaped its prison. Since she had already searched three other ruins for gates with similar locking mechanisms, she decided to give it a try.

She found the place overgrown and infested with a great number of various beasts, but none that posed a serious threat to her. In the catacombs she located the gate, but she did not have time to study it for long before the light of her torch awoke something huge and roaring. Elmendra fled without looking back, and since then, the Palace of Fehara has been Orangaar's domain. And every day, the liege troll summons new minions in the form of wild beasts, solitary rage trolls, and goblin outcasts.

THE WAY TO FAARAH MOROUN

Going straight from Karvosti, it will take about a seven days' march to reach the ruin, but Brother Bartho claims that the place is easier to find if one takes a detour by the sun temple east of the cliff. In that case, one can follow a relatively well-beaten path for the first three days, before reaching the

Parts of Faarah Moroun's northern façade still rise majestically from Davokar's grasp.



temple and turning to proceed north for five days. Early the fifth day, a vast swamp should be encountered. Following its rim, Faarah Moroun will be found a little further into the woods north of the swamp.

Bartho has the following to say about the area, which is not much, since he did not follow Elmendra all the way into the ruin:

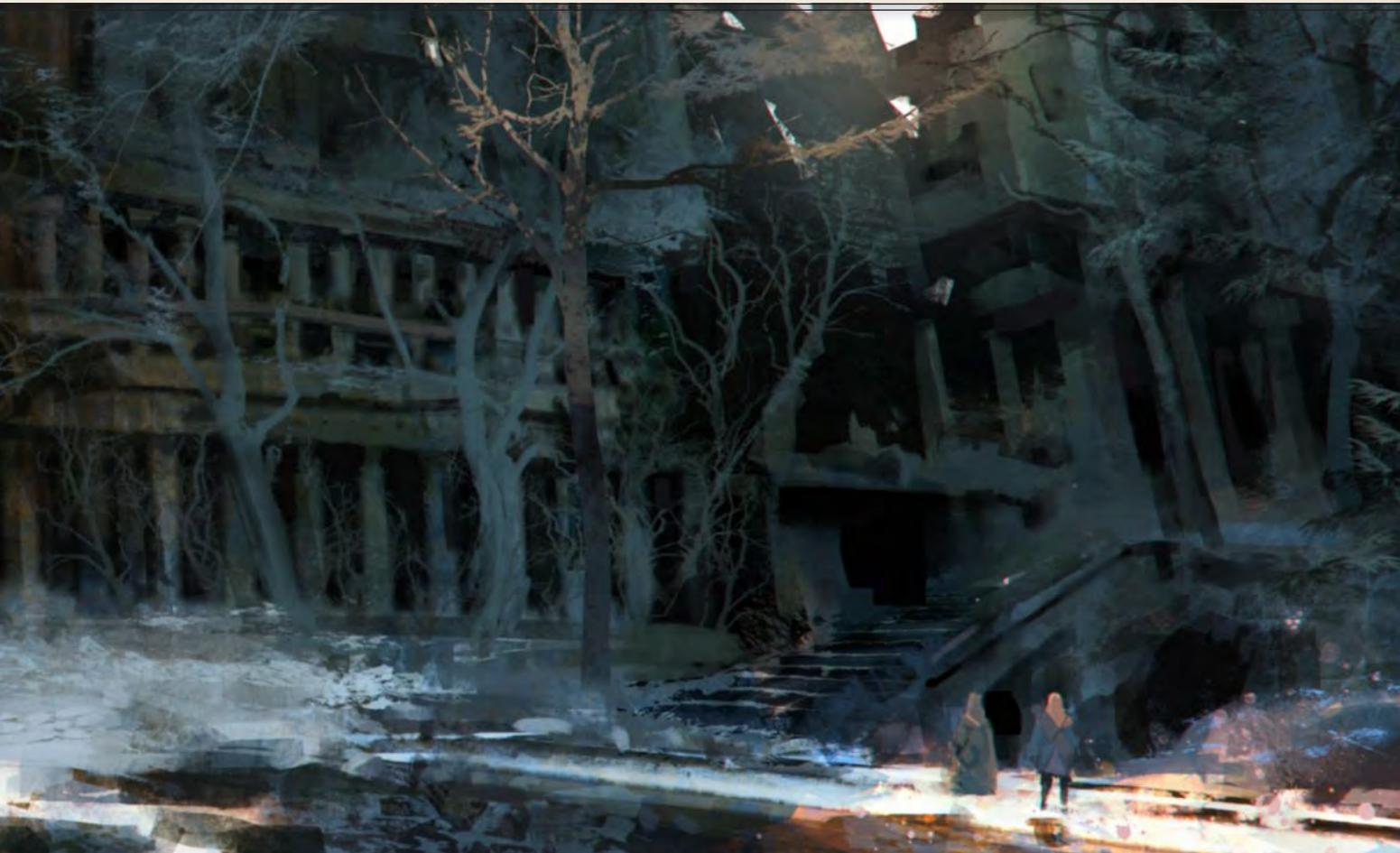
- ◆ The goal of their journey was to examine a Symbarian locking mechanism. Sometimes Elmendra spoke about finding the gate of a prison, sometimes the one of a laboratory; perhaps the gates she was referring to were one and the same.
- ◆ Faarah Moroun is a gigantic palace ruin, one of the largest ever found in Davokar, but the bottom floor is practically all that is left of it.
- ◆ On the way home, Elmendra complained about the place having been swarming with beasts; she reflexively looked towards the sky whenever she heard a noise, as if expecting an attack from above.
- ◆ The only concrete thing she mentioned was a temple or shrine that she had passed. “*Prios may be wrathful and demanding, but there is no doubt that what the Symbarians worshipped were... unsound. True monstrosities...*”
- ◆ And then there was that verse... Elmendra recited it to herself throughout the journey, so he could not fail to

learn it. But whether it has any real significance he cannot say: “*The horseman canters two paces east; the moon crescent follows him once and again. The ship glides six leagues the other way, shadowed half-way by the eagle. The dog then tails its riding friend, till it swivels and doubles the distance.*”

THE IRON PACT'S WARBAND

The group of elves that becomes involved in the treasure hunt is actually situated near Faarah Moroun on another mission: to assess the recently awoken liege troll Orangaar and the situation. The group is led by the gentle and diplomatically inclined Malahai from the Halls of a Thousand Tears. He is accompanied by a group of warriors commanded by the anything but gentle Adreanea, who has launched many raids against Ambrian outposts in Davokar. The number of elven warriors is equal to that of the player characters, and they have the stats of a Late Summer Elf (*Bestiary*, page 175).

During the first part of Act II, Malahai is in charge of the warband. He will approach the leaders of arriving factions and urge them to return to Karvosti, but he is not prepared to take up arms. Meanwhile, Adreanea becomes increasingly frustrated, and by the end of the second act, she and her warriors will break with Malahai – all who do not obey the laws of the Iron Pact and leave the woods of their own accord must pay with their lives!



Technically, this means that if Faarah Moroun is the third stop on the player characters' journey, they will have to deal with a group of murderous elves. If they are clever, this could actually work to their advantage, provided they can get Adreanea to focus on Dagesto and Ioséfia. It should also be mentioned that Malahai will remain in the area, disappointed with his sister in arms. With some clever negotiation, perhaps there is a way for the characters to gain his protection.

Malahai

"I share your pain..."

The elven spiritualist Malahai suffers with the world, yet he remains stoic. The only way to cope with the pain is to accept it; fighting it will only worsen the wounds. And none who have not yet been thoroughly corrupted is beyond saving; with the proper care, it is possible to breathe new life into the dark and the dead. It must be. The alternative is unthinkable...

If the characters meet Malahai after Adreanea has gone her own blood-soaked way, he is in desperate need of a silver lining. Should the player characters admit that they are looking for Symbar, they will, of course, never get any help from him. But if they can trick him (requires an opposed **Charisma (Persuasion) check**) or express sincere intentions to stop others from finding the city, he might take their



side. In that case, the elven warriors will leave them alone after Malahai has loudly explained that they are allies in the battle against darkness.

Tactics: Should Malahai find himself in battle, he will first try to use *irresistible dance* to deal with whomever he feels is the biggest threat before trying to make them see the error in using violence against Creation. If the opposition seems tough, he will inhale a dose of *Spirit Friend*.

Malahai

Medium humanoid (elf)

Armor Class 16 (woven silk)

Hit Points 119 (14d8 + 56)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	18 (+4)	19 (+4)	20 (+5)	14 (+2)	17 (+3)

Saving Throws Int +9, Wis +6

Skills Arcana +13, History +13, Perception +6, Persuasion +7, Survival +6

Senses passive Perception 16

Languages Ambrian, Barbarian, Elvish

Challenge 9 (5,000 XP, proficiency bonus +4)

Manner neutral face, expressive eyes

Shadow greenish-yellow with brown spots, like autumn leaves struck by the oncoming winter
(Corruption: 6/16)

Equipment 2 doses Spirit Friend, 3 doses Elixir of Life, flask of Blueberry Juice

Ancient Magic. Malahai can cast accurate strike, chill touch, and mage hand without gaining Corruption.

Spellcasting. Malahai is a 14th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save 17, +9 to hit with spell attacks). He knows the following spells:

Cantrips: *acid splash* (1), *dancing lights* (1), *message* (1)

1st level spells: *burning hands* (1d4 + 1), *feather fall* (1d4 + 1), *mage armor* (1d4 + 1)

2nd level spells: *detect thoughts* (1d4 + 2), *invisibility* (1d4 + 2)

3rd level spells: *counterspell* (1d4 + 3), *protection from energy* (1d4 + 3)

4th level spells: *black tentacles* (1d4 + 4), *wall of fire* (1d4 + 4)

5th level spells: *dream* (1d4 + 5), *legend lore* (1d4 + 5)

6th level spells: *eyebite* (1d4 + 6), *irresistible dance* (1d4 + 6)

7th level spells: *etherealness* (1d4 + 7), *forcecage* (1d4 + 7)

Rituals: *detect magic*, *magic mouth*, *flaming servant*, *tiny hut*

ACTIONS

Quarterstaff. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) bludgeoning damage.



Adreanea

“The world is diseased, you are the plague.”

Adreanea is not the most unreasonable warrior of the Iron Pact, but not far from it. She views humanity as a disease of which the world must be cleansed, and is confident that all who doubt this will soon realize the truth. At the same time, she is initially loyal to the organization, which is the only reason why she puts up with Malahai for as long as she does.

Once she decides to ignore his orders, the group turns from diplomats to avengers. Player characters (humans included) wishing to stop the information about Symbar from spreading could very well form an alliance with her, but only if she considers herself in need of reinforcements.

Tactics: Adreanea uses her mastercrafted longbow in combat, and usually begins by firing three arrows at different targets, hoping to soften them up. Then she will move backwards while focusing on one target at a time.

COMPETITORS IN THE AREA

If the player characters make Faarah Moroun the first stop on their journey, they will encounter the groups of Captain Lindra and Father Argaton, and possibly Cleaver. As always, the latter would rather work against the characters than with them, but the others' positions are less clear – except that they would find it very difficult to collaborate with each other.

If the palace ruin is their second stop, the characters must deal with Captain Lindra (who has not yet found what she seeks) and Leohan's knights. The Templars will most likely go their own way, while Lindra has become more willing to form alliances, after having spent a long time in the ruin without any progress.

Should Faarah Moroun be the characters' last stop, the ranger captain will have moved on and been replaced by

Adreanea

Medium humanoid (elf)

Armor Class 17 (unarmored defense, see below)

Hit Points 119 (14d8 + 56)

Speed 30 ft. or 40 ft. (unarmored defense, see below)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	22 (+6)	13 (+1)	12 (+1)	19 (+5)	13 (+1)

Saving Throws Con +4, Cha +4

Skills Insight +8, Intimidation +4, Perception +8, Survival +8

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 19

Languages Barbarian, Elvish

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

Manner aloof, condescending

Shadow shimmering cyan, like clear water flowing over the overgrown bottom of a brook (Corruption: 1/9)

Equipment 20 arrows, 5 Homing Arrows (see *Special Arrows* on page 134), braid from her friend Darial who was killed by Ambrians, 3 doses of Truth Serum

Ancient Magic. Adreanea can cast *accurate strike*, *fire bolt* and *minor illusion* without gaining Corruption.

Archery. Adreanea adds +2 to her ranged weapon attacks (included below).

Marksman. At the start of her turn, Adreanea can aim.

Her speed becomes 0 and she has advantage on her ranged weapon attacks.

Rune Tattoos. Adreanea is decorated with mystical tattoos that inspired Clan Vavjod. She can use her bonus action to add 1d8 radiant damage to her attacks until the beginning of her next turn and she gains 1 temporary Corruption. She can also use her bonus action at the start of her turn to activate another illustration and heal 3 hit points, gaining 1 temporary Corruption in the process.

Unarmored Defense. If Adreanea is not wearing any armor, her Armor Class is 10 + her Dexterity modifier + her Constitution modifier and her speed is 40 feet.

ACTIONS

Multiaction. Adreanea makes three attacks with her longbow.

Mastercraft Longbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +12 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (1d8 + 6) piercing damage. *Deep Impact:* the bow does 21 (2d8 + 12) piercing damage on a critical.

the groups of Dagesto and Ioséfia. It is possible to collaborate with any of them, but one must act quickly, or they will join forces with each other instead – standing all alone against Adreanea and her warriors could be very difficult indeed.

ORANGAAR

As far as the liege troll Orangaar is concerned, he is the rightful ruler of Faarah Moroun. He will happily share it with beasts and other trolls bound by his command, but is furious about constantly being disturbed by prying elves and snooping humans. The only upside is that he loves the taste of both elven and human flesh, yet, in the end, all he really wants is to be left alone to sing and continue building his realm.

He spends most of his time in the glade where a ballroom used to be, with mosaics on the walls and huge window openings to the courtyard outside. If the ruin is the player characters' second or third stop, Orangaar will have figured out what all these nosy groups are after, and ordered one of his two groups of rage trolls to stage an ambush in room #10. If Faarah Moroun is their first stop, the rage trolls will alternate between resting in the courtyard (#2) and patrolling the ruin. The Gamemaster could simply decide when the characters should encounter a patrol, or ask the players to roll 1d10 each time they enter a new room; 1 means that the patrol is in an adjacent room and can be detected by a character with a **passive Perception of 12 or higher** or a comparable **Wisdom (Perception) check** if a character announces that they're listening for sounds coming from a nearby room.

Troll Song Across the Land

The troll singer Orangaar spends at least four hours a day trying to lure new minions with his song. With a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) or Charisma (Performance) check, the player characters can conclude that the

tune, sung in a minor key (see *Melodic Summoning* on page 167), is coming from the eastern parts of the ruin – but because of the echoes and the troll's movements, they cannot pinpoint his exact location.

Orangaar

"My larder is completely bare; wanna see?"

Orangaar only recently awoke from his hibernation. All he wants is to fatten up and entice servants to make his life more comfortable. He is infuriated by the intrusions of the characters and their competitors, but he is not stupid, and will try to turn the situation to his advantage. He

would prefer to see both humans and elves added to his larder, but if they come across as worthy adversaries, he might be willing to negotiate. The worst thing one could possibly do in Orangaar's presence is to show weakness, to beg and plead; it will always lead to combat – which a successful DC 20 Intelligence (History or Nature) check will indicate.

Orangaar

Large humanoid (Troll)

Armor Class 11

Hit Points 189 (14d10 + 112, tough)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
23 (+6)	12 (+1)	24 (+7)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)	17 (+3)

Saving Throws Cha +6, Con +10

Skills Athletics +9, Intimidation +6, Perception +3, Survival +3

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages Barbarian, Troll languages

Challenge 8 (3,900 XP, proficiency bonus +3)

Manner underbite grin, chuckles

Shadow deep red, with faint rusty streaks (7/14)

Equipment 2d12 thaler worth of trinkets and jewelry

Combat Hymn (1/rest). Orangaar can begin the hymn with an action and continue it on his turn with a bonus action (*Player's Guide*, page 120). While the hymn is in effect, Orangaar and six allies within 60 feet of him gain a +2 bonus to attack rolls and damage, which counts as magical. Orangaar must concentrate on this effect as if it were a spell and using another hymn, singing a spell, or if he stops singing the hymn its effect ends.

