5E

RUINS OF SYMBAROUM

The World of Symbaroum

LORE AND SETTINGS OF AMBRIA & DAVOKAR

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Welcome to...

... the world of Symbaroum – a world of clashing cultures and ideals, a world of mystery and adventure, a world constantly on the verge of being swallowed by the darkness of the Eternal Night. To be frank, this may not sound very welcoming, but with so much at stake it is a place where you and your friends can actually make a difference, and have lots of fun and excitement doing so. Also, in the world of Symbaroum, no one dictates what type of difference you ought to make – what goals to strive for, what friends (and, in turn, enemies) to make, and what means to employ in the struggle, is totally up to you!

THIS BOOK EXPANDS on the lore and setting information presented in the *Ruins of Symbaroum Gamemaster's Guide*. However, the opening section, called *What You See...*, is written to be read by both players and gamemasters. It is meant to give players a basic understanding of the setting's main settlements – Thistle Hold, Karvosti and Yndaros – as if their characters had lived there for more than a few nights. The rather superficial description is intended to make them feel at home, thereby giving them knowledge and tools to take the initiative in problem-solving situations. Of course, it is also important for gamemasters to familiarize themselves with the facade, as this will prove vital when revealing the truth behind various misconceptions and lies to the players and their characters.

The second section offers insights into what goes on beneath the surface, and should not be shown to the players. It delves deep into the ancient history of the Davokar region, and also accounts for more recent events linked to the three main settlements. In addition, you will find ten or more plot hooks for each of the settlements, ready to be developed into full-fledged adventures in accordance with the preferences of your gaming group.

The final section of the book is composed of seven adventure locations, complete with background, maps, and a colorful gallery of non-player characters. The locations can be played as one-shot adventures, used as the basis of a treasure hunt campaign, or as random encounters during the characters' travels in the region. And speaking of travels, this book rounds off with the journal of the expedition leader Vidina, from her perilous journey to a place deep inside the great forest, the Temple of Exaltation. The entries of the journal should exemplify what is stated in the chapter Expeditions in Davokar, in the *Gamemaster's Guide* (pages 59–93): in the world of Symbaroum, the road towards your goal may often prove as daunting as the challenges you encounter on arrival. Not to mention the road back home, should you live long enough to make it that far...

Important Notice

Lots of people and places described in this book are linked to, and will resurface in, the adventure chronicle *The Throne of Thorns*. If you and your friends do not enjoy ready-made adventures and prefer to create homebrew scenarios based on general setting information, this is not an issue.

But if you, on the contrary, appreciate some outside assistance in the creation of epic stories with rich locations and tailored non-player characters, you should look out for the symbol in the book's second section. If you see this symbol in the description of a place or a person, this means it has a role to play in the chronicle. Of course, you can still use them for scenarios or campaigns of your own making, but in that case you must be ready to make some adjustments when it is time to embark on the hunt for the Throne of Thorns.

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THE DAYTHALERS OF the Sanitary Commissioner are keeping the town clean from filth, washing the grime from streets and squares. Merchants polish their goods till they shine, bards tune the disharmonious from their instruments, and the floor of the Abomitorium is raked smooth as the bottom of a pond. But in spite of the efforts, the truth lingers.

In dark corners gathers filth that has been overlooked; the grime merges diluted with the dirt and stones of the streets; the polishing cloths never reach the corruption inside the artifacts; the finely tuned instruments cannot hide the lies in the lyrics; and a rake can never clean the blood out of stamped earth.

All who live in Thistle Hold know that its Ambrian façade hides an inside more influenced by Davokar than anyone wants to admit. Still, maybe one does right in polishing and cleaning and lying? As King Ynedar said when trying to instill courage into an Alberetor beset by the Dark Lords: *"A single fearful human can raze the strongest keep, while a human free from fears can live happily in the monster's den."*

Then again, the Hero King should have added that the life of the latter will probably be nipped in its jolly bud...

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What You See...

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Thistle Hold

Every day for eight long years, Merdalo has risen from his straw bed, combed his shaggy beard and walked to the Antique Plaza. Every day for eight long years, he has mounted his wooden box to sing the praises of Thistle Hold, and he has smiled in thanks for every shilling making the bronze cup at his feet sing along. His songs are about successful expeditions to the forest ruins, about the town as a peaceful orchard in a violent world, about women and men who have risen from the deepest misery – all thanks to Thistle Hold.

Merdalo was once involved in the construction work; ever since he has watched the town grow and evolve from his lowly stage. The songs have always appeared dishonest but that never used to bother him, not as long as the audience rewarded his well-sounding lies with equally well-sounding coins. But a gnawing feeling has grown in his chest, stronger and stronger with each passing day. Deep down Merdalo knows that he is a murderer, just as Mayor Nightpitch and all others who participate in upholding the illusion. For what else should you call someone who convinces people that they can fly, only to silently watch as they dive headlong into the Abyss with a hopeful smile on their lips?

ALMOST ALL AMBRIANS share the same dream. Of course, you can craft a tolerable existence by farming the Ambrian soil, alternately by partaking in the construction of Yndaros or some other rapidly growing town. But also people who succeed in those respects can hardly avoid fantasizing about the simultaneously safe and exciting life rumored to be lived behind Thistle Hold's towering palisade.

Then there are all those who never consider farming or construction work, those who are dead set on contributing to the aim set forth by the Queen – to make the treasures of Davokar the property of the Ambrian realm. This despite the fact that a majority of those trying to realize the dream quickly find it transformed into a nightmare.

A considerable portion of the town's treasure hunters never find anything besides their own deaths in some predator's jaws or at the pointy end of some competitor's spear. Others return empty-handed from a couple of expeditions and cannot afford to launch a third. And some never get started; they remain seated in some tavern, listening to stories about hundreds of dig sites with a terrible anxiety sloshing around amongst black brew and pieces of kidney pie in their bellies.

Regardless of all cautionary tales, the dream of Thistle Hold is firmly rooted in the Ambrian soul. No one believes they would make the same mistakes as the unlucky fools who went before them. No, they would succeed if given half a chance. Because no matter how many fall victim to the dream, the few success stories will always lure young and old, poor and wealthy, learned and ignorant to the fortune hunters' harbor.

This chapter is based on the sort of information about Thistle Hold that one can gain by spending more than a few days in town. If combined with the description in the *Gamemaster's Guide* (pages 22–32), the text should offer enough of an idea of how the town works for you (and, more importantly, your player character) to feel somewhat at home there, in the bittersweet Thistle Hold.

First Impressions

MOST OF THOSE who enter one of Thistle Hold's gates for the first time do so with clear expectations. It is supposed to be new, calm, organized and clean – at least compared to cities like Yndaros or the equally fast-growing Ravenia.

Initially it may seem as if expectations correspond with reality. All buildings are less than a decade old, the atmosphere is void of shouting peddlers and noise from building sites, and the main streets are so free from debris that one might suspect someone wipes them clean every morning (which they actually do). However, it does not take more than a couple of days and nights before it becomes obvious that this apparent idyll comes at a price.

More or less daily, you can witness grim guards of the Town Watch escorting some inhabitant, apathetic or furious, to the South Gate. Everyone knows that if the person happened to have some belongings the guards will confiscate

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The statue on the Toad's Square inspires both dreams and nightmares – dreams of grandiose finds, nightmares of encounters with the toad's descendants

these on behalf of the Mayor, as compensation for warranted payments or as punishment for crimes committed. And as soon as the villain emerges onto the Southern Highroad, they are forever banned from even visiting the Hold.

Other spots of soot and mildew soon appear on the façade. While public displays of drunkenness and aggression figure frequently in the area framed by the street called Haloban's Ring, other parts of town reward such behavior with a stretch on the cold stone floor of the Penitentiary. And even the most compliant visitor can become the target of imprisonment or a flogging, if they displease the Town Watch or some prominent resident. Protesting hardly helps in a town where repeated defiance is enough to get you banished.

On the other hand... if one refuses to give in to the strong arm of the law and stays a while in the town, it will soon become apparent that there are ways to avoid detection. As long as you steer clear of talkative witnesses, place a bribe in the right hand, and carefully consider whom your actions might anger you can often get the job done. When you hear someone say that *"Thistle Hold lives in the shadows"* this is what they mean – under cover of darkness, in alleys and nooks, behind closed doors and shutters thrives that which would never be allowed under clear blue skies. Contraband is trafficked in and out of town, artifacts are bought and sold without the Mayor getting his cut, people are murdered or severely beaten, and both stores and residences are burgled. There are even those who, convincingly, claim that both members of the Iron Pact and blight-marked cultists live inside the palisade.