Retribution Hymn (1/rest). Orangaar can begin the hymn with an action, choosing a creature he can see within 60 feet. While the hymn is in effect, when he takes damage from that creature that damage is split evenly between himself and the creature (if the damage is odd, Orangaar takes that point of damage as well). Orangaar must concentrate on this effect as if it were a spell and use his bonus action on subsequent turns to continue the effect. Using another hymn, singing a spell, or if Orangaar stops singing the hymn its effect ends.

Sustaining Hymn (1/rest). Orangaar can begin the hymn with an action and continue it on his turn with a bonus action (*Player's Guide*, page 120). While the hymn is in effect, Orangaar and six allies within 60 feet of him gain 7 temporary hit points when the effect begins and at the start each of Orangaar's turns. Orangaar must concentrate on this effect as if it were a spell and using another hymn, singing a spell, or if he stops singing the hymn its effect ends.

Songs of the Dusk. Orangaar can cast up to 6 spell levels worth of 3rd-level or lower spells without making a saving throw. He must complete a long or extended rest to regain these spell levels.

Rage (3/day). As a bonus action, Orangaar can enter a rage that lasts for 1 minute. While in the rage, he has advantage on Strength checks and saving throws and cannot cast spells or concentrate. When he makes a melee weapon attack he adds +3 to its damage. Orangaar has resistance to bludgeoning, piercing and slashing damage while in the rage. The rage ends early if he ends his turn without having attacked a hostile creature since his last turn or taken damage since then. Orangaar can also use a bonus action to end the rage.

Regeneration. Orangaar recovers 10 hit points at the start of his turn, unless he has taken acid or fire damage since his last turn.

Tough. Orangaar has 1 extra hit point for each Hit Die he has (included above).

Troll Singing. Orangaar is a 14th level troll singer. His spellcasting ability is Charisma (+6 to hit, spell save DC 14) and he can cast spells as in the *Player's Guide*, page 120. He can cast the following spells:

Cantrips: *accurate strike, dancing lights, light, mending, message, prestidigitation*

1st-level spells: *animal friendship* (favored, DC 14), *cure wounds* (DC 14), *faerie fire* (DC 14)

2nd-level spells: *see invisibility* (favored, DC 16), *suggestion* (DC 16)

3rd-level spells: *fear* (unfavored, DC 18), *stinking cloud* (favored, DC 18)

4th-level spells: *compulsion* (DC 20), *hallucinatory terrain* (favored, DC 20)

5th-level spells: *awaken* (DC 22), *dream* (favored, DC 22)

6th-level spells: *find the path* (favored, DC 24), *melodic summoning* (DC 24)

7th-level spells: *arcane sword* (favored, DC 26), *forcecage* (DC 26)

Rituals: *speak with animals, animal messenger, detect magic, melodic summoning* (see next page)

ACTIONS

Multiaattack. Orangaar makes two claw attacks.

Claw. **Melee Weapon Attack:** +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. **Hit:** 11 (1d10 + 6) slashing damage.

Orangaar loves to rule, to dominate and make others dance to his tune, preferably in a way that goes against their own will and ideals. If the player characters request access to the Laboratory, he will first demand a living or recently slain elf in return – he is obviously more than capable of taking lives himself, but forcing a group of humans to do so brings him as much satisfaction as the delicious gift itself. Should the characters refuse his offer, he will instead propose that they rid his ruin of the blight-born hunger wolves who have occupied its north-eastern parts (in that case, the liege troll will watch the violence from a distance, out of curiosity and simply to be entertained).

Finally, he may accept one or more artifacts as payment, but those would have to be objects which the characters really do not wish to part with.

MELODIC SUMMONING

6th-level conjuration (ritual)

Casting Time: 1 hour

Range: 20 miles

Components: V, S, M (a musical instrument worth at least 1 thaler, not consumed by the casting)

Duration: Special

In ancient times, the trolls used this slow, wailing tune as a summoning call, to muster their kin in the face of danger or gather them for important festivals. Other trolls would often join in the singing as they walked toward the place where it first begun – that way, the song's message could reach a greater number of individuals.

The singing mystic must decide which tune to sing. There is a tune for each category of creature (*Bestiary*, page 214): beasts, humanoids, and undead. The singer may specify a tag such as Elf, Troll, etc. All creatures of the selected category (and fitting the tag if specified) within range are charmed by the singer and drawn to their location. An affected creature can make a **Wisdom saving throw** to resist these effects and can repeat the saving throw at the beginning of each day. A creature that succeeds at the save is immune to this spell for one year. If the creature fails the saving throw, the effects last for 24 hours and then the creature repeats the saving throw as above.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell at 8th level or higher, the range is extended by 10 miles for each additional spell level.

Rage Trolls

(one for every two player characters)

"Oh!? Eeeee... Ah! Arrrgh."

More and more wandering rage trolls are enticed by the liege troll's song and come to join his guard. Regardless of when the player characters arrive or how many they are, a number of sharp-toothed troll guards will be waiting for them.

They obey Orangaar's every word, out of fear as much as respect, and will never back down from a fight once it has begun. However, a person that can communicate with them can use an action to make them come to their senses (allowing another saving throw against *melodic summoning*). The characters might even persuade the trolls to guide them to their master.

For stats, see **rage troll, group-living**, *Bestiary*, page 211.

NAVIGATING THE RUIN

The enormous, overgrown ruin complex is in bad shape; except for some parts of the façade, all that is left are the walls on the bottom floor, sometimes with the ceiling intact. The eroded inner walls are about 25 feet high, and though they are covered with vines and moss, they are quite difficult to climb. In many areas, there are also locked or otherwise sealed doors of steel and bronze.

Entering Faarah Moroun is not difficult; many places on the map are marked with the symbol (N), where archways, windows and other such entryways allow the player characters to get past the outer walls. But as they move through the ruin, the Gamemaster must keep an eye on the map – especially on the symbols indicating where there is a risk of collapse and where the doors are still intact. The following paragraphs describe how the various challenges in the area can be handled.

Locked Doors (K): All wooden doors are long gone, but Faarah Moroun was once a magnificent palace, and some of its gates were made of bronze and steel. There are several ways for the player characters to get past the locked doors: they could unlock, kick in, or climb past them.

Picking the locks requires a **DC 20 Dexterity (Thieves' Tools) check**, but there is a risk of the locking mechanism being broken and impossible to pick. Roll a d6 when a new lock is discovered; on a result of **1-2** it is damaged and cannot be picked. How difficult it is to kick the door in depends on the degree of rust/corrosion and what state the walls are in. Roll a d6 and assign a DC for the **Strength (Athletics) check** based on the result: **1-2** DC 15, **3-4** DC 20, **5-6** DC 25. Note that even a failed attempt is likely to be heard from far away, alerting both beasts and competing groups of their presence.

Should the player characters try to climb past the door, see *Dangers for Climbers* below.



FARAH MOROUN

1. Orangaar
2. Courtyard
3. Chapel
4. Mare Cats
5. Fey Beasts
6. Kanaran ($\times 4$)
7. Hunger Wolves
8. The Wraith Owls' stairwell
9. Verrogobakk
10. Ambush
11. Stairs to the Laboratory



Risk of Collapse: While Faarah Moroun has no cellar per se, there are a number of underground vaults which were once utilized for storage purposes. There are also a few smaller sinkholes which have opened up in the ruin and undermined its vast, overgrown floors.

The symbols  and  mark locations where the player characters risk crashing straight through the ground, falling $(2d4 - 1) \times 10$ feet to the cellar floor below, or $1d4 \times 10$ feet into a tapered sinkhole. An affected character can make a **DC 15 Dexterity saving throw** to avoid the fall.

Dangers for Climbers: Should a player character attempt to climb the inner walls of the ruin, there is a great risk that they will be in for an unpleasant surprise or two. Also, note that a person who reaches the top of the wall risks being detected by the **wraith owls** nesting in Faarah Moroun.

When someone starts to climb, roll 1d20 and see the *Dangers for Climbers* table to determine what lurks in the vegetation. Obviously, the characters following the first climber will not have to roll again. However, they will have to deal with the challenge if it is not neutralized after being discovered.

DANGERS FOR CLIMBERS

1d20	Event	Effect
1-9	Nothing happens	—
10-13	Loose stones	Make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or fall $(1d4 - 1) \times 10$ feet (a zero result means the climber was close enough to the bottom to not take any damage), along with the stones. The character must relocate by at least 30 feet before trying again.
14-15	Poisonous vines	Make a DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check ; on a failure make a DC 15 Constitution check or take $2d6$ poison damage and fall $(1d4 - 1) \times 10$ feet (a zero result means the climber was close enough to the bottom to not take any damage).
16-17	Venomous spiders	$1d4$ venomous spiders attack the climber (they are +6 to hit and do $1d4$ poison damage each). A climber that takes 10 or more damage must make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or fall $(1d4 - 1) \times 10$ feet (a zero result means the climber was close enough to the bottom to not take any damage).
18-19	Venomous snake	A lightning-fast venomous snake strikes at the climber (+8 to hit, $1d8$ poison damage). If a creature takes 5 or more damage must make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or fall $(1d4 - 1) \times 10$ feet (a zero result means the climber was close enough to the bottom to not take any damage).
20	Hornets	The climber is attacked by a hornet swarm (<i>Bestiary</i> , page 162). If the climber becomes stunned, they fall $(1d4 - 1) \times 10$ feet (a zero result means the climber was close enough to the bottom to not take any damage).

BEASTS

Orangaar and his trolls are not the only ones who have made Faarah Moroun their home, which is just what the liege troll wants. Two packs of mare cats and fay beasts, two kanarans, a wraith owl couple, and a pair of blight-marked hunger wolves all occupy various parts of the ruin.

When they are not hunting in the nearby woods, these creatures tend to stay within their territories. Normally, they do not hunt inside the ruin, but they are willing to make an exception for the right prey. And if someone comes near their respective homes, they will certainly defend them.

Mare Cats: A group of several females (three for every two player characters) and one male have settled in the north-western parts of the palace, along with some kittens (one for each player character) who are old enough to hunt and defend their pack. A character with a **passive Perception of 17 or higher** who approaches their lair will find fresh animal droppings; a **DC 10 Intelligence (Nature) check**

– the Bushcraft trait provides advantage – to identify the beast in question.

Stats for the mare cat kittens can be found on page 79. For the adults, use the **mare cat** in the *Bestiary*, page 143.

Fey Beasts: A pack of fey beasts (one for each player character) has just arrived at the palace and settled in its once magnificent entrance hall (room #5). Player characters watching the northern gate will notice their presence without a check, but a character can make a **DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) check** – Bushcraft provides advantage – to determine how many there are. Half of the pack guards the newborn cubs (no stats necessary) and their territory at all times.

Fey beast stats are described in the *Bestiary*, page 139.

Kanarans: Two fully grown kanarans inhabit Faarah Moroun. Like the other beasts, they usually hunt in the woods, but if the player characters split up or set up camp inside the ruin, they will gladly make an exception.

Kanaran stats can be found in the *Bestiary*, page 142.

Hunger Wolves: Orangaar's song has attracted two blight-marked hunger wolves. They keep to themselves and use Faarah Moroun as a base while hunting in the woods. The rest of their pack was killed while fighting a frenzied abomination.

They were once magnificent young creatures the size of ponies, with thick, sleek fur and their heads held high. But with the attack, everything changed. Now they reek of sulfur, their eyes are yellow with puss, and parts of their fur are sticky with goo from festering wounds which never seem to heal.

The beasts stats can be found in the *Bestiary*, page 140, except they cause 1d4 temporary Corruption with their bites, have the multiattack feature (two bites), their shadow is different: pale yellow with black spots, like meadow grass attacked by mold (corruption: 3/4), and count as Challenge 3 (700 XP).

Wraith Owls: Two wraith owls nest at the top of the broken stairwell which towers over the rest of the ruin. With three eggs about to hatch, the parents are gathering food for the intense period that lies ahead.

As long as the characters remain on the ground, the wraith owls will leave them alone, but climbing on top of the inner walls will immediately make them targets for the owls' sweeping attacks. Characters who expose themselves in this way must pass a **DC 20 Dexterity (Stealth) check**; failure means that they are detected.

Wraith owl stats can be found in the *Bestiary*, page 165.

VERROGOBAKK

The surviving members of the goblin tribe Verrogobakk have occupied the western parts of the ruin. They remain in Orangaar's favor by presenting him with daily offerings in the form of small animals, berries, and mushrooms. Chieftain Gelumm regards the liege troll as an ally, and hopes to rebuild his tribe under the troll's protection.

Nine adult goblins managed to survive the plague which ravaged their tribe, and now there are a handful of children and as many aged tribesmen to feed. The Chieftain (who is versed in the tongue of trolls) will never betray Orangaar, but could be an ally in the fight against the character's competitors, in exchange for objects which can later be used to appease the liege troll.

It is also possible that the devious Gelumm will try to trick the player characters, for example by gaining their trust and then claiming to have arranged a meeting with Orangaar – a meeting they must attend unarmed. Alternatively, he could trick the player characters into splitting up, giving his fellow goblins the opportunity to attack and capture the weakest ones, as a gift to their mighty ally.

Verrogobakks

"You scratch me, I scratch you."

The adult goblins (three times the number of player characters) have had a tough life in Davokar and know how to use

their weapons. They also possess a well-developed survival instinct, which they make use of in combat, and wear leather armor made of fur from various animals, the heads pulled up as hoods. Gelumm leads them (preferably from the rear) and his sister Tobaa (a **goblin shaman**) aid them mystically.

The Verrogobakks have stats as a **goblin warrior**, *Bestiary*, page 189, except for Tobaa and Gelumm (a **goblin chieftain**).

THE CHAPEL

At the center of the palace there was once a chapel, where Herbalag and his family would worship the daemon Jeberaja. The actual prayer room is dominated by the weathered and overgrown statue of a monstrous figure. Cleared of vegetation, the creature will emerge in all its fiendish horror – leaning forward menacingly, with half-expanded bat wings, terrible fangs, and a long, snake-like tongue slithering from its gaping jaws. Four outstretched arms, two of them with massive grippers, the other two with foot-long claws for cutting and slashing seemingly reaching for the characters.

Those who care to look, and pass a **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check**, will notice the edges of a hatch in the stone floor. The block of stone can be pried out with the proper tools. Beneath it are some stairs leading into the darkness, to the chapel catacombs. There is room for ten or so coffins, but all of the alcoves are empty, save one. In the lone sarcophagus rests Herbalag's father, along with some of his most prized possessions: a jewel-encrusted gold ring (value: 20 thaler); a ceremonial dagger with a wavy blade of bluish metal (value: 25 thaler); a golden, ruby-eyed statue of Jeberaja (value: 17 thaler); and finally, a headband of black stone (see the textbox *Arvalam's Blindfold*, page 173).

Prying up the stone is bound to make a lot of noise. The Gamemaster decides whether Orangaar's rage trolls, or possibly some of the character's competitors, take notice.

Note that if the characters come to Faarah Moroun after Cleaver, the catacombs will already have been cleared of treasure. Otherwise, no one will visit the Chapel until stop 3, when Dagesto and/or Ioséfia arrive.

The Cellar

Whether the cellar is a vast maze of chambers and corridors, or if it only contains the former laboratory and the holding cell depends on if the Gamemaster wants to add further challenges before reaching the gate or not. In the latter (suggested) case, this part of the basement level only has three rooms: the huge, hall-like workroom, a smaller ritual chamber and the prison – all empty except for some cracked stone tables.



The recently woken troll singer
Orangaar is busy building his new realm,
and does not like to be disturbed...

Arvalam's Blindfold, ARTIFACT

They say that Arvalam, Steward Grabando's court mystic, was one of the greatest demonologists during the late Symbaroum era. He was able to both summon and tame monstrosities which no other mystic ever could. However, Arvalam's exceptional power was not due to talent or extensive training, but to the blindfold he always wore when contacting the Yonderworld – which, allegedly, he acquired by making a pact with the daemon Lukofei. To harness the powers of the blindfold, it must cover its wearer's eyes, which significantly impairs his or her perceptive abilities (the character is blinded).

See Through Daemon

Whenever the artifact's master summons a daemon, they can use their bonus action to see its weakness or dark

appetites, and will thus be able to subdue it with greater ease: they have advantage on the required Charisma check for *summon daemon* (*Player's Guide*, page 206).

Requires: bonus action

Corruption: 1 temporary Corruption

Abyssal Premonition

If the artifact's master knows *banishment*, the blindfold can allow the master a glimpse of what dwells on the other side of the rift to the Yonderworld as they cast the spell. If the target of the spell is a daemon then it does not return if at least 30 seconds (5 rounds) have passed since it was banished and the spell ends.

Requires: bonus action

Corruption: 1 temporary Corruption

THE LABORATORY DOOR

There is a stone stairway, full of twigs and moldering leaves, leading to the cellar. Utter darkness awaits at the bottom of the stairs, and the air smells somewhat sour, like the fumes of some toxic, acidic substance.

What it looks like down there is largely for the Gamemaster to decide (see the textbox *The Cellar*, page 171). But there, in the back of the old laboratory, is the reinforced vault where Orangaar underwent his second hibernation, and where Prince Herbelag became one with the daemon Jeberaja. Its bronze door is huge; about twice the height of a man, almost as wide, and two feet thick. The corroded exterior is exquisitely ornamented, like a painting of a landscape with mountains, plains and water, and with figures as well – a rider on his horse; a couple walking hand in hand; a prowling hunter; animals in the form of a dog, a bear, and some birds. There is also a ship at sea, a crescent moon, and a cart pulled by oxen.

The Key to the Undergate

If the characters have somehow angered Brother Bartho, they will have to find some other way to learn the verse. For more information, see page 175, under the heading *Who Knows What?*

The door is open enough for a human to slip through. Inside, there is nothing but remnants of Orangaar's shriveled cocoon. The really interesting details are not found in the room, but on the inside of the door itself. Someone (Herbalag possessed by Jeberaja) has slashed tears in the metal and pulled them open, exposing the door's interior and, hence, the locking mechanism which Elmendra came looking for.

Examining the Door: Understanding how the mechanism operates requires a **DC 20 Intelligence (Investigation)** check – proficiency with Smith's Tools grants advantage. Some of the figures on the front of the door are attached to rods protruding from it. When someone pulls the figure, a connected gear is positioned so that its cogs mesh with those of the lock. Apparently, one must pull the figures in a certain order, and then turn them either left or right a certain number of clicks.

If the character succeeds by 5 or more, they realize that the lock can be set up in many different ways. In other words, should one find a similar door somewhere else, one will most likely need a code key specific to that particular door.

If the player characters have remained on good terms with Brother Bartho, they already have the code needed to unlock the Undergate at the roots of Karvosti – it is the verse which Bartho heard Elmendra recite over and over during their expedition (page 162).



ACT III:

Inside the Mother Rock

Returning to Karvosti after a more or less successful hunt for information, the player characters find the cliff under siege by a vast Ambrian army. Although they have already faced a number of tough challenges, the greatest one lays still ahead: to navigate the Underworld, reach and enter the High Chieftain's cliff, and confront the new mistress of the tunnels: the former Huldra, Oryela. If they are not careful, the challenge might be greater still, as the spider princess Karathran holds court near Karvosti's power node.

OBVIOUSLY, THE THIRD act will be affected by what happened in the first two. If the player characters have not obtained all the necessary clues, they may first have to negotiate with their competitors. Then the journey itself might be affected by which factions are still in the running. What happens in the tunnels and chambers of Karvosti also depends on previous events – what allies/enemies the characters have made, what items they have at their disposal, and, of course, what abilities and knowledge they possess.

Back on Karvosti

THE CHARACTERS WILL probably want to make a stop on the besieged Karvosti before setting off into the Underworld, to gather provisions and learn more about how the situation on the plateau has developed – something that could be an exciting experience in itself, with the enormous Ambrian army surrounding it. If they would rather go on the last stretch of the journey right away, parts of what is described below could take place in the woods around the Rift (page 177) or near Vearra's Outpost (or what is left of it).

UNDER SIEGE

When the player characters return from their third expedition, the Ambrian army has arrived and encamped in the woods east of the cliff. Their exact number cannot be determined, but the characters may of course take the opportunity to ask questions about that and other matters when they are stopped by one of the cavalry units constantly patrolling the camp perimeter.

As long as the characters are not wanted for crimes and do not appear threatening in any way, the rangers will let them pass. They must then reach the area below the northern part of the cliff where the Ambrians have established a route for civilians trying to leave or enter the

The chapter describing the third act is divided into sections which will probably be played more or less in sequence. First, the chapter addresses potential negotiations with other factions, then the journey to, and opening of, the backdoor into the cliff (called The Undergate), and finally what awaits the player characters on the other side of the door.

Last to be described is Karvosti's reliquary, including the stone tablet that started the treasure hunt, along with Oryela, the former Huldra with a severely split personality.

plateau. But the rangers strongly advise the characters not to proceed: "*The Queen is losing patience and the attack could begin any time now.*"

Moving along the edge of the camp, a character can learn that the army consists of more than just archers and infantry. Mystics move back and forth between tents, and the characters can often see at least a few Pansars sitting by the fires in full armor, perhaps there to serve as officers or

Entry Rules

The Ambrian guard post by the foot of the cliff will let civilians pass, but there are restrictions in place. Save what can be carried in a standard backpack, no provisions may be brought to the plateau. Weapons are okay, but they will refuse entry to all who look like barbarian warriors, guards, or witches. Also, there is a risk that the soldiers will confiscate equipment, treasure, and artifacts – not because they are ordered to, but because they can.

to bolster the regular troops. There is also a group of siege technicians arguing around a towering pine. With a successful **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check**, the characters are able to make out what they are discussing – which kind of mechanism and what material should be used to construct trebuchets powerful enough to hurl firebombs at the plateau.

Getting Past the Alarm System

Player characters who for some reason wish to avoid Queen Korinthia's army could try to climb the western side of Karvosti. This would mean climbing between 150 and 200 feet up an almost vertical surface.

Player characters must make a **DC 15 Strength (Athletics)** or **Dexterity (Acrobatics)** check to make the ascent. If they fail, the nature of their failure determines the danger. If they failed the check by 4 or less then they must make a **DC 15 Dexterity saving throw** or fall $(2d4 + 10) \times 10$ feet; if they failed the check by 5 or more the calculation is $(2d4 + 15) \times 10$ feet instead. Once the characters close in on the summit, they must then make a **DC 20 Dexterity (Stealth or Thieves' Tools) check** to get past the alarm system (see textbox).

AN ULTIMATUM

When the Gamemaster thinks it appropriate, the Queen's patience finally runs out. A herald, escorted by ten Pansars, rides up the cliff, stops in front of the wall, and shouts in a booming voice:

"Korinthia Nighthane of House Kohinoor, Queen of Ambria, rightful holder of the Throne of Thorns and the Slayer of Darkness, wishes to inform the chieftain of the barbarian clans that he has two days to grant her people full access to the cliff of Karvosti, including its underground chambers and those concealed by mystical means. Failure to comply with these terms will not be tolerated, and will result in the immediate and uncompromising annexation of what the barbarian folk calls the High Chieftain's cliff."

The two-day time limit is only meant as a suggestion; the Gamemaster may increase or decrease it as they pleases. Player characters who are already on Karvosti can hurry to conclude their affairs on the plateau and then follow the crowds who are still there – including Crueljaw, Ov and Teresma, and both cooks from the pilgrim camp.

No matter how much time remains until the deadline expires, everyone (except the Sovereign's Oath) can feel the panic creeping up on them – a large-scale war between Ambria and the people of Davokar could be the end of an entire generation, on both sides.

Although he is still unwell, Tharaban will do everything in his power to avoid confrontation, for example having his representatives (the characters?) offer Korinthia and Seldonio access to the stronghold vaults. But Korinthia will not

The Alarm System

Designed by High Chieftain Dormegor's master builder, the alarm system has proven effective to this day. Almost the entire cliff is encircled by a ten-feet-wide cluster of extremely thin wires, about seventy feet from the top, all attached to one of the eight bell towers positioned along the edge of Karvosti. It would take a lot for someone to climb all the way up without releasing the weights which make the bell towers signal their arrival – especially for packs of beasts or large abominations.

The areas near the wall and below the grove of Aloéna by the southern tip are the only ones free from wires. The witches have made it clear that Aloéna will not have any bells or wires near her domain; something the High Chieftains have approved, believing the ancient creature to be perfectly capable of dealing with intruders herself, should they try to sneak into her grove.

budge. The Queen of Ambria is convinced that the witches will come around, if only because of appeals and threats from the clan chieftains (read more about this in the section titled *Calming the Storm*, page 191).

WHO KNOWS WHAT?

What information the various hunting parties have depends entirely on which way the player characters went during Act II and what happened at the adventure locations. The table on the next page shows a suggestion to start with, but the Gamemaster is of course free to ignore it and come up with something else.

However, we recommend that the information should be somewhat scattered, so that not all groups have all the information. This way, there would still be opportunities and need for negotiations, even if the player characters already have the information they need.

A few extra words must be said about the verse which is needed to open Karvosti's Undergate. Apart from the missing Elmendra, Brother Bartho is practically the only one who knows the verse. If he is dead, and the player characters have not yet learned it, there are a few ways to solve their dilemma:

The Stronghold Archives: The scrolls in which Elmendra found information regarding possible locations of doors similar to Karvosti's Undergate can be found in the High Chieftain's vaults. Two of the scrolls also recite the verse, describing it as "a key." Getting access to the vaults requires

WHO HAS OBTAINED WHICH CLUES

	Yeferon	New Earthmoor	Faarah Moroun
Ranger Captains	✓	✓	—
Leohan Meleke	✓	—	✓
Father Argaton	✓	—	✓
Dagesto	—	✓	—
Ioséfia Dresel	—	✓	✓
Cleaver	—	✓	—

a break-in or very good relations with Tharaban (or a considerable favor offered in return); finding the scrolls requires assistance from the High Chieftain's chronicler, Monagona; interpreting them requires a **DC 20 Intelligence (Investigation) check** – the Loremaster feature grants advantage.

Erella: Elmendra's verse was etched into Brother Bartho's brain, and he would often hum it to himself. If encouraged, his beloved Erella can recall every single word of it – but since she has no idea that it is actually a key code, the player characters will have to ask the right questions.

"Did Bartho have some special key?" will probably not get them very far. "Do you remember if there was something different about Bartho when he returned from his expedition with Elmendra?" will lead to something like: "No, nothing, nothing at all. Or... Well, I think that was when he started singing that annoying verse..."

Other Factions: Their competitors may well have learned the verse, either in one of the ways mentioned above or directly from Brother Bartho (e.g. Cleaver). In that case, the characters could either ally themselves with the group in question, or kidnap and interrogate its leader under more or less violent circumstances. Another option could be to prepare an ambush near the Undergate and wait for someone else to open it...

NEGOTIATIONS

Negotiations on Karvosti, or in the surrounding woods, are the player characters' last chance to compensate for previous mistakes. Even if the characters have managed to acquire the information they need, there might still be cause for negotiation. Groups who have failed to obtain all the necessary clues will try to learn whatever they do not know, and if the characters refuse to help them, they will turn to each other instead. Using the suggestion above, this would mean that an extremely problematic alliance could be formed between the Sun Knights and the Queen's Rangers, or between the former and one or two groups of fortune hunters.

Another reason to negotiate is that the groups representing House Kohinoor, the Templars and the Sun Church are well connected and have enormous resources at their disposal. If the characters play their cards right, they could benefit greatly from cooperating with their rivals – they could be promised a small fortune, estates, career opportunities, secret information, or perhaps a much sought-after artifact. But not without offering something in return: their negotiating partner will either request their help in the final stages of the treasure hunt, or demand that they stop hunting the "map to Symbar" entirely. And once the negotiations are done, the player characters have the choice between compliance and deceit.

Appearing Before Nightbane

If the player characters are given the opportunity to appear before the Queen, as the High Chieftain's envoys or during the adventure's epilogue, the Gamemaster would do well to truly emphasize her authority. She wears full armor, her face covered by the white porcelain mask, with a mighty broadsword at her side (successful **DC 15 Intelligence (History)** or **Wisdom (Insight or Perception)** check: the sword is well-used and has probably seen countless battles). Next to her are Seldonio, Grandmaster of Ordo Magica, and the

leader of her guard, General Jomilo. Furthermore, there are six dark-eyed pansars lined up between their liege and the characters, swords drawn but pointed at the floor.

Note that if the characters helped Korinthia get hold of the copper tablet during the adventure *Wrath of the Warden*, she will probably recognize their names. If so, they will receive a modifier of +1 if the scheming rules are employed, and she will thank them personally for their great efforts and achievements.

Through the Underworld

TIME HAS COME for the player characters to pack their bags, sharpen their weapons, and stock up on elixirs before setting off for the Undergate of Karvosti. The journey itself will most likely be as dangerous as the destination, particularly if the characters' competitors are still trying to get their hands on the cliff's rich stores of knowledge.

THE RIFT

Finding the entrance to the Underworld which Iasmial's warriors once used should not be very difficult – provided that they have the map. Of course, the characters will face other obstacles along the way.

The entrance is a virtually overgrown rift near the shore of Lake Volgoma. According to Garathve's indications, it is located four hundred and thirty paces east and three hundred and four paces north of the Blue Altar Stone – a huge rock of blue-grey granite, worn down to an egg-like shape by the crashing autumn waves (see the left side of the map on page 202). At its widest, the rift is no more than seven feet across, and it stretches nearly fifty feet long, curved like a crescent moon.

Heading down into the rift, one will find it narrow at first, before it widens again, eventually leading to a small underground chamber from which one small and two larger cracks run in different directions. There are about one hundred feet from the surface down to the bottom of the rift, and about fifteen feet from the opening in the chamber ceiling to the chamber floor. On the ground lie the skeletal remains of ten or so animals and two humans who have fallen to their deaths through the centuries.

Locating the Rift: The characters must make a **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check** to follow the map's instructions – the Bushcraft trait grants advantage. They must then gauge the terrain and pinpoint the exact location of the entrance. This requires a **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check**. On a failure by 5 or more, means one of the characters walks straight into the gap and may sustain falling damage (see below). The unfortunate character is chosen at random (or the one going first, if they stick together), and must pass a **DC 13 Dexterity saving throw** to not fall.

The Climb: Descending requires climbing down the sides of the rift, or using a rope which grants advantage on the required check. Doing so requires a **DC 15 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) group check**. Failing the check means that one or more characters put their weight on a loose stone and endangered the party in their attempt to compensate. Each character must make a **DC 13 Dexterity saving throw**. Those that fail will fall $(1d4 + 3) \times 10$ feet to the Underworld below.

Enemies Near the Rift: The landscape between Karvosti and Lake Volgoma consists of large rocks covered with vegetation – the perfect location for someone setting up an ambush...

Should any of the player characters' competitors still lack information needed to enter Karvosti, they could well be waiting close to the rift, hoping to trap someone who does. In that case, they will try to take at least one of the characters alive to lead them to the Undergate.

Another possibility is that the members of a certain group (alternately an alliance of groups) already have the information they need, but hope to stop or slow down anyone who might be following them. Then, the enemy's goal would simply be to eliminate the player characters.