Indeed, Thistle Hold is the safest harbor in a storm ridden Ambria, and it is indeed a town where representatives of different cultures and factions coexist in relative harmony. But the residents know the truth. The fortune hunter's harbor is a place where dreams are dashed more often than they are realized, a place where death sometimes appears as a more alluring exit than the town gates, a place where your life is never worth more than the sum of your belongings.

Maybe there is some truth to what the subsequently death-sentenced rioter Volfald purportedly shouted during his last night at the Salons of Symbaroum: *"Thistle Hold is a crab, a rock-hard shell over flabby insides; I'll mess around in here till naught but the shell remains!"*

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Fight Day in Thistle Hold. The local favorites Bruiser and Tulga take on a pack of mare cats.

Memorable Events

ALL WHO LIVE in Thistle Hold and who are not weighed down by grim reality are happy to share stories about the town's eventful past. Single story-tellers' vivid statements should of course be taken with a pinch of salt. But when one has heard the same event being described over and over, maybe one dares to assume that there is actually some truth to the story.

The incidents described in this section speak both of the history of the Hold and about what it is like to live there. Even if many occurred at a time when the town was smaller and not as protected, all of them could be repeated one way or another – something which the residents tend to underline. Because although the palisade stands strong it can be breached, and once the hull has been punctured an intruder can quickly cause catastrophic damage.

THE JEZITES' DOWNFALL (YEAR 10)

Everyone knows that Ambrian forces utterly defeated the barbarian warlord Haloban and his clan after a short siege in year 10. It is also commonly known that the Ambrian force captured Haloban alive and brought him back to Yndaros where he hung by the neck until dead, and that the Ambrian assault totally annihilated clan Jezora. Aside from that, there are some discrepancies in the stories.

Most people believe that Queen Korinthia had managed to persuade some members of the clan to betray their master by sabotaging the gates of the fortress, but other stories attribute the sabotage to the heroic actions of a group of Queen's Rangers. And regarding the clan's destruction, several diverse stories are told. Some say that also women and

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children died fighting, others that most Jezites went up in flames with the hall where they were hiding, and there are even those who maintain that the clan members died in a mass suicide.

No matter what one believes, the annihilation of the Jezites meant the end of the barbarian presence on the southern plains. Haloban's fortress was demolished so that no one would try to recapture it, and after that the area surrounding the ancient bronze well lay desolate for over two years, until Lasifor Nightpitch initiated his grandiose construction project.

THE ATTACK OF ELOAN-EO (YEAR 13)

During the late fall of year 13, while Thistle Hold was still under construction, an attack was launched from the forest. A force made up of at least a hundred elves (some say five hundred) struck just before dawn. Four rounds of fire arrows painted red stripes across the night sky and were followed by a fearless melee assault on the war veterans hired to defend the construction site.

The leader of the elves, later identified as the autumn elf Eloan-Eo, fell to the sword wielded by Serex Attio – several witnesses claim that the elf was beheaded from behind as he was running for the newly built toad statue. The bloodbath ended in Ambrian victory, but many humans were killed, and large parts of the town's northern districts went up in flames.

In the following years the elves made numerous attempts to demolish the Hold, through outright attacks or by sneaky acts of sabotage, most recently during the winter of year 20 when two murderous elves were caught in an attic near Nighthome. But none of the later incidents have caused such great losses in lives and property as the attack of Eloan-Eo.

THE BIRTH OF THE BEACON (YEAR 15)

The story of the construction of Thistle Hold's Beacon is a bloody tale that all newcomers soon will hear. It started when Nightpitch asked three contractors for suggestions on how the tower should be built – one of them got her throat slit in a bar brawl, another backed out after having survived a serious blood infection. The one remaining was Balon Daar, and since he could not be accused of taking part in any wrongdoings the contract was awarded to him.

Then the construction claimed numerous lives. The first design was nearly a hundred feet high when it suddenly collapsed – sabotage said the contractor; faulty calculations claimed others. Irrespective of which, two ogres and five goblins died in the collapse, along with four young treasure hunters who were crushed where they were drinking and boasting about their exploits in a nearby tavern.

"I have a friend who's an explorer, and his friend, who is also an explorer, was part of an expedition that captured an elf, alive and kicking. They tortured the elf to gain information about the hideouts of its people but were answered: 'the road to the halls of a thousand tears is closed to all but the invited'. Then the beast bled out."

"Beneath Ordo Magica's tower are dungeons where the wizards keep all sorts of horrors – an enslaved goblin tribe, a nest of etterherds, and a blight born Aboar that has almost broken free on a number of occasions. And treasure. Untold treasure!"

Before the work was done, another ogre and four more goblins had died, and as everyone knows, the tower continues to claim lives (since despondent residents tend to use it as a gateway to the afterlife). Yes, even if almost all explorers and treasure hunters in town have had reason to thank Mayor Nightpitch for the guiding flame of the Beacon, there are many who claim that the structure is cursed. And if one is to believe the really dark-minded storytellers, the Beacon is an actual living being, brought to life by the blood soaking the ground on which it stands, and forever thirsting for more.

THE TINY GLADIATRIX (YEAR 15)

Those who were present at the inauguration of the gladiator arena the Abomitorium, a spring day in year 15, will never forget what they saw. After a few exciting fights between town heroes and beasts of the forest it was time for the Grand Finale – twenty hardened war veterans against as many goblins who had been captured during a raid on a robber tribe close to Karvosti.

With wooden spears and shields, nineteen of the goblins did their best to defend against the Ambrians. The twentieth creature stood still. Those present swear that this individual could not have been a goblin, even if she had their size, posture, and disfigurements. Irrespective of which, she watched the slaughter with a warm smile, until the last of her fellow combatants fell dead at her feet. Then she shook her head, smacked her tongue in disapproval, and went to work.

The dry dirt of the arena whirled up in a dancing, local sandstorm covering the scene. Shortly, the horrified spectators heard death roars rise from the throats of their celebrated war heroes. And as the storm died out all of them were dead, most of them impaled on their own weapons. The creature dusted off her hands and wiped her bloody face clean with the hem of her skirt. No one tried to stop her as she calmly left the Abomitorium, passed through the Western Gate and disappeared into the woods.

To this day, the reason why this apparently powerful creature let herself be caught along with the goblins is a topic for heated discussions among the Davokar experts of Thistle Hold.

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THE BLOOD SPRAY DISEASE (YEAR 16)

The fall of year 16 is remembered as one of the most gruesome in the short but lively history of the Hold. Epidemics are not uncommon in town, and most often they can be blamed on sniffling goblin trash or explorers returning infected from expeditions. But thanks to the novices of Ordo Magica and the priests of Prios, the infections are often discovered and isolated before they spread beyond an unfortunate few. This was not the case with the abominable Blood Spray Disease.

It started with a few cases – people heard complaining about chest pains and who later started coughing up blood. As the number of infected rapidly rose, the condition of the initial victims grew dramatically worse. The cough became so violent that ribs cracked from within and the bleeding spread to all mucosal membranes. Before they died, especially powerful coughing attacks even made blood squirt out of their pores.

It is said that between five hundred and a thousand persons lost their lives before the outbreak was under control, all of them humans of Ambrian or barbarian heritage. The origin of the disease was never uncovered, but rumor has it that at least four of the initial victims had been seen purchasing medicures from the notorious Miracle Master some days before getting ill. This is obviously one of the reasons why said drug peddler nowadays keeps his transactions to the shady parts of Ambria's towns.

THE TRIUMPH OF IASOGOI (YEAR 16)

The most successful expedition ever to return to Thistle Hold was the one led by Iasogoi Brigo, then an adept of Ordo Magica. On a summer's day, year 16, the rumor spread like wildfire through town; people flocked to the square by the East Gate and when the sun was at its highest, it appeared like a mirage on the road from Kastor – a caravan of no less than twenty-nine horses and mules, burdened by gold, relics and artifacts salvaged from the depths of Davokar. At the front rode young Iasogoi himself, with a triumphant smile that must have burnt holes in the souls of everyone who had called him a fool and his plans ridiculous.