Should the idea of an ambush seem reasonable to the Gamemaster, they should prepare a map of the area surrounding the rift, mark where the enemies are hiding, and give some thought to their strategy. They will probably not attack until some of the player characters have started climbing into the deep...

THE JOURNEY BELOW

The Underworld is vast and diverse in nature. The area through which the player characters will be traveling consists mainly of small grottos, five to ten feet from floor to ceiling, connected by cracks whose width ranges from three to five feet. Medium and larger creatures may have to squeeze through some passages (see the textbox below). The tunnels slant downwards, and so do the grottos; sometimes one will need a rope to climb down steep bedrock slopes

Squeezing Into a Smaller Space

A creature can squeeze through a space smaller than it is. Use the table below to determine if a space requires squeezing. While squeezing through a space, a creature must spend 1 extra foot for every foot it moves there, and it has disadvantage on attack rolls and Dexterity saving throws. Attack rolls against the creature have advantage while it's in the smaller space.

Creature Size	Minimum Space Required
Tiny	1 foot
Small or Medium	3 feet
Large	5 feet
Huge	10 feet
Gargantuan	15 feet

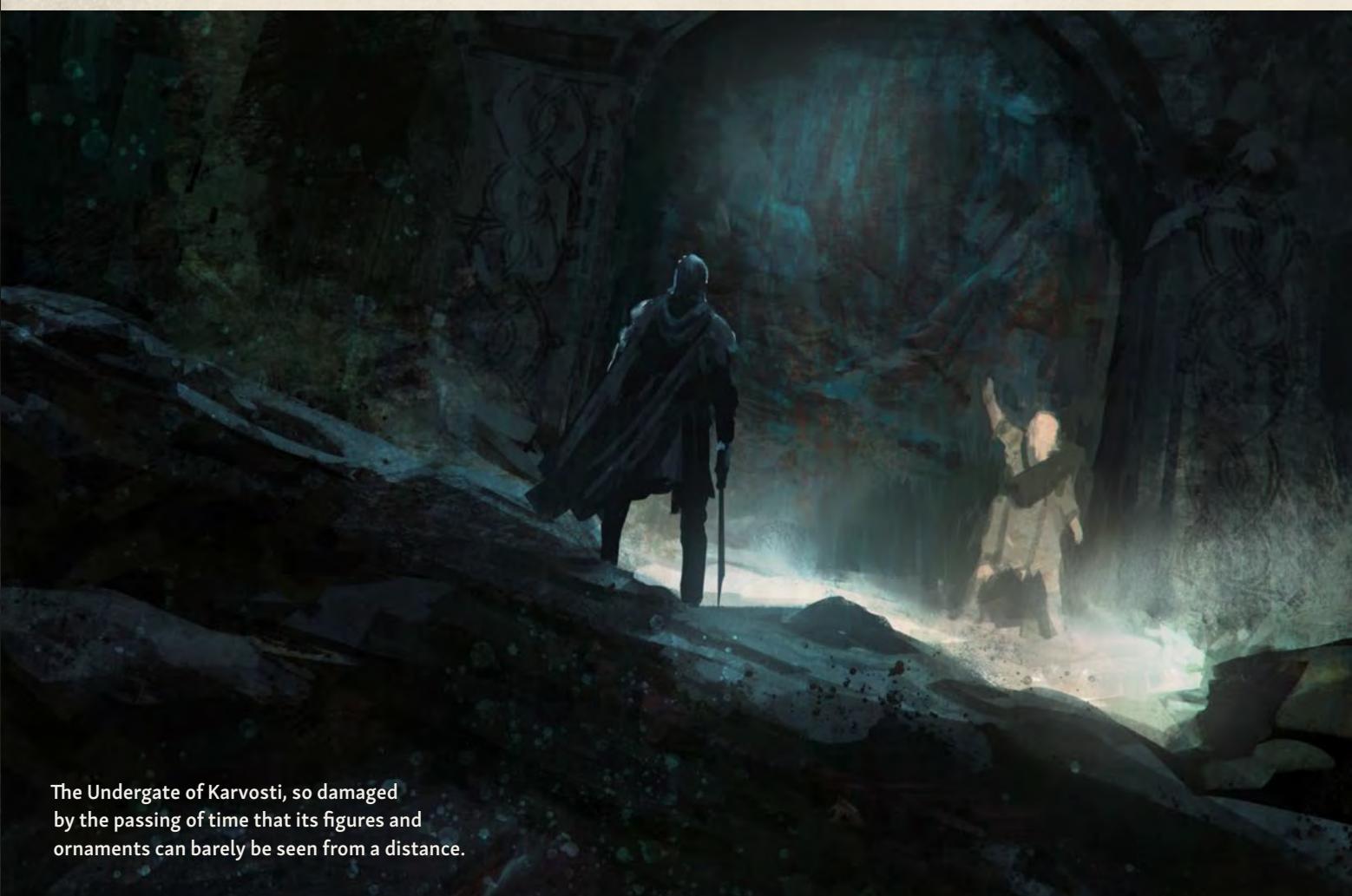
and masses of cobblestone. It is evident for everyone that the path takes them deeper and deeper down into the bedrock, hundreds of feet. This means that the nature of the surroundings changes along the way; some of the grottos near the end of the descent are warm and humid, with luminescent moss covering the floor, walls, and ceiling.

There are creatures living down there, but we would suggest that the player characters manage to avoid them

if they only follow the path marked on the map. Two **DC 12 Wisdom (Survival) checks** are required to navigate the tunnels and reach the Undergate. A character that has the Bushcraft feature or is proficient with Cartographer's Instruments has advantage on the check. Those who fail a check or deliberately deviate from the path must roll on the following table, unless the Gamemaster would rather decide on something else.

ENCOUNTERS IN THE UNDERWORLD

1d20	Encounter	Description
1–7	None	—
8–11	Pale crawlers rejected by other trolls (one for every PC)	<i>Bestiary</i> , page 209
12–14	A pack of wilys (one for every PC)	<i>Bestiary</i> , page 126
15–17	A vearon	<i>Bestiary</i> , page 146
18–19	Group-living rage trolls (one for every PC)	<i>Bestiary</i> , page 211
20	A raskaal	<i>Bestiary</i> , page 162



Into Karvosti

AT THE END of a more or less eventful journey through the Underworld, the player characters finally reach a massive gate, which probably looks very familiar. It is almost identical to the one in Faarah Moroun – severely corroded, twice the height of a man, almost as wide, two feet thick, and highly ornate – but the figures are slightly different. Now, all that remains is to open it.

THE GATE IS OPENED

In order to open the Undergate of Karvosti, one must either have memorized Elmendra's verse or written it down. Should the players have difficulty deciphering its meaning, the Gamemaster can let the characters have a go at it, preferably after some discussion; a successful **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check**. Success indicates that the figures below are the only ones not stuck to the door, since Elmendra has already loosened them using a chisel and alchemical substances purchased on Karvosti. Success by 5 or more means that they notice wear patterns on these figures that give a hint which direction each figure should be rotated.

To open the door, one must pull out five specific figures and turn them, clockwise or counterclockwise, a certain number of clicks. To be perfectly clear, here is a reiteration of the verse, along with explanations of each segment:

<i>The horseman canters two paces east...</i>	Pull the rider, turn 2 clicks clockwise
<i>the moon crescent follows him once and again.</i>	Pull the moon, turn 4 clicks clockwise
<i>The ship glides six leagues the other way...</i>	Pull the ship, turn 6 clicks counterclockwise
<i>shadowed half-way by the eagle.</i>	Pull the eagle, turn 3 clicks counterclockwise
<i>The dog then tails its riding friend...</i>	Pull the dog, turn 2 clicks clockwise
<i>till it swivels and doubles the distance.</i>	Turn the dog 4 clicks counterclockwise

Knock and Similar Magic Sealing/Opening Rite

If knock or similar magic is used, each figure counts as one lock for the purpose of the spell. The character (or NPC) must therefore perform the spell successfully six times in a row – otherwise, the mechanism resets and they will have to restart from the beginning.

Pushing the unlocked gate open when in a stressful situation (as in combat, for example) requires a **DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check** and requires a character to spend their action on two rounds in a row to move the massive door or one round if they succeed by 5 or more. If the character fails by 4 or less they have made some progress in getting it unstuck and will have advantage on their next check.

AMBUSH!

There is a considerable risk that the player characters will be attacked as soon as the door starts to open, if not earlier. It could be Argaton (perhaps in alliance with Adreanea) who wishes to stop the door from opening at all. Or maybe the characters are being followed by the same alliance that had some of its forces lie in wait by the rift?

It would be particularly dramatic if the attacking force is more than the characters can handle. Then they must either take their chances in combat or try to hold the enemy off while some of their fellow characters work on pushing the door open.

The rules for opening the door apply when pushing it closed as well, and it is obviously crucial that no person or object is in its way. On the other side of the door is a circular handle of corroded bronze, large as an ogre's headband, which can be used to open it from the inside. If one would rather keep it sealed, one could wedge the door shut, requiring a **DC 20 Dexterity (Carpenter's Tools, Excavation Tools, Mason's Tools, Smith's Tools, Thieves' Tools, Tinker's Tools, or Woodcarver's Tools)** as long as those tools are available or an **Intelligence (Investigation) check** to use steel weapons or other improvised materials (at your discretion).

Trailing Elmendra

IT IS NEITHER possible nor necessary to describe in detail the twists and turns of the tunnels which run through the inside of Karvosti. This section begins with a description of the area in general, followed by a closer look at nine of its sections, which are more or less internally homogeneous. And lastly, the focus is on a number of specific halls or chambers where the player characters may acquire certain information, confront enemies, or both.

NAVIGATING INSIDE KARVOSTI

First and foremost: with a few exceptions, there is no light inside Karvosti, either from lanterns or from any luminescent vegetation. It is dark. Pitch-dark. And as soon as one steps through the door, one is hit by a feeling of unease. Something is wrong, terribly wrong.

Two details immediately stand out:

- ◆ The ground is covered with fine-grained stone dust, which makes it impossible not to notice the footprints – tracks from the soft boots of quite a small person, in all

likelihood Elmendra. There are tracks leading away from the door, and others that lead back towards the Underworld (see the dotted line on the map on the next page).

- ◆ There are also other tracks in the dust, lots of them, but their shape is difficult to identify. Some are small and almost round; others are about four inches long, thin, with smudged outlines. A **DC 13 Intelligence (Nature) check** – the Bushcraft trait grants advantage on the check – allows a character to draw the right conclusion: these are the tracks of spiders, some running, others hopping. The biggest one must be truly enormous.

The characteristics of the various sections are described in greater detail under *The Sections* (page 183), but generally speaking, the inside of Karvosti consists of winding passages, cracks, and tunnels. Most of them were first created by the rain and meltwater which for thousands of years seeped through the cliff, and later sculpted by the witches to fit their needs. Others were made entirely by humans, most often to connect different parts of the network.

Some passages lead to halls and chambers: some large, others small; some natural, others of human making; some damp, others dry. Most of them are completely empty and seem to have never served any particular function, but the higher up one gets, the more one finds chambers built for practical use.

The Feeling of Unease: If the player characters are in section A, a **DC 20 Wisdom (Insight or Perception) check** is required to accurately identify the sensation; in section B a character with a passive Insight or Perception of 15 or higher will suffice, as long as everyone stands still and keeps quiet.

If successful, the player character will notice two distinct sounds – one is the soft flow of waves sweeping over bedrock; the other is a powerful throbbing sound, so low-pitched it can hardly be heard, but rather felt. Every fifteen breaths there is another throb, sending shivers down the spine and causing the very bedrock to tremble.

It is the sound of Garavarax. As the characters move closer to the underground lake in section C, the sound of the waves becomes louder, but the throbbing does not.

Cobwebs: As the player characters travel deeper into the cliff, they sometimes come across thick cobwebs, often positioned at ankle-height near tunnel openings and intersections. Moreover, there are individual strings, sometimes bundles of them, running along the walls and ceiling. A successful **DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check** leads to the conclusion that it must be some kind of warning system.

There is a good chance that the player characters will give away their presence every time they go from one section to another. Whoever goes first must make a **DC 15 Wisdom**

(Perception) check (if the character does not expressly state that they are watching out for spider webs they have disadvantage on the check). If it succeeds, the character manages to get past the obstacle without complication; if the check fails, the string of webbing will break. In the latter case, the risk of the spiders being alerted increases the closer they get to the power node (such a vast web inevitably has its flaws). When the characters enter sections B and C, roll 1d6, on a **1** the spiders are alerted; on a **1-2** for section D; **1-3** in section E and F; and **1-5** in section G.

The Symbols: Player characters who have spoken to Elida in New Earthmoor already know about the direction indicators which can be found in each of the larger corridors and intersections – triangles the size of one's palm, pointing upwards, downwards, left (south) or right (north). The characters will probably keep following Elmendra's trail, but in that case, the arrows could at least raise intriguing questions, such as: "Why did she head north from here? Elida made it perfectly clear that north was a bad idea."

The main function of the arrows is to give the players an alternative to the path taken by Elmendra; they can pick a direction (south and upwards) and stick to it, even if the footprints lead somewhere else.

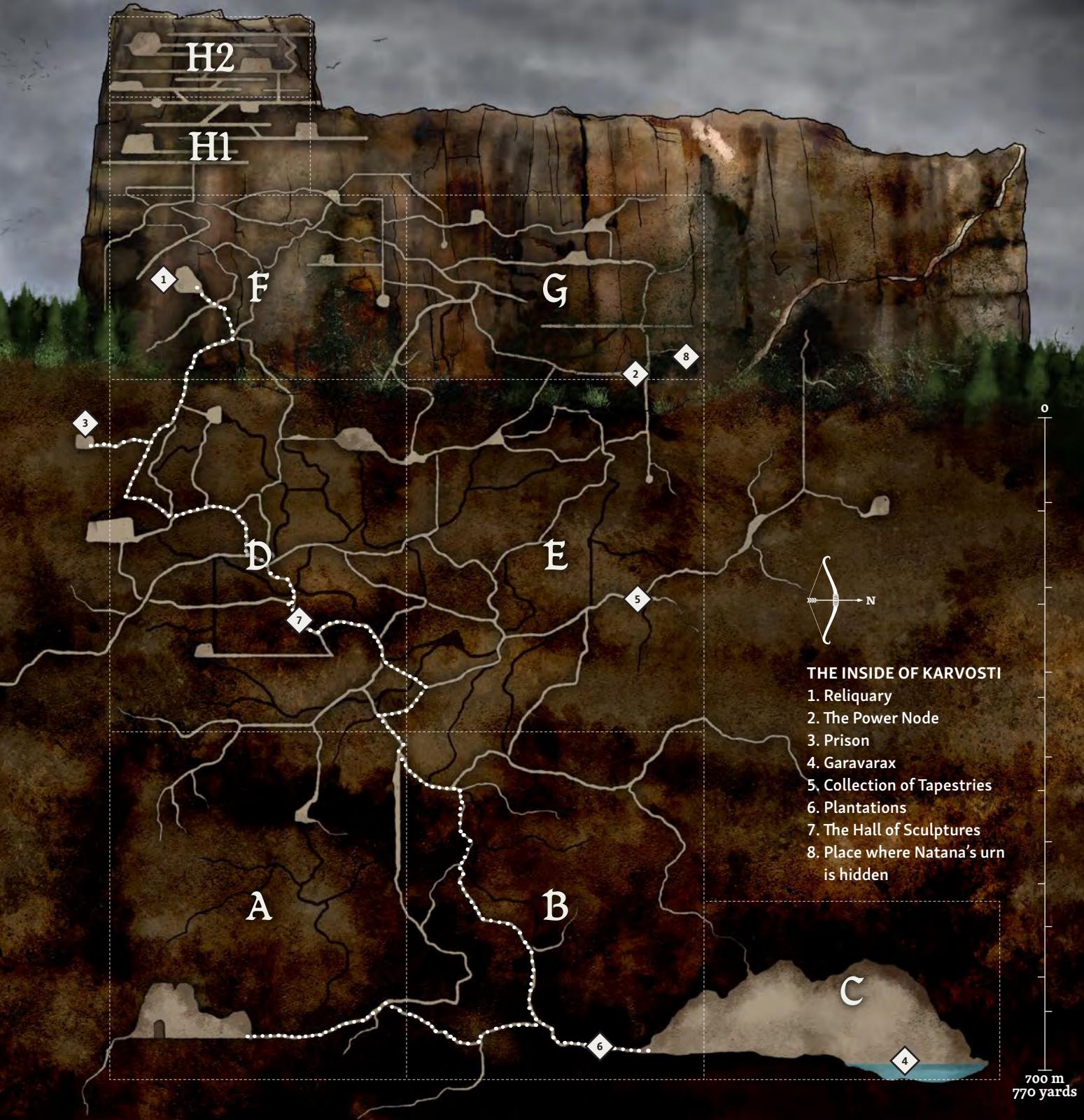
KARATHRAN

The deeper parts of Karvosti have a new ruler – the spider princess Karathran, daughter of Xanathâ, mother of many. Her children have been watching the Undergate for decades, waiting for a chance to get past it; a chance they got as Elmendra left the door half-open on her way out. The princess hurried inside along with many of her spiderlings, slew a couple of witches who had business in the deep, and sealed the passages between section H and F with numerous layers of cobweb.

What Karathran wants is the power of Karvosti's node; not for herself, but for her mother, Xanathâ. She has decided that it is time for the Spider King to return and resume his battle against the humans and their relentless efforts to destroy the world. However, this information will not be revealed to the player characters, even if they should somehow manage to gain an audience with Karathran. Both they and the Gamemaster will have to wait until the fourth episode of the chronicle to delve into that particular subject, when they encounter Xanathâ again, in the city of the last emperor: Symbar.

Should the player characters alert the spiders to their presence, they will first be pursued by **hunting spiders** (one for each player character, *Bestiary*, page 150). It is possible to hide from them in the dark nooks and crannies of the tunnels (a **DC 14 Dexterity [Stealth] group check** is required), but in that case, the hunters will not stop looking for them until they have left Karvosti.

1,200 m/1,300 yards



Note: The tunnels drawn vertically on the map slant to the east and west, and are therefore not as steep as they appear.

700 m
770 yards

Should it come to combat, the situation turns even more precarious. The player characters could of course win, but when the hunters do not report back, three more patrols (the same number of hunting spiders, led by a **fray spider**, Bestiary, page 150) are dispatched, which are best avoided.

Should any of these groups also be defeated, Karathran will consider the intruders a serious threat. She withdraws her forces (at least twice as many hunting spiders as player characters and one fray spider for every two characters) and positions them around the Power Node chamber, leaving the way to the Reliquary open for the characters. However, when they get there, Oryela will be much more difficult to handle.

Karathran

"I am Karathran, daughter of Xanathâ, mother of many."
Karathran is the daughter of the monstrous spider Xanathâ, one of the oldest creatures in the region, once hunted by the

great princes of Symbar. The mother has recently returned from a long stay in the Spirit World, which has given many of her daughters a new purpose in life – to do whatever they can to help the mother give new life to their brother, the Spider King Angathal Taar.

Karathran gratefully accepted her new role. During Xanathâ's absence, she watched the humans with growing concern, and she completely agrees that something must be done. That being said, over the centuries she has come to both respect and understand the clanfolk and their witches, and would rather not see them hurt. She intends to absorb the power of the node and leave Karvosti as she found it, preferably without further bloodshed.

As for her appearance, Karathran is black as night, with a body the size of an ogre and long, jointed legs. Normally her multitude of eyes are about three feet from the ground, but her long legs enable her to rise up and look down on even

Karathran

Large beast

Armor Class 19 (natural armor, carapace plates)

Hit Points 119 (14d10 + 42)

Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
21 (+5)	19 (+4)	17 (+3)	18 (+4)	15 (+2)	12 (+1)

Saving Throws Dex +8, Con +7, Wis +6, Cha +5

Skills Intimidation +9, Perception +6, Persuasion +9, Stealth +8

Damage Resistances poison

Senses darkvision 120 feet, passive Perception 16

Languages telepathy (120 ft, see below, ancient barbarian tongue, spider-tongue)

Challenge 11 (7,200 XP, proficiency bonus +4)

Manner completely motionless

Shadow sparkling white like sunlit snow (0/9)

Equipment —

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

Legendary Resistance (1/day). If Karathran fails a saving throw, she can choose to succeed instead.

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

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

Web Walker. Karathran ignores movement restrictions caused by webbing.

ACTIONS

Multiaction. Karathran makes two bite or two poison spit attacks.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 10 (1d10 + 5) piercing damage and the creature must make a DC 20 Constitution saving throw or become paralyzed for 1 minute. A paralyzed creature takes 11 (2d10) acid damage at the start of its turn and can repeat the saving throw at the end of its turn, ending the effects on a success.

Poison Spit. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, range 30/90 ft., one target. *Hit:* 17 (3d8 + 4) poison damage and the creature must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned for 1 minute. A paralyzed creature takes 5 (1d10) poison damage at the start of its turn and can repeat the saving throw at the end of its turn, ending the effects on a success.

Web (Recharge 5–6). *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, range 20/40 ft., one Medium or smaller creature. *Hit:* The creature is restrained by webbing. As an action, the restrained creature can make a DC 15 Strength check, escaping from the webbing on a success. The effect also ends if the webbing is destroyed. The webbing has AC 15, 30 hit points, vulnerability to fire damage, and immunity to bludgeoning, poison, and psychic damage.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

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

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

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

the tallest of adventurers. She communicates via telepathic imagery, removing the need to overcome any language barriers. She can express herself verbally as well, but only in creaking hisses and, at best, in an ancient barbarian dialect long since forgotten.

Tactics: Karathran leaves the fighting to her offspring, but will aid them with her web and poison spit. She does not enjoy killing, not in the least, but in this case backing down is not an option – she will not leave the node until the eggs she carries on her mother's behalf are filled with power.

Hunting Spiders

The **hunting spiders** (*Bestiary*, page 150) look like smaller version of their mother – about the size of a large dog, with glossy, black, hairless bodies and long, thin legs. They only obey their mother's commands, and will do anything to protect her.

Fray Spiders

The larger, stronger **fray spiders** (*Bestiary*, page 150) are the offspring of Karathran and Ark, the forest god of Odaban. Brownish-gray and covered with thick, short hairs, these large spiders lack the ability to spin webs. Instead, they catch their prey like most four-legged predators: with speed, strength, and cunning.

THE SECTIONS

As mentioned earlier, the inside of Karvosti is a maze of tunnels, corridors, halls, and chambers. The sections cannot all be described here, and drawing three-dimensional maps is also quite the challenge. But if the Gamemaster feels the need for more detailed plans of the area, our suggestion would be that each section should consist of two levels and that the network should be as wide as the cliff itself (400 meters, about 440 yards). Just remember to mark the passages leading up and down between levels.

Section A: The chambers in section A, where the characters enter Karvosti, are only visited by the witches when they have reason to venture into the Underworld. A wide tunnel (made by barbarians long ago) leads from the Undergate to the plantations in section B, and footprints indicate that Elmendra went that way, back and forth.

There is another passage which also leads to B, and two smaller tunnels leading to D. The latter ones are completely blocked by many layers of thick web. The player characters could either cut or burn their way through, but they must succeed on a **DC 20 Dexterity (Stealth) group check** or risk alerting the spiders.

Section B: In section B, the air is warmer and damper, and the ground is increasingly porous the further north one goes. The number of cave halls also increases, and near section C is a series of rooms where the witches grow lichens,

About the Map and the Sections

It is difficult for a two-dimensional map to do the insides of Karvosti justice. Not all its tunnels, cracks and halls are marked out; the focus is on the path taken by Elmendra. Should the player characters ignore her trail and wish to explore the rest of the underground complex, the Gamemaster is most welcome to add or remove whatever seems appropriate. Just remember to convey the constant threat of the spiders – if the characters linger for too long, they will soon go from hunters to being hunted!

mushrooms, and algae (see *The Plantations* on page 184). At an intersection in the middle of B, Elmendra first continued north, then came back the same way to follow a slanting tunnel toward E instead. The trail north leads straight through the section, past the plantations and into C.

There are two passages between A and B, and as many between B and E, but only one from B to C – a natural crack which runs from the plantations all the way to Garavarax's lake. The opening near the plantations is partially covered by spider webs. The characters must make a **DC 13 Dexterity (Stealth) group check** to proceed without disturbing them.

Section C: The northernmost section of the cave complex consists entirely of natural cracks, tunnels, and chambers. The witches only go there to help Aloéna keep a watchful eye on Garavarax when the giant seems restless in his sleep. Elmendra's trail goes all the way to the opening into the vast hall with the underground lake (page 184), but not a step further – the sight of Aloéna put an end to her curiosity. She reminded herself of why she had come, and turned around.

Section D: Section D is located directly above the Undergate, and it was here Elida spent most of her time as the witches' "guest." The footprints – which go from E, through the Hall of Sculptures, and on to the Prison – are not as easily distinguished, since Yeleta and her witches visit both the plantations and Oryela at least once every other day. At the intersection where Elmendra first went to the Prison (#3), then turned back and proceeded upwards, a character with a **passive Perception of 15 or higher** notices her detour.

As mentioned earlier, there are two tunnels between D and A, both covered with webbing. The same goes for those between D and F, and also for four of the five tunnels between D and E. Should the player characters cut or burn their way through they must make a **DC 25 Dexterity (Stealth) group check**. If they fail by 1-4, one patrol (as on page 180) of spiders discovers them. If they fail by 5 or more it is two patrols instead.

Section E: Except for the large tunnel leading to and from the Plantations, the witches rarely visit section E. The air is fresh and dry, which makes the section well-suited for storing textiles, parchment, and paper, and some of the natural chambers are used for that exact purpose. But the player characters will no doubt be more interested in the collection of tapestries described on page 185.

Next to the main tunnel is another passage between E and B, and two between E and G, both completely covered with webbing – a **DC 30 Dexterity (Stealth) check** is required with the consequences being the same as Section D. There are also five passages between E and D – one is the main tunnel, the others are smaller and covered with webs, requiring a **DC 25 Dexterity (Stealth) check**, with same consequences once again.

Section F: One could say that section F is the cellar of the witches' dwelling. In addition to the Reliquary (page 187), there are laboratories, a smithy, and storehouses for alchemical substances. The hunting spiders have destroyed most of it, but there are still treasures to be found. The Gamemaster could determine the number of finds in advance, or let the players make **DC 20 Intelligence (Investigation) checks**. On a success by 4 or less, they find one curiosity; on a success of 5 or more, they find 1d4 curiosities (*Gamemaster's Guide*, page 73).

Sections F and D are connected by two passages, one of which is completely covered with spider webs. Of the five passages between F and G, only one is free of webbing. The two passages between F and H are blocked by numerous layers of webbing, and hunting spiders (one for each player character) are posted near each passage, to warn the others if the witches should attempt to break through.

New Elixirs

Adding these supplies to producing certain elixirs allows them to be more potent:

Yellow Mist Cap

Adding mist cap when creating Choking Spores means that the victim of a garrote loses conscious half as soon as normal. As normal, they receive at least one round to attempt to escape the garrote (*Player's Guide*, page 181). Each dose of raw material is worth 4 thaler.

Weeping Wind Lichen

Mixing the wind lichen into an ordinary Herbal Cure means it heals 2d4 hit points instead. When used with the Medicus feature, the character restores two Hit Dice instead of one. There are enough lichens for 2d4 Herbal Cures, and each dose of raw material is worth 10 thaler.

Section G: Section G could be described as the heart of Karvosti, as this is where one finds the mystical node used by the witches whenever they need more power than their own bodies can channel. Here can also be found one large and six smaller ritual chambers – stone halls that are completely bare, except for patterned rugs on the floor. A long time ago, Oryela hid the artifact that corrupted her, Natana's Urn, deep inside a crack in the wall of a grotto directly behind the Power Node chamber.

All passages into and out of G are covered with spider webs, except the larger corridor which leads to F.

Section H1-2: The two passages leading to the witches' dwellings, guest rooms, and meeting rooms are blocked by webs. And what is more, the witches have sealed the bronze doors on their side of the spider webs, as they wait for the negotiations with Karathran to bring about a peaceful solution.

The character's chances of reaching these sections are slim – they would first have to kill the **hunting spiders** (two for each player character) posted in the area, then get through many layers of web and a massive bronze door before Karathran sends her entire horde to stop them. And even if they somehow manage all of this, the witches will immediately put bags over their heads, escort them to the entrance hall, and make them leave through the opening near Aloéna's grove.

THE PLANTATIONS

In the porous stone at the bottom level of Karvosti's tunnels, the Huldra and her aides are growing alchemically potent algae, mushrooms, and lichens. Rock formations and stalagmites divide the almost 700-foot-long, slightly sloping cave into a number of sections, each with said ingredients growing on the floor and walls.

With a **DC 20 Intelligence (Investigation) check** – a field laboratory or proficiency with Alchemist's Supplies or Poisoner's Kit provides advantage – the characters can recognize many common components of various poisons and alchemical remedies. But there is one mushroom and one type of algae that none will have seen before. In order to find them, one must study the plantations closely. After looking around for half an hour the character must make another **DC 20 Intelligence (Investigation) check** – passing the check means that the character finds a mushroom the witches call Yellow Mist Cap; success by 5 or more means they have also found the lichen known as the Weeping Wind Lichen. See the textbox *New Elixirs* to the left.

GARAVARAX

If the player characters follow Elmendra's trail north from the plantations, through a crack in the rock, they will reach the other side after about 150 meters. The further they go,

the air grows damper and the waves louder. Soon, another sound emerges from the dark – the faint, melodic singing of birds.

They can tell from the sound alone that the hall ahead is extremely vast. Then they glimpse a cold, grainy light coming from the ground further in.

With a successful **DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check**, the characters can also see a figure standing completely still in the dark between them and the strange light; an enormous figure, about 10 feet tall. If the characters have seen Aloéna before and pass the Perception check by 5 or more, they will recognize her immediately.

Aloéna is standing on the brink of the underground lake, at the bottom of which the giant Garavarax is kept in perpetual slumber. The slow beating of his heart is what makes the lake surge and the ground tremble. And thanks to the faintly glowing algae at the bottom of the lake the characters may actually catch a glimpse of him. They cannot make out any details, just a huge, dark shadow against the light of the algae. The birdsong is now heard quite clearly, coming from somewhere further in.

Should the player characters dare approach her, Aloéna will slowly turn around and put a finger to her lips, hushing them. Her focus is entirely on Garavarax, and she is not interested in why the characters have come, who they are, or what they bring with them. As long as they keep quiet and don't disturb the water, she may give brief answers to some of their questions – in perfect Ambrian, no less. If they ask her about something not listed below, she simply shakes her head and nods toward the exit:

What are you doing?

"Help the lulling singers sustain Garavarax's slumber. These are perilous times for the little people, even with no storms on Lake Volgoma."

Are you not needed on Karvosti?

"I watch and listen and assess, there as I do here. I am where I must be, always."

We need your help; can you help us?

"No, that I need not do..."

Davokar is about to awaken, the forest grows darker; why do you not intervene?

"I act in accordance with my calling. It was I who put Garavarax to rest, and I must see that he does not awaken. That is all..."

THE TAPESTRY COLLECTION

In a dry natural cave, some thirty rods have been hung horizontally from the ceiling, attached with wires and hooks. On these rods, fifty or so tapestries and patterned rugs are mounted in row after row. Most of them are tattered,

probably salvaged from Symbarian ruins, and many depict abstract patterns rather than images. However, there are two interesting exceptions:

The Throne of Thorns: 10 by 15 feet in dimensions, the tapestry was weaved with thick threads which over the years have lost much of their color and luster. It depicts a throne, perched on a stone podium – a throne of black stone with a towering back shaped like a half-open hand-fan, and with thick, writhing thorns stretching toward the ceiling and drooping over the podium like a billowing cape. And on the throne sits a faceless ruler dressed in white and red, with some kind of crooked wooden staff resting across its lap.