The trade in antiquities flourished for six months thanks to Iasogoi's bounty. And that is unique. Sure, Lysindra Goldengrasp has contributed to filling the stocks of the antique dealers, and Gorakai the Younger returned from the Aqueducts of Clearwater laden with treasure. But never again has the market been flooded like it was when Iasogoi Brigo returned from Akkona's Catacombs, located under the ruined city of Odaban.

"Cultists – you know people who ally with the Evils of Davokar in exchange for dark gifts – are everywhere. I've been told, by those I trust, that many nobles are involved in secret societies that worship the darkness. You must agree that Duke Gadramei in Kastor seems like a shady figure..."

THE MERCHANTS' WAR (YEAR 17)

When the Hold was young, the trade in artifacts and antique items was handled differently compared to today. In the early days, it was common for the treasure hunters themselves to place a table on the Antique Plaza to peddle their finds, without bothering with registrations and authenticity certificates. This caused problems. For one thing, deceitful merchants tricked many buyers. Other customers found themselves being the owners of items oozing with Corruption (there is, for instance, a tale about a figurine that caused a whole family – consisting of mother, father, grandparents and seven children – to develop blight-marks before the source of the "sickness" was established). But worst of all for the earnest treasure hunters of the Hold was that their hard-earned valuables and their whole occupation was dragged in the dirt by charlatans.

The popular notion is that a smaller group of successful explorers initiated the purge; some even say it was performed with the silent approval of Mayor Nightpitch. In any case, within a month more than twenty individuals disappeared, out of which a handful were found murdered and the rest vanished without a trace. It was in the wake of these killings that Faraldo and Sefira established their businesses and started issuing certificates of authenticity. There is probably not a single soul who believes that the former Ordo Magica magisters are totally without guilt in the purge that paved their way.

AN ABOMINATION AMONGST US (YEAR 17)

On a bleak winter's night year 17, the residents of the town's western districts were awakened by a heartbreaking cry. The Town Watch was quick to the scene and formed a circle around the podium of the hangman's pole, but they could not stop hundreds of curious bystanders getting a glimpse of the source of the scream.

Below the podium sat an abomination, on this everyone agreed. But past that the depictions differ. Most witnesses described it as a black-furred, human sized beast, but many emphatically claimed that the body of a human woman was hidden under the fur. Some even stress that the creature wept. Then there were those who spoke of beastly fangs, gold shimmering eyeballs and horn-like outgrowths on shoulders and back, but whatever the case it must have had long and sharp claws.

The abomination slew a dozen persons before it almost flew up the palisade and vanished into Davokar. The speculations regarding the event were and remain many. However, the most popular theory has to do with an explorer named

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Tarleo who had been executed for murdering a greedy antique dealer that same day. Maybe the blight beast was one of the assistants Tarleo lost during his disastrous expedition to the sunken castle Manon Melas?

THE DEATH NIGHT (YEAR 18)

The hardened residents of Thistle Hold are not easily spooked. But after the mid-winter night of year 18, it is no understatement to claim that the whole town was paralyzed with fear.

From midnight up until the following afternoon, no less than ninety-nine humans were found dead with self-inflicted wounds. Some were hung by the neck, some had drained themselves of blood with between one and two dozen cuts, some had swallowed toxins or thrown themselves on their own weapons.

After a first inspection it was revealed that the dead only shared one characteristic. Not origin or gender, not social standing or age. No, their only common denominator was that they were all explorers, of Davokar and the ruins of Symbaroum.

It took a long while before the next expedition left Thistle Hold, partly because of the cold winter, partly because of the lingering fear. And there are many questions still unanswered. What caused the wave of suicides? Was it only a coincidence that all victims had traveled through Davokar? And even more vexing: why ninety-nine? Why not an even hundred? Or are the lost remains of the Death Night's hundredth victim out there somewhere to be found?

Rumors

Sprinkled across this book's first section you will find a collection of rumors that can be heard in the public spaces of Thistle Hold, Karvosti and Yndaros, often spoken in a whispering voice. Most likely more than half of them are pure fabrications and the rest affected by mix-ups or exaggerations. But who knows, maybe even those rumors contain some grains of truth...

The Hunter's Harbor

Over the years, Thistle Hold has become more and more densely built and with the growing population the need for taverns, amusements and shops has increased. This chapter presents a collection of popular or for some other reason notable establishments, together with a number of authoritative institutions which are important for running the town.

Taverns

THERE SURELY ARE lots of butcheries, bakeries and market stands for fresh vegetables in the Hold, but a majority of the residents tend to eat their meals outside of their homes. Every tavern, bar and shabby shack serve food of varying quality, at least as snacks to accompany the beer, wine, or spirits.

In Thistle Hold the Ambrian food tradition – mostly consisting of refined, spicy dishes in the form of sausages, jellies, pates and pies – has strong competition from the more rustic barbarian cookery. Even if the most exotic specialties, like roasted sawflies and slow-boiled etterherd, cannot be found on any standard menus, all respectable tavern owners can offer their guests roasted wild boar as well as butter seared back steaks and vegetarian stews.

"The Dump Tavern teaches its patrons a special phrase and if you whisper it in the bar keep's ear, he cuts all prices in half. Just say: 'Your mother is a troll, your father an elf, poor little trolf'."

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"You haven't heard it from me, but the theurgs of the temple are insane. They plan to murder the Queen and all her vassals, and turn Ambria into a Realm of Prios. Father Elfeno is one of the conspiracy's leaders and I'll bet there's proof of his involvement at the temple!"

AFADIR'S TRIUMPH TAVERN

Anyone with plenty of thaler in the purse longing for a culinary journey back to old Alberetor should make a reservation at *Afadir's Triumph* Tavern. Neither the ingredients nor the spices match the original recipes, but the owner and his staff do their best to find worthy, local replacements. The salmons of Berendoria's bay can be swapped for the rainbow trout of Ambria's rivers; the southern Pepper fruit has its equivalent in Davokar's Roka berries; and honey may be used as a substitute for the sugar of Alberetor.

However, sometimes things go wrong. During the summer of year 18, more than twenty people got sick and four died because an ambitious kitchen hand thought that he had found the perfect surrogate for the herb chervil – often used to flavor buttered turnips. Unfortunately, the substitute proved to be toxic and the young boy himself immune to its effects. Instead of a promotion, he suffered ten days in the block before he was executed by hanging. Afadir paid the large fines and swore in the name of Prios never to let anyone repeat such a mistake.

- Trout pudding with buttered turnips, 15 shillings
- Roka Sausage with mashed beats, 12 shillings
- Tankard of Argona (fine stut), 2 shillings
- Tankard of Kurun's Honor (triple fermented ale), 5 shillings
- Honey roasted sorrel, 3 shillings
- Salty-sweet bread sticks, 5 ortegs

BREW

The beer salon *Brew* is run by an elderly couple, Kaglio and Sunna, who claim to have been successful as brewers already before the move north of the Titans. Their assortment spans from fermented malt beverages, like the commonly available Stut, to triple fermented and very strong specialties with names like Urtal and Adersel. Since three years past they also serve the beverage Veloum, stemming from clan Vajvod's proud brewing tradition. It is not as strong as blackbrew but just as full-bodied and much more palatable.

Even though Brew is located outside Haloban's Ring, it can become rough in there at times. The clientele primarily consists of successful fortune hunters resting in-between expeditions, and their boasting has an unfortunate tendency to translate into brawls. But then Brute steps in – the huge and fearless ogre who is hired to break brawlers apart and to hurl them out on the Eastern Square, if needs be. No one picks a fight with Brute, especially when it is said that the old crone he calls Mi-Mum is an aged and incredibly powerful barbarian witch.

- Hack Tray (cheese and meats), 3 shillings
- Tankard of The Duke's Relief (simple stut), 1 shilling
- Tankard of Urtal (triple fermented red ale), 5 shillings
- Tankard of Adersel (triple fermented ale), 8 shillings
- Tankard of Veloum, 2 shillings

THE SLAUGHTERHOUSE

In two neighboring houses on a back street close to the Toad's Square lays *The Slaughterhouse*. One is the actual slaughterhouse, the other a tavern that can take about a hundred guests at the long tables. The menu mainly consists of offal – heart, liver, stuffed lung, and various pasty stews. It is cheap but not the least distasteful, and if you are prepared to pay more there is newly butchered fine meats to order, slow cooked or sautéed in sun-yellow butter.