The Last Battle of Symbar: A thin, panoramic tapestry, 13 feet high and just over 25 feet wide. Cuneiform writings have been embroidered near its upper edge and can be interpreted by someone that succeeds with a **DC 25 Intelligence (Investigation) check** – the Loremaster feature grants advantage: "The Last Battle of Symbar." A great city towers in the background, with a battle raging in the forefront. In the center rides a steel-clad knight, swinging a sword. More human warriors come rushing from the left, toward their enemies – slim, spear-wielding humanoids, some as tall as the warriors, others much taller. And among them swarms a horde of spider creatures. A successful **DC 20 Intelligence (Investigation or Nature) check**, leads to the conclusion that Symbar (according to the tapestry) was crushed by an army of elves and spiders...

THE HALL OF SCULPTURES

In one of the larger halls of section F, the witches have amassed a large collection of sculptures which over the centuries have been found amongst the *ruins of Symbaroum*. They are all related, in one way or another, to the mystical and/or dark forces of the world. Most of them are relatively small, human-sized at best, but some are gigantic, brought to the hall in pieces and later reassembled.

The collection consists of almost a hundred and fifty sculptures. Sixteen of them were once alive, before being turned into stone, iron, copper, or jade. Notable examples are the arch troll Bobarax, who angered the god Alor; Queen Aganda's slave, Galg, who was forced to sample his mistress's poisoned wine; and the lindworm Orselenda, whose insatiable desire for gold finally became her undoing.

Player characters who have been to Faraah Moroun will also recognize two statues like the one in the ruin's chapel (the worship of Jeberaja was widespread), among other sculptures of abominations and daemons – one bears a striking resemblance to Princess Fangafa, who can be encountered in the adventure *Tomb of Dying Dreams*, featured in the *Ruins of Symbaroum Adventure Compendium*.

THE PRISON

Scattered across a natural cavern, between 150 and 300 feet in diameter with a height varying between 15 and 50 feet, are fourteen steel cages in various shapes and sizes. They are all from the Symbarian era, and the runes carved into their bars shield them from mystical energies – in other words, the person inside the cage cannot use mystical powers or cast spells.

The air in the tunnel leading to the cavern is pungent and unsound, which can be detected upon approach with a successful **DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check**. Inside the cave, each breath makes the windpipes burn with pain (each creature that remains in the area must make a **DC 15 Constitution saving throw** or take 1d4 poison damage at the end of their turn). Two distinct sounds can be heard from different parts of the cavern: the wretched whimper of some beast, and the tapping of bone against iron.

Oryela is no longer in her cage; she was set free by Karathran in exchange for information about Karvosti, the witches, and the power node. Three cages contain the corpses of creatures who recently died from starvation: a barbarian man with abnormally long arms, skin coarse like the bark of a tree, and horns growing out of his bald head; a female goblin with monstrous fangs and pale skin covered with black streaks; and a wolf-like creature whose fur has in many places been replaced with moss and whose head looks more like that of a wild boar, only with ten tusks and a long, wriggling snake-tongue.

The whimper comes from what seems to be a small, ragged canine, huddled in its cage: a jakaar pup. It looks no more than a few weeks old, with a fluffy tail covering its eyes. But whoever picks the lock – a **DC 15 Dexterity (Thieves' Tools) check** or breaks it – a **DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check** and lets it out will suffer the consequences – while transforming, it leaps rapaciously at whoever freed it, suddenly not as cute and tiny as it first appeared (has the stats of a **Fey Beast**, Bestiary, page 139).

Should the player characters follow the tapping sound, they will soon find a cage whose naked prisoner looks wearily up at them. It is an elven woman, a summer elf by the looks of it, seemingly unmarked by Corruption. She is sitting down with her knees to her chin, knocking her knuckles hard against the bottom of the steel cage. Her knuckles are bruised and bloodied.

The elf does not get up; she does not beg to be released or initiate a conversation. However, she will answer questions if they are asked in Elvish (this requires a **DC 15 Intelligence [Investigation]** or **Charisma [Persuasion] check** – the Lremaster feature grants advantage). She reveals that Oryela was freed by “*The Spider Princess who now rules these caverns*,” but mentions nothing about herself, except that her name is Eol-Mir. If the player characters offer to let her out, she will thank them somberly and get to her feet. She leaves by herself and will wait for them by the Undergate (without opening it), whether the characters tell her to or not.

Karvosti's Power Node

It is highly unlikely that the player characters will gain access to Karvosti's power node. Even if they should somehow manage to eliminate the entire horde of spiders, including their mistress, one of them would have to attune themselves to the crystal, which neither the witches nor the wrath-guard will allow. But if the unlikely should occur, the following applies:

The individual who is attuned to the node and is situated within 300 feet of it...

- ◆ ... will not receive any Corruption from casting spells.
- ◆ ... doubles the effect of one dimension of the spell's area of effect or adds one unit of time or die of damage to a spell. Alternately, if the spell allows casting at higher spell levels it counts as being cast one level higher than normal. If there are discrepancies the Gamemaster decides.
- ◆ ... has advantage on any ability checks or saving throws required by the spell.
- ◆ ... causes any creature affected by the spell to have disadvantage on a required saving throw from the spell; if the spell attempts to influence its mind.

THE POWER NODE

The chamber of the Power Node is not a natural one; the rock surrounding the node has simply been removed, resulting in a square room, each side about twenty paces long, with an arched ceiling and six smooth pillars preventing the cave from collapsing. At the center, partially lowered into the floor, is the node – a massive indigo crystal the size of a crouching arch troll.

Karathran is perched on the node, as if she is incubating a gigantic egg. She is accompanied by a number of fray spiders equal to the number of player characters, and twice as many hunting spiders. It should also be mentioned that one of the ways into (and out of) the chamber is entirely blocked by a thick layer of spider web; it has AC 10, 40 hit points, vulnerability to fire damage and immunity to bludgeoning, poison, and psychic damage.

OTHER MATTERS OF INTEREST

In addition to the above, the Gamemaster could make the journey through Karvosti even more intense by using the following events and incidents.

Ygval's Daughter: When entering a larger chamber, the characters get to make a **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check**. Whoever succeeds notices someone sitting on the floor in front of them, at the very edge of their light source. The person is completely still, with her back to the characters, dressed in a simple blue cowl. Approaching her, they can see the face of a young woman inside the hood. The girl stares at the floor; she appears to be alive, but will not answer

when spoken to. Should they touch her, she will hiss at them angrily, without making eye-contact.

For the Gamemaster: This is the third daughter of the late High Chieftain Ygval. For some reason she stopped aging when reaching nineteen and has lived in the tunnels ever since, withdrawn into herself, with no interest in anyone else.

Dead Witches: Three dead witches, all killed by the invading spiders, can be found in various parts of the tunnels. One of them is a Zarekian man who was on his way back from the plantations with a basket of mushrooms; the other two, both from clan Karohar, were attacked while meditating in section G.

Finally, the player characters could find the lifeless body of Eferneya, the Huldra's closest assistant besides Gadramon. She was going to see Oryela when Karathran attacked, and she slew three hunting spiders before falling victim to a fatal

bite. Note that the Gamemaster is free to replace Eferneya with some other senior witch, if they wish.

The Rain of Fire: The player characters can see a faint light coming from up ahead. Approaching it, they soon reach the entrance of an ordinary grotto, no more than fifteen feet in diameter with about five to ten feet from floor to ceiling. But there is one remarkable detail: fiery embers seem to be raining down from above. A closer look will reveal the embers to be glowing red drops oozing from the ceiling, evaporating before hitting the ground. A character than wanders into the chamber (or is forced into it) must make a **DC 20 Dexterity saving throw** or take 1d6 fire damage at the start of their turn.

For the Gamemaster: The glowing drops are an aftereffect of an incredibly powerful ceremony weaved long ago by the Huldra Areol, who died in the process.

The Reliquary

THE WITCHES' RELIQUARY contains a large collection of powerful or remarkable objects which the Huldra and her predecessors thought to be of particular importance. All objects in the reliquary are protected by *raven's doom* (see textbox), triggered if someone tries to move or damage an item – which explains Elmendra's marks of Corruption.

One of the objects is the stone tablet which started this entire hunt. Unfortunately, the characters will have serious difficulties getting hold of it, for between them and the tablet stands the former Huldra, Oryela, and she will not let them through – not without being offered something in return.

OVERVIEW

The reliquary consists of seven small chambers with smooth, chalked walls and arched ceilings, connected by short corridors (also arched). Karathran ordered all passages to be spun shut, as she could sense the energies of the protective spells and did not want her children running around among the artifacts. The main entrance is still open since Oryela

burst through the web looking for Spiderbane (see below). Note that there are torches on the wall, which could be lit by the player characters.

The chambers contain some thirty objects, placed on stone podiums, mounted on the walls, or standing directly on the ground. There are weapons and shields, books and scrolls, stone tablets, cloth banners, vases and urns, large statues and tiny figurines. And they are all protected with *raven's doom*. A character with Shadow-sight can make a **DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check** to know the objects are somehow mystically protected, and *detect magic* allows them to know that it is powerful abjuration magic.

Oryela has only been in the chamber where Spiderbane is normally found. The reliquary floor is much less dusty than those in the lower sections of the complex, but with enough light and a successful **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check**, one can see Elmendra's footprints where the former Huldra has not set foot. Apparently the fortune hunter went into the chamber on the right, and then out again.

The Raven's Doom

The spell that protects the reliquary is known only to those witches who gain the rank of Huldra.

THE RAVEN'S DOOM

5th-level abjuration, ritual

Casting Time: 1 minute

Range: Touch

Components: V, S

Duration: Until dispelled

The mystic summons the dark spirits of retribution and binds them to an object no larger than five feet on a side, punishing anyone trying to steal or meddle with it. In

doing so, one determines the conditions for triggering the effect – usually a non-excluded creature approaching within 150 feet, or perhaps if the object is moved or damaged. The mystic themselves is immune to the effect and can name up to five individuals who are also excluded.

If the effect is triggered each creature within 30 feet of the object it must make a **Constitution saving throw** or gain 1d4 temporary Corruption on a failed save, or 1d8 temporary Corruption on a successful one.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell at 6th level or higher, you add 1d4 to the permanent Corruption and 1d8 to the temporary Corruption to the Corruption gain for each level above 5th.



Night Elves

There is a group of elves who long ago sacrificed themselves in order to close a chasm which was spewing corruption deep within Davokar, in what was once the great city of Dakovak. They were thoroughly corrupted in the process and are now bursting with hatred and bloodlust, although they have retained some capacity for reason and thought. They are all pale and emaciated, with deadly fangs and eyes red as blood – nothing more needs to be said about the night elves (or blood elves) for the time being, but they will appear again in future modules.

ORYELA

As they reach the entrance to the reliquary, the player characters hear the voice of an old woman roaring in elvish: “Stop! Stop or die!” Ignoring her warning makes combat inevitable; Iel has taken command of Oryela’s body and will not be defied. On the other hand, if they do as they are told, they may actually negotiate with the elf.

Iel is not leaving Karvosti without the artifact that slew the keeper Deadorna and darkened Oryela’s soul. After being freed, he went to the reliquary to fetch the weapon known as Spiderbane, but as the weapon was missing he remained there out of fear of Karathran. Now he sees the characters as a second chance.

Listed below are some ways in which characters unwilling to fight Iel/Oryela could access the chamber with the stone tablet. Should they want to try a different approach, the Gamemaster is encouraged to reward all good ideas:

Trade: If the characters are carrying Spiderbane, Iel will recognize it regardless of its current form. He then suggests a simple trade – the artifact for safe passage to the reliquary.

A Favor: Iel is willing to grant the characters access to the reliquary on the condition that they first bring him a certain artifact: Natana’s Urn. He tells them where to find it; in a natural cave just past the power node chamber, hidden in a crack in the wall.

The characters ought to realize that attacking the spiders is a bad idea. If they are to oblige Oryela/Iel, they must use stealth and cunning. Characters sneaking through section G must pass a **DC 15 Dexterity (Stealth) check** on the way to the artifact, and another one on the way back. They will also have to pass a **DC 25 Wisdom (Perception) check** to detect the webs which are part of the spiders’ warning system: if the check is successful, the player characters can easily step over or crawl underneath the strands; if failed, a patrol (as page 180) will come on initiative count 20 three rounds later.

If someone goes to distract Katharan, or tries to negotiate with her, the sneaking characters have advantage on their Stealth checks.

Iel’s strategy

When the player characters show themselves to the night elf, he immediately casts *mass suggestion* on them. Have the players make **DC 17 Wisdom saving throws**, but do not tell them why. If the characters fail the saving throw Iel will suggest that he should be left alone, or the characters may perish if they try to confront him.

Oryela/Iel

Medium human (Barbarian) possessed by Night Elf

Armor Class 17 (Cowl of Dorgvalg, page 190)

Hit Points 119 (14d8 + 56)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	17 (+3)	18 (+4)	11 (+1)	20 (+5)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Int +5, Wis +9

Skills Arcana +5, Insight +9, Perception +9

Senses passive Perception 19

Languages Ambrian, Barbarian, Goblin

Challenge 9 (5,000 XP, proficiency bonus +4)

Manner grumpy, croaking voice

Shadow glossy black with a hint of red, like a pool of blood in the moonlight (thoroughly corrupt)

Equipment

Shapeshifter (4/day). Iel can become a battle-trained jakaar (*Bestiary*, page 141 and *Player's Guide*, page 122) for six hours.

Spellcasting. Iel (+9 to hit, spell save DC 17) knows the following spells:

Cantrips: accurate strike, chill touch, mage hand, minor illusion, poison spray, prestidigitation

1st-level spells: charm person, comprehend languages, hellish rebuke

2nd-level spells: enthrall, ray of enfeeblement

3rd-level spells: counterspell, larvae boil

4th-level spells: blight, dimension door

5th-level spells: hold monster, telepathic bond

6th-level spells: circle of death, mass suggestion

7th-level spells: etherealness, finger of death

Rituals: find familiar, blood bond, illusory script, raven's doom

ACTIONS

Spear of Terael-Kael. Magical Melee or Ranged Weapon

Attack: +7 to hit, reach 10 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. **Hit:** 6 (1d6 + 3) magical piercing damage.

Deep Impact: the spear does 13 (2d6 + 6) magical piercing damage on a critical.

Remember, if the player characters have previously been detected by Karathran, this solution will hardly be possible, as section G will be swarming with hunting and fray spiders.

Oryela/Iel

"My price is blood or deeds; you decide."

Since Oryela was set free by Karathran, Iel has taken complete control of her body, obsessed with finding Natana's Urn and taking it to the glade where his own body sits entranced. He is less concerned with the body of the former Huldra, and will not hesitate to sacrifice it in battle – if he

cannot get Oryela's hands on the Urn, she is of no use to him anyway.

Since Iel has already been thoroughly corrupted, he has nothing to lose from using the Spear of Terael-Kael (below) and the Cowl of Dorgvalg (page 190). Hence, the characters face an extremely wrinkled, shriveled old woman with bushy grey-black hair, dressed in a bright white cowl and leaning on an ornamented spear. A jet-black bat hovers nearby, actually Iel's fiendish familiar, Malek. Malek will likely attempt to deliver *larvae boil* for Iel to weaken an opponent.

The Spear of Terael-Kael, ARTIFACT (+2, 2 PERMANENT CORRUPTION, UNIQUE)

After having convinced himself and his warriors that they must seek vengeance for the crimes committed against the forest, the autumn elf Terael-Kael was slain on Karvosti by First Guard Farvan. His spear was given to the witches for safekeeping, and has rested in their reliquary ever since.

The Spear has the Reach and Deep Impact properties, and the following powers:

Return

The spear can be thrown as a regular throwing spear, with one addition, by using a bonus action the master may cause it to return, automatically and instantly, to the thrower's hand.

Requires: bonus action

Corruption: 1 temporary Corruption

Earthquake

The master can cause the ground to shake by striking the shaft of the spear against something hard with their bonus action. All creatures within 10 feet of the master must make a **DC 15 Strength saving throw**. Creatures that fail the save become prone.

Requires: bonus action

Corruption: 1d4 temporary Corruption

The Cowl of Dorgvalg, ARTIFACT (+2, 2 PERMANENT CORRUPTION, UNIQUE)

According to myth, Dorgvalg was a symbolist and beast-master who followed the first waves of refugees from the ashen deserts of the east to the plains west of the Ravens. It is said that he lived an ascetic life in the mountains, shunned by other humans because of the company he kept – a number of wraith owls, which had agreed to hunt for him in return for his care and protection. The witches attribute this cowl to Dorgvalg, as it is made from the white feathers of the wraith owl and painted with powerful runes. But whether he really was its original owner and creator is hard to say.

The Cowl of Dorgvalg is light armor and has the following powers:

Protective Wings

The master of the cowl can use their reaction to activate its protective rune. The power provides the *shield* spell.

Requires: reaction

Corruption: 1 temporary Corruption

Friend of Birds

If the symbols on the back of the cowl are activated, it will grow a pair of huge wraith owl wings, endowing its master with the gift of flight (they gain a fly speed equal to their normal speed). However, the ability to fly must be learned through much practice and painful failure; the first ten times the player character must make a **DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check** at the beginning of their turn. On a failure they fall from their current height but can use their reaction to make another check if there's time before they hit the ground. When activated, the wings will remain until the master uses a bonus action to let them remerge with the symbols.

Requires: action

Corruption: 1d4 temporary Corruption per minute

THE STONE TABLET

Elmendra's trail leads to the inner right chamber via two passages covered with spider web. There are five objects inside: on the walls, a weathered stone tablet, a simple wooden shield and an oil painting depicting an ocean which seems to be moving; on the floor, a black, life-sized stone statue of an androgynous human, and a sealed urn with something tapping and scratching inside. Judging by her footprints, Elmendra went up to the stone tablet and walked around for a bit before leaving the way she came.

Strange signs are inscribed on the tablet; signs which a character can make a **DC 30 Intelligence (History or Investigation) check** to decipher – the Loremaster feature grants advantage. On a success of 4 or under, the character recognizes the symbols as late Symbarian but the ravages of time have left large sections of the inscription illegible. They can choose one symbol to be certain about, either the one that means "Symbar" (alternate meanings are "empire" or "homeland"), the one that likely means "city" (alternate meanings are "seat" or "center") or the one that likely means "destruction" (alternate meanings might be "loss" or "death"). On a success by 5 or more the character is more certain of the most likely meanings but also aware of the alternates.

Draw or Trace: The question is, how will the player characters be able to bring the tablet with them for analysis? The easiest way would be to hold one or more pieces of paper against the tablet and trace over them with a piece of charcoal (perhaps from a torch). A good result requires a

successful **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) or Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check** and requires a minute to complete.

Another option could be to draw a copy of the signs, which takes the same check as above but requires at least three minutes. Should the players/characters come up with good ideas for alternative solutions, they should of course be allowed.

Note that player characters with the Absolute Memory boon (see the *Player's Guide*, page 147) will be able to recreate the signs at a later time.

The Spiders Arrive: As the characters go through the web-covered passages to the stone tablet, they must succeed on a **DC 20 Dexterity (Stealth) group check** or alert the spiders. If alerted, patrols of spiders (at least two but perhaps more, depending on Karathran's alert level) arrive after one minute.

In the Spiders' Web

If the player characters have already angered or threatened Karathran in any way, she will react strongly to their intrusion into the artifact chamber, as well as to their continued presence within the tunnels. This means that two additional patrols will show up 1d4 minutes after the first patrol with orders to (if possible) poison the intruders and force them to appear before the spider princess. How such a scenario unfolds is up to the Gamemaster to decide.

Wise player characters will realize that they may have been detected, hurry up with what they are doing and head for the Undergate as quickly as possible. The hunting spiders are quick and will (probably) catch up with them before long, but they will not attack right away. Instead, they will send for reinforcements and try to stall the fleeing intruders by going around them and setting up roadblocks; feel free to let the player characters run into freshly spun webs (use the stats given in the **hunting spider's** stat block in the *Bestiary*, page 150). Eventually, when there is enough room for them to take full advantage of their speed, the spiders attack. If the player characters cannot end the fight quickly, they better run before more enemies arrive (see the textbox *In the Spiders' Web*, previous page).

Moving or Destroying the Tablet

Grabbing hold of and lifting the tablet will activate the effect of the *raven's doom* spell cast upon it, triggering a DC 17 Constitution saving throw (page 187). If the player characters are allies of the Iron Pact or have other reasons for wanting to destroy the tablet, it can certainly be done – all it takes is one blow with a weapon that does slashing or bludgeoning damage. When the blow lands, *raven's doom* takes effect, but after that the tablet may be smashed to smithereens.



Aftermath

Whether the player characters come flying out of Karvosti as if launched from a catapult or exit the cliff under less hectic circumstances, they must still be on their guard. War is imminent on the plateau, and the player characters are probably still hunted or wanted by the competing groups and their leaders. In other words, one must tread carefully in the wake of *The Witch Hammer*.

THIS CONCLUDING CHAPTER (except the *Alternative Endings* on page 194) is based on the premise that the characters reach the reliquary and copy the inscription on the stone tablet. The text below offers suggestions on what could happen in the game world and what the characters could do while waiting

for the next episode in the *Chronicle of the Throne of Thorns*. Even if the gaming group would rather take on the upcoming adventure in Yndaros with other characters, these suggestions could still be of use, as ideas for new adventures and as a background when describing large scale developments.

Calming the Storm

WHEN THE PLAYER characters have returned to the surface, the most pressing question is what (if anything) they should do about the escalating conflict between the Ambrians and clanfolk. What they know could probably help calm the storm, if presented in the right way to the right people.

In that regard, these two pieces of information are of the greatest importance:

- ◆ Much of what happened during the adventure indicates that something strange is going on with the northern clans, and that the attacks (against outposts, free settlements,

caravans, etc.) were coordinated from Gaoian or Saarian territory. Reports of burnt-off clan tattoos, new Sovereign tattoos on the warriors' wrists, and the written messages found in Fundiber's tent would be particularly decisive.

- ◆ There is indeed a stone tablet inside Karvosti, and it does mention Symbar, perhaps even specifically “the devastation of the city of Symbar.” Whether it contains actual directions to the lost city remains unclear, but it is possible. The actual tablet or a copy of its inscription would of course be particularly interesting.

AUDIENCE WITH THE HIGH CHIEFTAIN

These days, very few are granted a meeting with the High Chieftain. The player characters would have to be on good terms with the people around him (such as First Guard Farvan) and somehow get them to persuade Tharaban to grant the characters an audience.

The High Chieftain does not comment on their claims about the Sovereign's Oath, but the more evidence they present, the more interested he becomes. As long as they actually have something to offer, he demands that they present the same information to Queen Korinthia.

When they tell Tharaban about the stone tablet, his eyes suddenly darken. If he believes their story, he says, in a calm and steady voice: *"I should kill you where you stand..."* Regardless of the character's reactions, he interrupts them by raising his hands in a gesture of peace and says: *"Wait!"* As things currently stand, Tharaban realizes that it would probably be best to tell Korinthia the truth, particularly if the northern clans are trying to turn the entire forest against him.

Tharaban tells his guards to leave, walks up to the player characters, and lowers his voice to a rumbling whisper: *"Go to Nightbane, tell her everything. But if you repeat my words to Yeleta, I will call you liars, accuse you of sedition, and banish you from Karvosti. Is that clear?"*

AUDIENCE WITH KORINTHIA

With the right contacts, the player characters might actually be allowed to appear before the Queen of Ambria herself. Depending on who their allies are, these contacts could be a Pansar captain from Yndaros named Rania, the ranger captain Morlas who once operated near Thistle Hold, the liturg

Aranitra, or perhaps even the High Chieftain (as described above). Whoever it is, the player characters will first have to tell their story to General Jomilo in his tent.

Provided that the characters present strong arguments and convincing evidence regarding the Sovereign's Oath and the existence of the stone tablet, General Jomilo, having listened silently to their story, will inform the Queen of what he just heard. But not before asking *"Is that all?"* – repeatedly, if necessary.

Their meeting with Korinthia Nightbane is brief. The Queen will see them in her pavilion, with Seldonio by her side. She repeats the most essential parts of their story and asks them to confirm their veracity.

If the player characters did not show the tablet's inscriptions to the general, Korinthia will ask for it. If they will not oblige (truthfully or with a lie), she says, in a tense voice: *"I ask you again, and know that withholding the information I seek will be considered an act of treason against crown and country: do you have in your possession, or are you able to present, a reproduction of the tablet?"*

Whatever their answer may be, the Queen concludes the audience with a simple *"Ambria thanks you"* and nods to the general. The characters are escorted out, gently but firmly, and given a leather document tube marked with House Ko-hinoor's sigil (the Flaming Pine). It contains a Writ of Debt worth 200 thaler.

AUDIENCE WITH THE HULDRA

The player characters might want to meet and speak with Yeleta, perhaps to explain or justify their intrusion, or perhaps to inform her of the spider infestation and offer their services in solving the problem.

The Gamemaster must decide whether the Arch Witch will see them and, if so, what her reaction will be, based on what the characters have done so far and how they present their motives. In any case, the fact that they trespassed into Karvosti will not be to their advantage. But Yeleta is practical and may forgive them, for example if they meant to stop others from finding Symbar or prevent a war between Ambria and the clans.

No matter how much they beg or threaten, Yeleta will never offer the slightest hint on how to interpret the symbols on the tablet – since they should never have seen the text in the first place, they have no right to know its meaning. With dark eyes and threatening voice, she demands that they immediately destroy any copies they might have made and forget everything they saw in the tunnels of Karvosti. Needless to say, this is no time for arguing.

Finally, Yeleta will never, under any circumstances, admit that anyone has ever managed to open the Undergate, and those who claim otherwise will be publicly denounced as liars.

Traitors

Should the player characters be caught with having lied to the Queen (for instance, if they have already shown their copy to Tharaban) she will definitely make good on her threat. The characters become wanted (dead or alive, reward: 100 thaler each) and must assume new identities in order to move freely through Ambria.

This could be a starting point for an entire series of adventures, in which the characters must first escape pursuing rangers and bounty hunters, and then perform challenging tasks to regain the Queen's favor – for example by carrying out missions for one of her dukes; missions which would prove them to be loyal and valuable subjects.

Developments

HOW THINGS DEVELOP in the wake of the adventure depends largely on the player character's actions. For that reason, it is important that the Gamemaster takes some time to contemplate and summarize what has actually happened. Only then will it be possible to present a fair and accurate picture of what consequences and repercussions the player character's deeds will have.

On a more personal level, Gamemasters could ask themselves what impression the player characters (individually and as a group) made on the people they met along the way. How will they be remembered in New Earthmoor? What reputation have they gained among the residents at Vearra's Outpost? Have the leaders of the Sovereign's Oath heard of their deeds, and if so, how do they react? The answers to these questions might determine whether the characters become famous or infamous, rewarded or wanted, invited to parties or ambushed by assassins. For more inspiration, see the *Gamemaster's Guide*, page 120 and 173.

AMBRIA AND THE CLANS

The characters may come to play a decisive role in the conflict between Ambria and the barbarians. If the Queen is made aware of the Sovereign's Oath and receives a copy of the stone tablet, she will lift the siege; fifty pansars and as many rangers remain on the cliff to strengthen its defenses, while Korinthia and Seldonio march south with the rest of their troops.

Should the player characters act differently, or lack the necessary knowledge, Korinthia's time limit eventually expires. She declares Karvosti annexed by the Kingdom of Ambria, and gives the High Chieftain two hours to accept her decision; refusal to do so will be considered an act of war. After much anguish, the High Chieftain leaves the plateau along with his wrathguards, without shedding blood or uttering a word but burning with bitter rage. Other clan members are allowed to stay, but may not bear arms on the plateau (this includes the characters, if their heritage is known).

Korinthia and Jomilo soon return to Ambria, while Seldonio moves into the High Chieftain's stronghold and starts cataloguing its great stores of knowledge. Lothar Grendel is appointed bailiff of Karvosti. Since the witches refuse to leave their dwelling, a mix of pansars, rangers, and wizards are posted at every exit, even at the sealed Undergate.

Wretched and miserable, High Chieftain Tharaban settles down just outside the Odav settlement near the Arch Bridge, along with the Guard of the Slumbering Wrath, his servants from the stronghold, and other former residents of Karvosti. He will do everything in his power to convince the southern chieftains of the threat that is growing in the north, but his efforts will have very little effect.

THE SUN CHURCH

Until the next part of the campaign, the templars will have broken away from the rest of the Sun Church and formed a new one with Commander Iakobo Vearra as its head. He calls himself the First Revenger, his followers Enforcers, and his congregation "The Church of Dead Priors."

Their main target is not the barbarian people per se, but Davokar and the Iron Pact. The templars are divided into smaller groups, called Suns, who are sent to destroy certain targets in the woods or strike against suspected sorcerers and Iron Pact agents within the kingdom. They do not seem to follow any particular strategy. According to the First Revenger, there is nothing left to fight for – all that remains is vengeance.

The First Father leaves Templewall, along with the rest of the Curia, to establish a new seat in Yndaros, partly because of the templars' betrayal, but also to gain greater control of the church's overall development. The faction who (with the Queen's silent support) wishes to reform the church and reestablish Prios as the god of warmth, love and forgiveness is slowly gaining ground. Jeseebegai can sense it, but has yet to identify any individual troublemaker other than the heretic Sarvola in Thistle Hold.

Reading the Tablet

Deciphering the meaning of the stone tablet's symbols will require more than just a die roll and a bit of luck. First, the player characters must restore the symbols which are partially weathered, then fill in the blanks left by those that are missing entirely, and finally, they must find a way to interpret symbols that are unknown even to the scholars. In other words: the process of interpreting the text will take months, if not years; right up to the beginning of the third part of *The Throne of Thorns*.

If the Gamemaster so desires, they could create an entire series of minor adventures based on the different stages of the process. The characters must find someone who can restore the tablet to its original state, and then someone as versed in the cuneiform of late Symbaroum as Elmendra. The question will not only be where such individuals can be found, but who of them can be trusted. Confiding in the wrong people could be downright fatal...

In time, the Curia will begin to take action, forcefully, and often without any incriminating evidence. As a consequence, the reformation gains new momentum, as more and more people begin to question the terrible deeds done in the name of the god whom many are now calling the “the Prios of War.” But that is a development for the next adventure module.

THE SOVEREIGN’S OATH

The sun is shining on the champions of the Blood-Daughter. Whether *The Witch Hammer* ends with Korinthia annexing Karvosti or “only” leaving a garrison on the plateau, the developments are sure to benefit the Sovereign’s Oath. Except for the chieftains and witches, more and more Enoais, Goeds, and Yedes are becoming convinced that Tharaban, the Huldra, and all the southern clans are under Ambrian control.

One by one, the clans join the alliance; chieftains Karona and Vikomer are executed, while Leonod of Yedesa recognizes the danger in time and flees south; the Keepers live on, cloistered inside Karvosti along with the Huldra, but all their disciples are slain.