Were it not for the vile rumors circulating, the owner of the Slaughterhouse, Master Morlam, would have even more guests at his tables. He mutters that it is his competitors who claim that some of the meat he is serving is waste from the Abomitorium – not only mare cats, jakaars and wild boars but also goblins, ogres and the odd barbarian. But as long as the proud Master Butcher refuses to comment on such claims the rumor mill will likely keep grinding, not least since they are based on a fair question: what happens to the remains of the creatures killed during fights in the arena?

- Mixed Stew, 5 ortegs
- Hash Patties with turnips, 2 shillings
- Stuffed Lung with Black Mash, 4 shillings
- Slow-cooked Prime Rib with stewed carrot, 5 shillings
- King's Steak in gravy, 8 shillings
- Tankard of stut (unspecified), 3 ortegs
- Glass of Blackbrew (unspecified), 1 orteg

ODOVAKAR

If you want to eat like a true barbarian you should head to *Odovakar*, at least according to the loyal guests at the tavern and the owners themselves, the barbarian siblings Verama and Melgor. Here you order tender slices of barbecued meat, steaming bowls of stewed root vegetables, or other dishes flavored with forest spices and truffles. A specialty is the puff pastry covered, sweet-spicy mushroom pies originating from the owners' clan Odaiova. These pies are preferably eaten according to the clan custom: eat first, drink later – a challenge for anyone who is not used to the burning hot dishes of the Odavs.

Just like all other barbarian-owned establishments, Odovakar is the target of everything from scorn and derision to pure vandalism. The guilty parties often belong to one of two groups: they are either treasure hunters with scars after encounters with clanfolk, or the type of fanatical Prios-followers who regard anything barbarian as an aspect of Davokar's wildness and evil. Mayor Nightpitch has made it

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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
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

SQUARES AND PARKS

40. The Antique Plaza
41. The Queen's Square
42. The Toad's Square
43. The Eastern Square
44. Park of the Elders

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clear: all who have been allowed to live inside the palisade are first and foremost to be regarded as residents of the Hold, wherever they come from. On the other hand, such statements are hardly any comfort to the relatives and friends of all those who have been banned or even incarcerated because of their, according to relatives, reasonable actions.

- Sweet-Spicy Mushroom pie, 4 shillings
- Barbecued young-boar with beats, 6 shillings
- Fiery Root Stew, 4 shillings
- Tankard of Zarekean Blackbrew, 1 shilling
- Can of Spring Water, 3 ortegs
- Truffle buttered Biscuit, 5 ortegs

THE GRUBBERY

Among the tents and wagons of Blackmoor there is nothing that deserves being called a tavern; the closest you get is the handful of tents referred to as the *Grubbery*. The cook Alevia was once the first head chef at the Salons of Symbaroum, and a very appreciated one at that – until she was thrown out through the Southern Gate, banned from reentering Thistle Hold ever again.

Even though many claim to know what actually happened, the reason behind the ban remains a much-debated mystery. If Alevia really brutalized a kitchen boy, if she embezzled valuable ingredients or conspired to kill Mayor Nightpitch by poisoning him, nobody will ever truly know. But what is evident to anyone visiting the *Grubbery* is that if you with one hand place a shilling on her palm you will get a bowl of excellent soup and a piece of newly baked bread in the other. Any troublemaker or freeloader will instead get a bash from Alevia's big wooden ladle, if not from her frying pan.

- Bread, 1–5 ortegs
- Soup, 1–5 ortegs
- Cup of water, 1 orteg

Entertainment

THE CRAZE FOR barbarian tales and songs which typifies many establishments in Yndaros can hardly be recognized in Thistle Hold. This can probably be explained as an effect of such legends being part of the residents' work, and of most people in the Hold wanting to keep anything related to Davokar outside the palisade.

In the town of Mayor Nightpitch, entertainment is seldom anything else than a distraction and escape from an all too thrilling everyday existence. Other than that, the heritage of the Ambrian people seems to be appealing, expressed in dances, songs, and tales from times prior to The Great War.

Finally, one should not forget the gladiator area, the Abomitorium, which can be seen as an exception from what is stated above. But it is likely no coincidence that most residents visit the bloody battleground regularly. To people living with abominations and beasts just around the corner it must feel reassuring to be reminded that the horrors of Davokar can be fought and killed.

SPECTACLE

Anyone who wants to test the postulate that "wild partying can raise the roof" should dance their way to *Spectacle*. In the great, open salon the carousing goes on from nightfall until long after daybreak. Aside from barrels filled with cheap stut and even cheaper blackbrew, *Spectacle's* foremost attraction is the entertainers. They perform in the midst of the guests – the barbarian fire artists, the Ambrian jesters, the stilt dancers from Ravenia, the snake-eater Kumuma, and many others.

Most popular is the group of dwarven acrobats that the owner, Golonas, has taken under his wing. Visitors from Yndaros are amazed, as they have learned to associate dwarves with pride, restraint, and pure brutality. You never see a glimpse of such traits among *Spectacle's* acrobats, whose far from accomplished tricks and stunts make them appear more like jesters. Especially loved is the one called Dopey, who spends his evenings falling on his bum, being slapped in the face, and having his clothes covered in everything from putrid fish to tar and feathers – always with the same strained look in his face and tears of anger trickling down his cheeks.

- Tankard of Stut (unspecified), 5 ortegs
- Glass of Blackbrew (unspecified), 4 ortegs
- Roasted almonds, 1 orteg

"They say there are no templars in Thistle Hold but that's a lie, I have seen them! During the days they walk around in normal clothing, but sometimes at night they dress in their armor and march the streets, ready to slay some suspected cultist or some poor blight-marked fortune hunter."

BENEGO'S

Do you lack the funds needed to finance your next expedition? Or are you interested in expanding the meager traveling fund? Among the fortune hunters in town, it is said that the chance to become rich is bigger at *Benego´s* than in Davokar, and that is probably true – even if your success in that case depends on luck instead of on skill and good planning.

At the tables on the ground floor the stakes are quite modest, playing dice or Prios' Sun – a strategy game based on an ancient mechanic with bricks of different values, which was developed and grew popular during the war against the Dark Lords.

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On the upper floor, and especially in the private chambers, there is no limit to the bets placed. A tall tale speaks of a game that really went out of control, which ended with the opponents betting their body parts during the final rounds. One of them cut off an ear and added it to the fortune already laying on the table; the other one raised him three fingers from the left hand. And so it continued, with toes, eyes, tongues, and lips until one of them decided to live large and literally placed his heart on the table. The loser left with his life and the winner's family could live like nobles for the following six months, until the winnings were spent.

However, what angers bystanders most is what goes on in the basement below the gambling house. There anyone can bet their hard-earned thaler on death fights taking place in an iron cage. The combatants are roosters of the species Orv, according to the owner captured in the deeply corrupted parts of Davokar – they are small but very real and rampaging abominations! Ordo Magica as well as the priests of Prios regard the activity with disgust and have demanded to know exactly from where the roosters are fetched. But Thistle Hold abides to the laws of Mayor Nightpitch, and so far he has done nothing to stop the popular prize fights run by his former traveling companion, Benego.

LEGENDS

As the name suggests, the tavern *Legends* is a watering hole for all who are fascinated by the past. Here come the most popular storytellers in the realm, to mesmerize the audience with stories of the feats of House Kohinoor, the suppression of unrighteous rebellions, and remarkable individuals who rose from poverty to elevated positions during the olden days of Alberetor. Other stories are about The Great War, its victories but also about the little man's valiant struggle against both fear and dreadful enemies.

Most of what is heard at *Legends* has been modified and dramatized, just like the many returning patrons want it. But now and again, sessions are arranged with some of Ambria's most prominent historians; events that may be less exciting for those listening, but which provide something to enchant the real enthusiasts. Seldonio, the Grand Master of Ordo Magica, has been one such guest, so also Queen Mother Abesina's personal biographer, and one of High Chieftain Tharaban's chroniclers. The latter treated the audience to a real horror story about the elves of Davokar and something he called "The Halls of a Thousand Blood-Red Tears."

During sessions like these the security is heightened, not least because of the closeness to Davokar and the fear that the Iron Pact or hostile barbarians will move in on the dignitaries. But so far only two attacks have been repelled. Lasifor Nightpitch was the first intended victim and the war hero Herakleo Attio the second, and on both occasions the perpetrators were drunk, displeased, and misguided residents – in Herakleo's case, his own unruly brother, Serex.

"The fortune hunter Mireda died some days ago. She owned a house at the intersection Thistle Street and Pitch Street which is full of hidden valuables. If you are quick, you can get there and loot the building before Mayor Nightpitch has signed the order to confiscate the lot!"