The growing forces of the Sovereign’s Oath move closer and closer to Karvosti, and arrive as the next episode begins. The Blood-Daughter makes her intentions known: to reestablish Symbaroum, as it was before witches and warlocks brought the empire to ruin. In order to accomplish this, all witches must be purged by fire and all traces of the last thousand years of misrule must be wiped out. In other words: the world must

be rid of all mystics, and every barbarian creation built since the fall of Symbaroum (including the stronghold on Karvosti and all knowledge stored both there and in the Huldra’s dwelling) will be destroyed, burned, and lost to the world.

ALTERNATIVE ENDINGS

So, what happens if the player characters fail to achieve the main goal of the adventure, or if they choose a different path and pursue their own ambitions? Never fear! It is perfectly okay. Regardless of how *The Witch Hammer* ends, the gaming group will be able to play the next part of the campaign, using the same characters or entirely new ones. That is what makes roleplaying great – the flexibility and freedom of the gaming groups to improvise and adjust the developments according to their own specific wishes and experiences.

Should the player characters ignore the stone tablet or actively try to stop other groups from reaching it, it will most likely result in an Ambrian annexation of Karvosti. And in the latter case, they will probably become known as traitors, heretics, or worse. But that does not stop them from going to Yndaros, where many dubious individuals can move more or less freely (albeit with false identities and under great caution). Nor will they find themselves completely without allies, as everyone from Iron Pact agents and barbarian spies to heretical priests live and operate in the simmering cauldron that is the capital of Ambria, Korinthia’s high seat – Yndaros.

What Comes Next?

OBVIOUSLY, THERE IS no need for surviving player characters to idly await the next part in the *Chronicle of the Throne of Thorns* and the translation of the stone tablet. Whether it is the High Chieftain or Lothar Grendel who rules the plateau, much is still the same up there – the conflicts, the lust for treasure hunting, and the threat from the darkening forest.

Furthermore, there may be reasons for the characters to get involved in situations which have occurred as a result of what happened in *The Witch Hammer* – to keep investigating the adventure locations, act as diplomats in conflicts between various factions, or gather more information about the new enemy in the north.

This section begins with a few words on the distribution of Experience, after which we present a number of ideas for you, the Gamemasters, to develop as you see fit.

EXPERIENCE

The characters will likely have earned enough experience points to achieve 10th level, which is the default expectation for the next adventure. For scenes where the characters met a challenge but did not earn experience by defeating monsters we recommend an award equal to their proficiency bonus × 1,000 XP for a complete success, or about

half that amount as long as they made forward progress. However, the gaming group is free to change this, should they want their characters to progress faster or more slowly than that.

PROFESSIONS

On and around Karvosti are a number of people who could be used to explain a new player character’s backstory. For example, First Guard Farvan could be looking to recruit additional wrathguards – now that the northern clans have turned their backs on the High Chieftain, perhaps he might even consider Ambrian candidates?

Another possibility is that one of the elves, Malahai or Adreanea, shows an interest in teaching someone the deeper secrets of the Iron Pact; an education which would differ greatly depending on who makes the offer.

TRACKING ELMENDRA

One adventure (if not more) could very well center around the player characters attempting to locate Elmendra, of their own accord or on behalf of a friend or relative of hers. There are many rumors about her having been seen in Ravenia, Mergile, Agrella, and of course in both Thistle Hold and

Yndaros. Another game opening could be that some people in Kastor claim to have seen her at the Red Dragon Inn, and heard her mention all sorts of destinations.

But whatever happens, it is important that these scenarios end in failure. Elmendra has covered her tracks quite well, keeps to the shadows, and will not reappear until the next part of *The Throne of Thorns*.

DIPLOMATS

The events on Karvosti, the division of the church, and the emergence of the Sovereign's Oath have greatly affected the relations between the region's powerful factions. Player characters who have risen through the ranks within a certain faction could be sent to deliver a message or negotiate with the leaders of other groups. If not, there will certainly be diplomats and couriers in need of protection on their travels.

This could be developed into a series of exciting adventures, in which the player characters must go straight into the enemy's headquarters and play their cards right in order to return at all. For example, they could accompany Tharaban's negotiator/spy on a meeting with some representative of the Sovereign's Oath, or be the eyes and ears of Sarvola or Deseba the Old as a group of priests loyal to the Curia is meeting in Thistle Hold...

SPIES IN THE NORTH

Speaking of the Sovereign's Oath... Almost all the southern factions would be willing to pay a handsome sum for information regarding the situation in the north. The Queen (with or without her Rangers as intermediaries) would be a likely employer in this context; so would Tharaban, possibly in collaboration with Embersind of Odaiova. The witches and Ordo Magica will also try to gain a better understanding of what is going on.

For the player characters, this could mean infiltrating the ancient fortress of Saar-Khan, to gather information or maybe even assassinate some important individual. And if the player group would rather stick to the woods, the target could instead be clan Gaoia's main settlement, or the lair of the lindworm oracle Odralintos.

WORK TO BE DONE

Another possible "pastime" is to revisit Yeferon Isle, Faarah Moroun, and/or New Earthmoor. In all likelihood, there will still be adventures to be had in these places, and even if the player characters left them completely cleared of items and

creatures, there could always be more treasures to uncover or new creatures inhabiting the area – naturally, the Game-master is free to make any adjustments they wish.

If the liege troll Orangaar is still alive, this could be the time to get rid of him and organize a larger excavation of the old palace. It is also likely that the people of New Earthmoor will need help, or that they, starved and desperate from sieges and attacks, begin to attack ships traveling along the river Malgomor. As for Yeferon... well, who knows what would happen if the protective barrier surrounding the island suddenly vanished, or if the mighty Manaud happened to wake from his slumber...

FORESHADOWING

The next part of the chronicle will take place in and around Yndaros. The capital city of Ambria is preparing for a grandiose wedding, as the "Sunshine Duchess" Esmerelda are about to wed Thabor of Yedesa, son of High Chieftain Tharaban. But the real festivities will not even begin before the city is hit by a rain of fire, and everything turns to chaos.

For the player characters, the adventure will initially be about figuring out what has happened and then trying to hunt down the persons responsible for the attack on Queen and Country. Before the end it is revealed that the events are linked to Elmendra the Senseless and the stone tablet she discovered inside Karvosti. And so, the hunt is resumed – a hunt that will lead them to the ruins of Old Kadizar; down to the roots of the capital and what remains of the once glorious Lindaros; and finally out into the Yonderworld, where they will meet Elmendra right before the final showdown against their main antagonist – the resentful and corruption sick former arch mage Kullinan Furia.

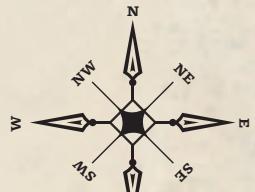
To Keep in Mind...

Gamemasters may of course do whatever they want with the game world of Symbaroum. But keep in mind that if characters are given a chance to meet and kill people who are central to the chronicle at large (e.g. the Blood-Daughter, Odralintos, or even Korinthia), the Gamemaster must be ready to replace these with other characters when they appear in future parts of the campaign.





1. Farah Moroun
2. Jakaar
3. Jerak's Sinkhole
4. The Rift
5. Kavosti
6. New Earthmoor
7. Odaban
8. The Odama Citadel
9. Rhan Mahaar
10. Serand's Pyramid
11. Sun Temple
12. Lake Great Water
13. Earth Towers of Black Leech Rift
14. The Arch Bridge
15. Vearra's Outpost
16. The Whisperer's Rapids
17. Whitewater
18. Yeferon



0 100 km
0 60 miles

Anadea's message

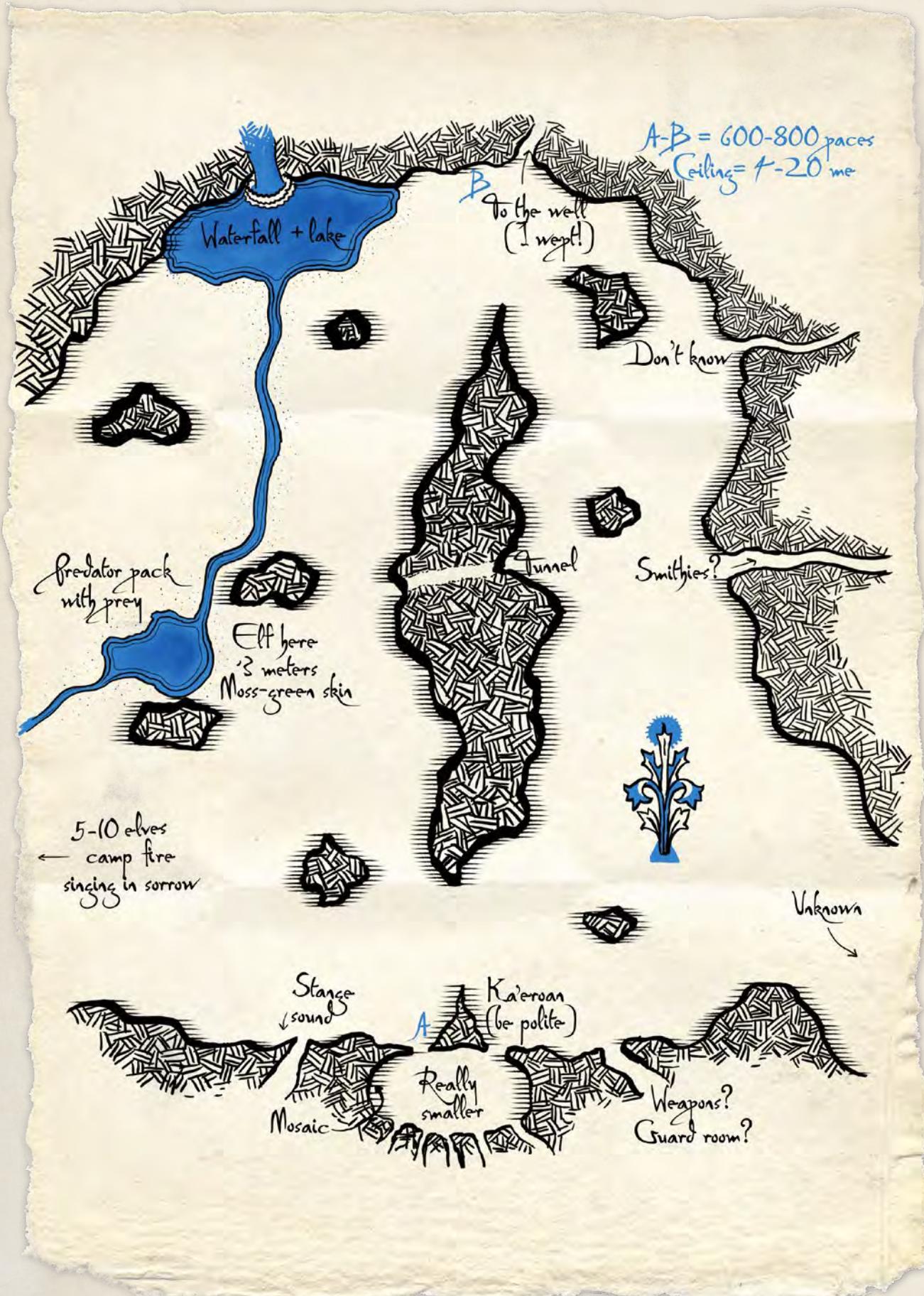
Dear soon to be friend,
 Meet me with haste at the Fern Tavern in the district
 northwest of the intersection Nedar's Road/The Promenade.
 My errand is urgent and of a nature best discussed eye to eye.
 Of you and your friends I ask only that you take a leap of
 faith and that you listen to my proposal. In return, I promise
 to not disappoint. I and the people I represent have vast
 resources and are prepared to offer a royal compensation
 for your services.

What you know can kill you.
 Meet me in Kalegras Alley
 now. Maybe we can help
 each other

Erlaber's message

What you seek is in the annex of the Sun
 Temple. Two times a day, at the mass held
 each morning and evening, the building
 is empty except for House Father Idaros.
 When you see him leave you have a short
 timeframe to get inside. Go through the
 gate facing Delya's Road, take the stairs to
 the second floor, turn right and head for
 the third door on the right hand side.
 Act with haste.

Father Elfeno's letter



On the evening of the twentieth fourth day of the second month, 21 years after the Victory, a brawl erupted at the Salons of Symbaroum. When the brave guards of the Town Watch arrived to avert the quarrel, it had spread to three floors and involved about one hundred souls. When asked why they were fighting, the combatants gave diverse answers, but most named intoxication or "the heart's delight" as the foremost reasons.

However, a witness named Geleto (fortune hunter) knows what actually caused the tumult. With his own eyes he saw two young priests involved in a violent altercation. They called each other Anadea and Arkel, and the dispute seemed to be about the Forest of Danokar, more exactly about whether or not the Church of Prios has adopted a correct standpoint regarding the nature of the woods. The witness is (due to his own inebriation) unsure about who of the two championed which viewpoint, but appears that one of them, at one point, clearly yelled "Death to First Father Jeseebegui!".

The priests never bramled, but their argument became so heated that the woman, flailing her arms, happened to hit a drinking jar that stood on their table. The jar hit a large barcharian woman in the neck, which is why she spun around and face-flapped a totally innocent youngster, whose friends were quick to accept the invitation to dance. The woman Anadea and the man Arkel sneaked out of their booth as the brawl attracted more and more to clench their fists.

So it was that the Forest of Danokar, on the evening of the twenty fourth, caused Queen Korinthia's subjects unnecessary pain and honest bushmeatmen economical loss, like so many times before.

Geleto's testimony

I will save the world. From Prios, from the Queen, from all.
Violence begets violence till none are left to fight!
That's it! Nevermore!

I am alone here, about knowing. Not everything.
The Mayor has also been there, in the Halls. And the
friend of Goldengrasp. Marvel.

But they don't know me. Cannot know!

I am needed. But I'd rather be needed there.

Contribute to the well with my tears and ~~sTOP~~!
The choice has been made. You'll learn. She trusts you.
Remember what you serve. Anadea is nothing, her actions
everything. EVERYTHING!

Now sleep.

Drone down sleep

Anadea's journal entry

Erlaber

Antique Dealer

Lowborn Noble?

Settled year 17 (from Gndaros)

Probable cultist

Possible killer

Possible cult leader

Year 18. Alone to survive when the rest of his family (wife and four children, age 0 to 9) were strangled to death, exsanguinated, and left to hang by the feet from a beam in the ceiling. Claimed to have been at a business meeting with wizard (Devidea) who backs the statement and implies a love affair. Door broken and valuables missing.

Year 18. Highly corrupt statuette stolen from warehouse in the north-western district, two guards brutally murdered. Using mystical means, the owner traced the item to Erlaber's home. Claims to have bought the

statuette in good faith from fortune hunter Gndalla. Investigation terminated when Gndalla is found dead wearing necklace from the warehouse.

Year 19. Beastly cult exposed in the village Gfiammer. The cult leaders last, wheezing words were "Aonbreagos, Erlaber, Aonbreagos...". According to NM, Aonbreagos was a tyrannical Sybarian noble house - possibly worshipped by the cult. Erlaber is questioned, (act?!) beweed, has never been to Gfiammer.

Year 20. Was seen with the changelings Klagander and Shiba, wanted in relation to a series of robberies and murders with dark overtones in Gndaros. Claims they contacted him, offered to sell him artifacts which proved to be trash.

Year 20. The antique dealer Josilia found poisoned, with intestines spilled out and self-inflicted wounds all over the body. Three witnesses speak of a black-dressed visitor three days earlier, one identifies Erlaber.

Unconfirmed, especially since the key witness suffers from dementia.

Dekamedo's notes
on Erlaber

FRIEND IN STRIFE AND SORROW
THIS OFFER IS THE ONLY ONE
YOU WILL RECEIVE
DECLINE AND MOURN ALONE
ACCEPT AND FOLLOW MY
CONFIDANT.

WE WILL MEET WHERE NO
TEAR FALLS IN VAIN.

I AM WAITING.
YOU ARE NEEDED.

TEARA-TÉANA

Teara-Téana's letter to Anadea



The plunderers parchment scroll

The symbols
on Galdag's Gate





The mental map

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