- Cheese tray (simple/aged cheese), 2/8 shillings
- Carafe of Vearra Red (simple wine), 2 thaler
- Carafe of Southern Slopes (from Alberetor), 15 thaler

THE ABOMITORIUM

The term Fight Day is for most of the Hold's residents associated with rising tensions, heated debates and an almost consuming longing for the sun to set. Of course, the excitement is especially intense to the three hundred souls who have been able to afford a presale ticket (3–10 thaler depending on the seat). But others besides the lucky ones place bets on their favorites and many more than the additional two hundred allowed in are gathering on the Queen's Square long before the gates are opened. Those who are forced to remain outside usually stay to listen to the roars and commotion from the arena, and most of them use what money they have left to place a final bet.

Inside the *Abomitorium* the show usually starts off with fights between human adversaries, one on one or in groups – fights which are stopped once one side admits defeat. Traveling gladiators and those with their main base in other towns battle against Thistle Hold's own favorites, as for instance the Sun Maiden with her golden locks, and the aged but still powerful war veteran Madrago. The fight when the Sun Maiden took on the master gladiator Hadaro "Scalp Crusher" from Yndaros, where both of them almost bled to death before the local hero managed to land a decisive blow, is legendary.

The Fight Day always ends with something extra spectacular, preferably related to Davokar. Fights against, or sometimes between, wild beasts are common occurrences, but if the audience gets to decide they would prefer other kinds of combatants. Three shows that are still talked about at the taverns in town are the ones that were announced as *The Goblin Rebellion*, *The Barbarian Uprising*, and *Attack from the Abyss*. In the first case Ambrian gladiators fought a ferocious goblin tribe; in the second they pounded the members of a rebellious group from clan Karohar who had been caught after a failed assault on Kastor. And during the Attack from the Abyss the audience got to see (likely for the last time) fifteen gladiators take on a captured and gravely blight-marked Aboar. Only four of them survived and nearly twenty reckless spectators were added to the list of dead and maimed.

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Inns

IN A TOWN where a quarter of everyone staying inside the palisade are more or less temporary guests, the inns have a vital role to play. The large number of visitors also explains why the guesthouses in town are so many and so varied. There are beds for rent in almost all districts in town, some of them expensive and extravagant, others so shoddy that you should be careful not to let your body make contact with linens and chamber pots.

Up until a couple of years ago it could be hard to get a room at the popular inns, but that is not the case anymore. With the growth of Blackmoor, the demand for rooms in town has declined, meaning that one would be unlucky not to find an unoccupied room at an affordable price. And should you be that unlucky, it is far from unheard of that someone already staying at one of the inns can agree to hand over the key, in exchange for a handful of thaler or as a result of resolute arm-twisting maneuvers.

THE COURT AND HARP

Do you want to know how Queen Korinthia has decorated her bedchamber? Or would you rather sleep like Grand Master Seldonio? Maybe you are keener on feeling like Duchess Esmerelda? Irrespective of which, the *Court and Harp* is the inn for you – the inn that claims to have designed its rooms based on credible reports from the bedrooms of various celebrities.

Of course, this requires that you can afford it, and also that you are able to dress and behave like a fairly decent person. The innkeeper Aragina, who has taken over the business from her dead husband, will never accept dirt or bad manners, and she has no problem expressing her opinions publicly. She has given up on getting the Town Watch to help her with difficult guests; it is commonly known that she resorts to other methods for getting rid of them. She orders members of staff not to clean the guest's rooms, to bang at the door with irrelevant questions in the middle of the night, and to "happen" to serve moldy bread and watered beverages at supper.

"Did you hear that the Beast Clan has attacked a woodcutting camp north of Karabbadokk? They say it's Karits in disguise, but that's goblin dung! My cousin has met a survivor of an alleged beast clan attack and he swears that the attackers were elves – thoroughly corrupt, blight-marked elves..."

In recent days, there have also been rumors saying that some of the more unkempt guests at the *Court and Harp* have been brutally beaten and robbed. Can it be that the widow has taken to paying less scrupulous individuals to teach the louts a lesson in manners?

THE WINGED LADLE

While the Hold was being built, it was not a pleasant place to live. The ground was trampled and muddy, goblins and Ambrian construction workers were making noise day and night, and without the palisade in place, the beasts of the forest could attack at a whim. For these reasons, and to be able to oversee the site, Lasifor Nightpitch had his house built in the crown of a towering tree – in fact, the only tree not chopped down in order to make room for buildings and streets.

When Nighthome was finished Lasifor left his eagle's nest, but the tree was left standing and since then a second floor and two annexes have been added to the treehouse. Today the inn has sixteen rooms, which often are booked in advance by nobles and dignitaries planning to visit the town. However, if you are lucky, a cancellation has been made and left a few beds available for hire. And surely it can be worth both the high cost and the climb up the stair winding along the trunk, because even if the final statement is a poetic lie there is some truth to the text painted on the sign at the bottom of the stair: *"Warmly welcome to* The Winged Ladle *– the inn that offers heavenly dining, divine drinks, and beds as soft as clouds at down to earth prices."*

THE COST FOR LODGING IN THISTLE HOLD

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

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Many celebrities have spent their night in town at *The Winged Ladle* – Queen Korinthia among others, if the rumors are true.

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THE WITCH AND FAMILIAR

In a town with so many guesthouses you have to stand out, especially if you are of an origin that otherwise would make potential customers go elsewhere. The huge, but also hugely kindhearted, Alomar stems from clan Zarek and was aware of this when he came to Thistle Hold to make a new life for himself and his mother, the witch Agdala. With the reluctant help of his mother, the *Witch and Familiar* has been turned into a barbarian camp site in three stories, framed by dark timber walls.

The rooms at the ground level as well as the whole of the second floor is dressed in lush emerald-green vegetation, with moss covering the floors and climbing the walls. There is no furniture; the closest you get to any kind of furnishings are the beddings made up of pelts placed directly on the floor, and stuffed hunting trophies of both well-known and rare forest beasts. The food served is obviously inspired by the clanfolk traditions – you often get porridge with fresh or dried berries for breakfast and slow-cooked or slow-roasted meat for the other meals.

The *Witch and Familiar* is especially popular among new arrivals to the borderland, who long for a first contact with the people and beasts of the forest. Alomar and his family must endure hundreds of questions each day and it is common for the inn's residents to be disturbed by newcomers who force themselves into their rooms for a chance to see the skin of a mare cat or the head of a hunger wolf. Even more problematic is that the inn is known for housing barbarians visiting the Hold for various reasons. Those of Thistle Hold's inhabitants who claim to have reasons to really hate the forest people, and who have fueled their anger with liquor, often appear at Alomar's threshold, ranting and looking for a target for their fury.

THE ROSEGARDEN

No other guesthouse in the realm has such a misrepresentative name as the *Rosegarden*. The name comes from the blooming park that was on the site up until the fall of year 16, but which was rebuilt into housing for a large number of impoverished residents after a series of failed expeditions. Initially, the unfortunates were dealt with harshly – they were escorted to the closest town's gate and thrown outside. But the problem escalated, and it was finally decided that the poverty instead should be hidden away behind walls, in the hope that at least some of the fortune hunters would recover and become productive again.

The *Rosegarden* is commonly called "The Last Chance" and is run by the hard-edged Delera on behalf of the Mayor. The four dormitories have room for about sixty guests, which, at the reasonable price of 5 ortegs a night, offer access to a sleeping coffin, a blanket and two servings of porridge or soup.

The turnover of guests is considerable. Many die from infections, others are victimized by more or less justified violence, and some choose to kill themselves as the last flicker of hope has faded. Others find themselves banned from town, while a few are lucky enough to become invited to join some expedition or treasure hunt. In any case, the sleeping coffins of those who leave are never empty for long.

RENT-A-TENT

In the southeastern corner of Blackmoor is a collection of tents with room for about fifty guests. The drunken owner Gormdan, who spends his days dreaming about his joyous childhood in Alberetor, is usually described as being as stupid as he is generous. He is not very concerned about being paid, so long as one treats him to a drink and appear to be happy listening to his dreamy blather. On the other hand, nor is he very concerned with hygiene and bookings – the plaids are literally stiff from dirt and if unlucky you will end up in a pavilion where fifteen people are supposed to cram together in a space barely big enough for eight.

Blackmoor is a dangerous place and Rent-a-Tent is no exception from that rule. If you spend the night, you must first and foremost be prepared to contract one nasty infection or another. Adding to that, there are threats in the form of unscrupulous guests and boozed neighbors regarding all around them as potential robber victims. And as if that were not enough, it is far from uncommon that the people of southeastern Blackmoor carry things with them from Davokar; nasty luggage which can be revealed when one least expects it.

Most recently, during a terrible night in year 21, something abominable clawed itself out of a female explorer's skin – a towering creature with bare muscles, with fingers transformed into knives of bone, and with outgrowths from the cranium, as if it wore a pointy bone crown. The abomination tore over a dozen people apart before it was cut down.

Trade

AMBRIA HAS A proud tradition of skilled artisans and, in most cases, they peddle their wares themselves, like their parents before them. But after the move across the Titans, a new kind of establishment has seen the light of day, and it first appeared in Thistle Hold.

When the town was young, only a few artisans had established their business in the area and most of them were occupied producing material for new constructions. Hence, the commoner who wanted to purchase explorer's equipment, household utensils or weapons could have to wait for months. But then a witty man named Marvalom got an idea on how to make some serious thaler from the situation. He sent his oldest daughter to Yndaros, tasked to purchase viable products in the capital and send them to be marketed

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in the Hold. And so, the General Store was born, a business form which thereafter has been seen to take root all across the Ambrian realm.

THE ROPE AND AXE

The Rope and Axe is the result of a grim family feud. The owner Melena is the daughter of the competitor Marvalom and helped her father start up his business. It is rumored that she spent many years in the capital living at the edge of starvation, convinced that the store had a hard time making a profit. And all the while Marvalom bought himself a spacious house and hired a cook and a handful of goblin servants. When Melena discovered what was going on, she moved back to Thistle Hold intent on ruining her father.

The business idea is a simple one: everything needed for travels in Davokar can be found under the same roof. Craftsmen can offer her low prices thanks to the steady inflow of new orders, and she buys from all over the realm to get the best prices available. It is also said that Melena buys equipment from the families of deceased explorers and that she is not afraid to fence stolen items, but this she categorically denies as vile rumors spread by her father. According to her, *The Rope and Axe* only offers customers first-rate and pristine objects crafted by Ambria's best artisans!

THE QUEEN'S SQUARE

Those who do not mind purchasing used equipment or spending a while searching for the right items do best to shop at the market on the Queen's Square. Every morning there is an awful racket as the vendors start building their stands and stalls, but before long the commerce can commence. The square is filled with quarreling over prices, fights over specific items, and sometimes spontaneous auctions are held when more than one customer want to get a hold of the same article. At the northeastern corner of the square, the drug and herb peddlers sell their dried and fresh components, along with ready-brewed elixirs. Some produce elixirs on demand, at times covering the whole square in spicy mists.

The downside with shopping at the market is primarily that pick-pockets revel in the crowds. Most feared is the gang called the Helmghasts. Not that anyone can claim to know that the Ghasts truly exists; it could just as well be several different gangs or some single, very capable individual. But what is certain is that Thistle Hold in general, and the Queen's Square in particular, is plagued by mugging sprees at irregular intervals, where hundreds of persons are robbed during the course of a day. The victims never notice anything of the theft itself, but afterwards they all find a small red stone medallion in the shape of a deformed, screaming face in the pocket or the bag from which the items was taken. It is said that one of the captains of the Town Watch, Tallios, has been tasked to handle the situation, but that he himself has been robbed of two purses while searching for the elusive Helmghasts.

"They say that the Blood-Daughter is reborn, the beastly Goddess of Saar-Kahn. This is of course ludicrous but if the Saars themselves are convinced, it may mean they are about to become even more aggressive – bad news for us and the other clans..."

BIG-BASHER'S SMITHY

The ogre Big-Basher came walking out of Davokar before the palisade of Thistle Hold was finished. Famished and unable to make himself understood, he was perceived as an onrushing threat and had it not been for the barbarian blacksmith Hurela he would most likely have been killed that day. Instead he was taken in by Hurela who immediately put him to work, first for working the bellows, later as an assistant at the anvil, and finally as the maker of weapons and armor parts. When the Master died from acute respiratory failure a few years ago, Basher inherited the smithy and no one doubts that he also has succeeded his "mother" as the finest blacksmith in the Hold.

Aside from the owner himself, two novices, one adept and three goblins work in the shop – the latter ones claimed to be the most privileged Karabbadokks in town. The goblins handle the bellows, shuffle coal and greet customers, always with a welcoming, pointy-toothed grin. The adept Vania crafts products of standard quality and sometimes even the novices perform well enough for their creations to be sold. But if you want weapons or armor of really high standard you have to order them directly from the master smith himself (see the box on Mastercraft items, below). The items take longer to make and cost more, but on the other hand they can mean the difference between life and death when facing the horrors of Davokar.

Mastercraft

Some non-magical equipment are so well made that they perform better than other equipment. These are known as mastercraft and provide a +1 bonus to attack rolls (for a weapon), armor class (for armor), or ability check (for tools). Weapons do not apply the bonus to damage rolls but a mastercraft weapon can be given the Deep Impact or Balanced weapon property. Mastercraft equipment is often twice the cost of standard equipment and may not be available in all locations.

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THE THALER'S DRUGSTORE

The Thaler's Drugstore is the alchemists' equivalent to Marvalom's, a store where you can find most anything. It is run by the sisters Ofera and Moria, but the elixirs are still crafted by their half-blind and lame father – the very private and equally renowned miracle-worker Skanander, previously employed as medicus at the court of Queen Mother Abesina.

The siblings offer fair prices for herbs and extracts which then are resold or converted into potent elixirs. For a short period during the autumn of year 19 they were forbidden to sell harmful brews, since a handful of murders had been committed with toxins bought at the Thaler's. But after massive protests from the owners and their customers the ban was lifted – a poison-coated axe or arrowhead can be exactly what is needed to lay down an onrushing forest beast or a furiously fighting clan warrior! Furthermore, the vile rumors claiming that Skanander does not hesitate to strengthen his decoctions by using blight-marked herbs and berries cannot be anything other than pure nonsense.

THE TREASURY

A former Master of Ordo Magica named Sefira runs the auction house *The Treasury* with her family. Thanks to their good reputation they can charge more than others for certificates of authenticity – about 25 thaler for artifacts and 5 thaler for curiosities and art objects – and also claim a provision as high as 25% on all sales. Despite the costs, people are queuing to have their finds examined and valued. Because even if a huge chunk of the profit goes to the aptly named *Treasury*, the actual revenue is in the end larger than if the item had been sold in some booth at the Antique Plaza. Many nobles gladly pay extra just to be able to say that they own an object with a certificate signed by Sefira.

Since what is stated above also applies to Faraldo's Novelty Store it is not uncommon that you can make astonishing discoveries in the marketplaces; peerless finds whose owners have yet to realize the upside of engaging one of the auction houses. The former fortune hunter Nilos has capitalized on this and established a growing business – his knowledgeable agents buy underpriced items on the market or directly from newly returned expeditions, for resale at a more reasonable but still relatively low rate. The question is how long it will take before a new Merchants' War flares up in Thistle Hold, and what part the likes of Faraldo and Sefira will play when that happens.

"I swear, the Iron Pact has lots of agents in the Hold! There are even humans in service of the elves, genuine traitors! It wouldn't surprise me if Faraldo, the antique dealer, is one of them – his store is always full of Symbarian artifacts!"

KODOMAR'S HUCKERY

At the center of Blackmoor you can hear, day after day, the barbarian Kodomar roar about diverse objects that he has for sale, for prices that are astoundingly low. The thundering giant of a man was one of the first to establish a more or less permanent shop in the tent camp, since he for unknown reasons was stopped from entering the Hold.

The humble tent he started in has been replaced, first by a huge pavilion, then by a rickety shed, and finally by a well-built and sturdy wooden house. The owner boasts about being able to sell just about anything, but admits that he may need some time if he is to accommodate to more exotic requests. It is also claimed that Kodomar gladly purchases gravely corrupt items, which can be difficult to market in the neighboring town, but for which he has a large and moneyed group of potential buyers.

The reason why the lone barbarian was not granted access to Thistle Hold is rumored to be linked to why he was expelled from clan Baiaga. It has been said that his former chieftain sent a rider with a message to Mayor Nightpitch, warning him that Kodomar was on his way south – all this to prevent a diplomatic crisis arising between the Ambrians and the clans of Davokar. There are numerous theories regarding why this was deemed necessary, even if many see the peddler's alleged tolerance for corrupt items as a clear indication.

Knowledge & Information

FOR THE FORTUNE hunter who wishes to be successful, decisiveness and first grade equipment is never enough. Equally important is access to true and fair information about the site you are headed for. Such knowledge may actually be found in the woods. Cuneiform writings on ancient ruins, legends told by clanfolk and goblin tribes living in the forest, even figurative mosaics and carvings – all of them can hold secrets about new treasure hunting grounds and prove to be worth a fortune if you would rather sell the information to someone else.

Also, there are lots of ways to gain crucial information in Thistle Hold. It seldom comes for free, and you must be careful not to trust just anyone with your secrets; treasure hunters are often utterly deceived, prior to or after having returned from an expedition to the depths of Davokar. Charlatans claiming to know everything there is to know about the targeted site may very well be full of lies, leading to deficient preparations and thereby to a disastrous outcome. And the explorer who reveals their valuable knowledge to

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some lore master may be told that it is useless, only to later learn that the same information has been used to guide an expedition that returned laden with treasure. Caution is a virtue to the residents of the Promised Land, in all conceivable ways.

Rules on how to search for information in archives, libraries and the like are found in the nearby box on Research.

ORDO MAGICA

One of the more reliable but also most expensive paths to knowledge is to visit the town chapter of Ordo Magica. According to what is said, Grand Master Seldonio has stated that the order shall strive to be honest and trustworthy, for several reasons. For one thing, he means that it is good for business if people feel safe to trust the wizards with their questions and finds. And if that is accomplished, it also benefits the order in its ambition to learn as much as possible about the new homeland of the Ambrians. However, this overall aim does not stop there from being individual members of Ordo Magica who do not hesitate to mislead knowledge seeking visitors in order to serve their own purposes and personal gain.

For a price varying from five shillings to five thaler (depending on the time spent), the adepts and magisters of the order chapter can help with translations of cuneiform writings, analysis of artifacts, and the casting of rituals needed to shed light on the obscure. Additionally, the archive on the tower's third floor is open to all paying customers who wish to study the travel records and witness statements it contains (at the fair price of one thaler per session).

Should that not suffice, it is also possible to gain an audience with one of the Masters in town – Cornelio, Eufrynda, or Goncai. This may cost as much as ten thaler for those who do not have good contacts or who cannot offer very important information in exchange.

THE LEGATION

The Queen's Legation must also be mentioned among the credible sources of information in town, at least in some areas. Suria Argona has two notaries employed, with the express task of recording everything that has to do with Queen Korinthia's grandiose endeavor. Hence, the shelves of the cellar vault are jam-packed with books and scrolls, describing huge as well as small events in the history and development of the region. Searching the archives for information costs one thaler per hour, but an alternative is to trade for the time – that is, you agree to tell the notaries of some more or less significant event that they are interested in preserving for posterity.

The latter can also be a way to add to the travel funds or save up for a couple of extra nights at one of Thistle Hold's guesthouses. Provided you are deemed credible, a witness statement from an expedition into Davokar or from some notable incident inside the palisade can pay between one and five thaler. But liars and showoffs should not bother to try, since the notaries Karasto and Perela are said to possess mystical means of knowing the truth – something which may result in a ban from the building.

Research

To find information on various matters, a character can attempt to gain access to various records. For each day spent in research, the player makes an **Intelligence (Investigation) check** with the DC dependent on the rarity of information researched: **common (DC 10)**, **uncommon (DC 13)**, **rare (DC 16)**, **very rare (DC 19)**, or **legendary (DC 22)**. On a success the GM provides the character with some helpful knowledge about the matter.

THE KARABBADOKKS

If you are after information on Davokar in general and about its southern regions in particular, you may very well find what you need in Karabbadokk, the goblin village east of the Hold. It is far from safe, since most members of the tribe have double-edged feelings towards humans – they live off jobs in and around Thistle Hold, but are also bitter or even hateful since they justly perceive themselves to be badly treated by their employers. But if you offer them reasonable pay or can hire them to do some kind of less degrading work, there is a chance that the Karabbadokks will swallow their anger.

A majority of the tribe members can communicate in Ambrian, but if you want to hold a proper conversation you should head towards the village center. There you will find the only real houses in Karabbadokk, three longhouses made from rough timber logs surrounding a courtyard open to the west. In the middlemost house live the tribe's three leaders – the chief Idelfons, the shaman Njekka, and the eccentric Garm Wormwriggler.

Questions about Davokar and its beasts are usually answered by the former hunter/gatherer Idelfons, while Njekka has vast knowledge about the barbarian clans and the mystical aspects of the forest – abominations and the sources and effects of Corruption. Garm was raised in Yndaros at the Convent School of the Last Light but chose to go back to his roots at the age of ten. He has been a wilderness guide for many years and knows most there is to know about the ruins of Symbaroum and the treasure hunters who roam the region, especially those who have been at it for a while.

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A view of the Hold's southern gate,
from way back when the Beacon was newly built.

AGDALA

The witch Agdala is not the most amenable person in town. She appears to loathe Thistle Hold and, if one was to judge from how it occasionally sounds in her presence, she hates her son Alomar even more – for being good for nothing, for forcing her to live among the Ambrians, for not having given her any grandchildren. The one thing that seems to put her in a good mood is when she has the opportunity to gossip about the members and doings of other clans – which she claims to know everything about.

And, if in good spirits, she can be helpful in other ways too. First of all, she is still a powerful witch and can be persuaded to help as long as she perceives the end as justified and good – rumor has it that she, given appropriate payment, has spoken to the dead and delivered predictions with great precision. Adding to that, there is probably no one in the Hold who is so versed in barbarian legends as Agdala, both when it comes to telling them and interpreting their true meanings.

People who have sought out the old witch tend to describe the meeting with a trembling voice and eyes flickering from anxiety. Apparently, she prefers favors to thaler as payment, and she threatens everyone that curses will plague those who pass on the information she has provided. With that in mind, it is not so strange that the people of Thistle Hold would rather frighten their children with the hag Agdala than with the Huldra of Karvosti.

DODRAMOS

He calls himself Dodramos, the soothsayer who for the last four years has lived in a tent in the western part of Blackmoor. Judging by his sweeping mannerisms, toothless doomsday predictions and love for sweets he is nothing more than a swindler. Nevertheless, presently there have been sightings suggesting the opposite: Dodramos has been visited or picked up by particularly well-built, if not extravagant, wagons. It is rumored that several noble houses

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have started seeking his advice, also that celebrities like Chapter Master Cornelio and Mayor Nightpitch have paid for his services.

Other rumors say that Dodramos was a practicing theurg at the monastery of the Twilight Friars before he turned up in Blackmoor (after having lost or recovered his senses, depending on the story). This is strongly denied by the Sun Church, and, since Dodramos himself seems to enjoy the mystery surrounding his person, the commoners are left to speculate.

The residents of Blackmoor say that Dodramos is an oracle for hire, but that he would just as soon be paid in food or hugs as in shillings. Most of them do not put much faith in his predictions, which remarkably often foretell a bright and prosperous future for any and all. Sure, such prophesies can be enough to provide the poor and broken inhabitants of the tent camp with a glimmer of hope, but it hardly affects his credibility in a positive way.

Authorities

ALREADY WHEN THISTLE Hold was being built, several of Ambria's most powerful factions were there, as avid supporters or actual contributing parties. Today all major factions are represented in town, officially or working from the shadows. Far from all are happy that Nightpitch has such vast influence in the region, but not much can be done about that. The Sun Church has initiated a partnership with Duke Gadramei in Seragon, hoping to transform Kastor to a steppingstone into Davokar, but that will take many years and until then theurgs and Black Cloaks are forced to use the Hold as their most advanced base of operations.

It is said that there are very few conflicts between organizations like Ordo Magica, the Sun Church, and the noble houses in Thistle Hold, much fewer than in the other cities of the realm. Of course, the reason for this is that Lasifor Nightpitch has little to no patience with infighting and that Korinthia allows him to decide who gets to live

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and function within the palisade. But then there are some know-it-alls who claim that the factions in town indeed are fighting each other, only that they, chiefly and thus far, do so behind the scenes. And surely there may be some truth to such claims, because no matter how powerful Mayor Nightpitch is he would hardly stand a chance if the likes of First Father Jeseebegai or Grand Master Seldonio were provoked into action.

THE SUN TEMPLE

By the Park of the Elders lays the town's sun temple with its shining copper dome on the roof. Its First Theurg is named Elfeno, a priest mage who despite his relative youth is said to be one of the Sun God's most powerful servants. At times, when the leader of the temple steps in instead of the liturgs who normally handles the Sunset Mass, the audience gets to experience something unforgettable. Those equipped to make the comparison claim that not even the First Father speaks with such passion, of his love for Prios and humankind's appointed task – to tirelessly and humbly cultivate nature, thereby cleansing it from the rampant forces of evil.

Anyone can go to the temple for spiritual guidance, treatment for diseases and ailments, and not least to have the priests scatter the darkness of a clouded mind. There are also those who turn to the temple after having been exposed to the Corruption of Davokar, but for those the priests cannot do much more than pray for the mercy of Prios. What more is, according to gossip, the blight-stricken should really keep away from the temple. If things go badly they can find themselves imprisoned in the catacombs, said to be located beneath the temple, containing people and creatures suffering from corruption sickness.

The representatives of the temple have not publicly admitted that this is true, but the black carriages are proof enough for most – carriages driven by grim Black Cloaks that, now and again, stop in front of the temple to be loaded with stone coffins big enough to hold fully grown humans and which always leave town through the South Gate. It is not farfetched to guess that they are heading for the monastery of the Twilight Friars in the Titans.

THE FORTUNE HUNTERS' DISTRICT

Many famous and successful fortune hunters live in the district east of Thistle Street, south of Lasifor's Road, in peace and quiet between expeditions. Many have also retired and devote themselves to helping younger talents, for a substantial provision of course. Those who are offered a place under Iasogoi Brigo's or Lysindra Goldengrasp's wings also get access to all their contacts and, in some cases, part of their fortunes. And even if all help comes at the expense of a required return in the form of future shares (*Player's Guide*, page 161), this can be exactly what a group of newly baked explorers need to fulfill their dreams. On the other hand, the district also inspires nightmares.

Some of its residents – among others Elmea Rabbit's Foot and the terrifying elder who was called Erok the Dark at his prime – never leave their estates. It is talked about blightmarks and even worse; that many of the district's success stories have a soot black and corruption corroded flipside. If so, that could possibly explain the cries of torment that sometimes echo through the southeastern parts of town, maybe also the beastly howls that the residents of the district usually blame on their tame jakaars.

THE MERCHANTS' HOUSE

In the building called The Merchants' House, the artisans and store owners of Thistle Hold convene periodically. Together they make up a growing crowd and maybe also a growing faction of power and influence in town. Indeed, the antique dealers have long been strong, but lately other subgroups have also taken steps towards becoming more organized. Many of the artisans' guilds that were established in Yndaros a few years back, have founded branches in places like Kurun, Ravenia, Kastor and Mergile – now also in the town of Mayor Nightpitch.

At the Merchants' House the members meet to speak of common interests and to devise plans on how to influence the Mayor in important decisions. It is said that the merchants wish for a more open town, where more entrepreneurs are allowed to establish stores and workshops inside the palisade and where the fees for passing through the gate houses are abolished. That way, the dawning trade in Blackmoor would be truncated and eventually the revenues for the town would increase.

Other rumors describe the Merchants' House as a place for forming conspiracies and cartels. Far from all artisans and craftsmen in town are invited to become members and those on the outside are much more often hit by sabotage, robberies, and other disasters. Maybe this is because they cannot afford to pay as much for security, but among the dives inside Haloban's Ring you can sometimes hear fortune hunters boast about having performed tasks for the Merchants' House – missions whose character they gladly hint at but never talk openly about.

THE MONASTERY

The Twilight Friars have a substantial posting in the Hold, even if it is not as large-scale as the convent school in Yndaros or the monastery in the Titans. In the windowless stone building Prior Emundi and seven Black Cloaks live their ascetic lives. They are active from sunup to sundown and are said to spend most of the time meditating and praying, and a smaller part of each day engaged in activities meant to ennoble the physical shape that the Sun God has endowed them with. On the few occasions when the monks

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are seen leaving the monastery they are always going to or from the sun temple, presumably tasked to care for its blight-stricken prisoners.

Aside from the permanent residents, the second floor of the building sometimes houses pilgrims headed for the sun temple on Karvosti. Then there is the third floor, accessible only to The Whip of Prios – the section within the order dedicated to tracking down and handling heretics. Other than that, Prior Emundi does not receive any visitors, except under extraordinary circumstances. A visitor who knocks on the door is greeted by the young postulant Adso, who is yet to be consecrated and who must put up with running errands and being the order's public face. He can talk to the Prior and, if the situation appears serious enough, arrange an audience inside the monastery. However, any visitor who has reason to suspect themselves of being even the slightest bit blight-touched is advised to avoid such a meeting.

THE TOWN SEAT

By the Antique Plaza stands the building where the staff of Lasifor Nightpitch holds court. The one who handles the daily business is Ader Gorinder, the last survivor of a small noble house that otherwise perished during The Great War. There are also the relentless Tax Commissioner Dario, the Law Commissioner Asmerda and the Construction Commissioner Kalio Galeia – all of them recruited by the Mayor when the town was being built, and faithful to him ever since.

The most popular character in the staff is Sanitary Commissioner Agramai Kalfas, not because he keeps the streets tidy but primarily because he often can be seen partying, dancing, and carousing with the populace at the establishments by the Toad's Square. If master Agramai is among the guests, you can be pretty sure that the evening and night will be a success – at least if you are interested in an all-nighter!

The administration building also houses the Hall of Knights, a meeting and resting place for nobles visiting the Hold. Officially Suria Argona, the Queen's Legate, is in charge of the activities in the Knight's Hall, but it is commonly known that her father has taken over that role. Count Alkantor is a close friend of Lasifor Nightpitch and when parties are held in the Hall you can often see the roofed carriage of the Mayor parked outside the Town's Seat.

There are, however, persistent rumors saying that some specific nobles rarely accompany Lasifor to such events. If it is because they do not feel welcome or if it has to do with them wanting to distance themselves from the smaller houses is debated, but the representatives of House Kohinoor are said to never make more than occasional courtesy visits to the Hall. One should not make too much of such a trifle, but of course it contributes to the speculations regarding schisms among the nobles of Ambria.

THE HIGH CHIEFTAIN'S ENVOY

Vicona of clan Godinja is High Chieftain Tharaban's official envoy in Ambria and she is seated in the Hold. With her is the witch Yoramon, who was part of the former Huldra Oryela's inner circle, and six guardian warriors led by Yoramon's son.

All of barbarian heritage are welcome to the modest residence of the envoy, where they can get help with anything from a monetary handout to contacts with suitable trade partners in the Ambrian realm. It has also been known to happen, that clanfolk who commit crimes in the Hold are handed over to Vicona, for immediate punishment or for being deported back to their clan territory.

Suspicious Ambrians tend to claim that the envoy engages in espionage on account of the High Chieftain, or that she pays Ambrians in the Town's Seat, the Merchants' House and Ordo Magica for information and to spread false rumors about the dealings of the clans. Even more serious allegations identify her as the extended arm of the High Chieftain when it comes to hunting down exiled clan members who are trying to hide in Thistle Hold, after having violated taboos or committed serious acts of violence. But the few who have actually talked to the mild and kind-hearted envoy assure rumormongers that the woman behind the mask would never be capable of such heinous acts.

However, not many would put it past the dark-gazed Yoramon to lead those kinds of operations. In any case, the whole town knows about the bodies that now and again are found in the northern district of town – the remains of nameless barbarians that no one seems to recognize.

THE PENITENTIARY

There is no great need for prison cells in Thistle Hold, since most criminals are either condemned into exile or directly to death. But nonetheless, there is a small and closely guarded building at the Garrison which is commonly called the Penitentiary. There the most serious offenders in town are held captive pending Law Enforcer Asmerda's verdict, and it is there troublemakers and drunkards from the dives around the Toad's Square are dragged to sleep it off.

Visiting the Penitentiary is far from pleasant, especially during the winter when the icy cold creeps along the floors of the unheated building. There are no bunks, the food consists of water and bark bread, and you are seldom told for how long you will have to stay. However, the biggest fear comes from somewhere else. The warden is the weasel-like Pergalo, the son of the master torturer Katia who managed to make a captured Dark Lord reveal where Queen Korinthia was held prisoner, near the end of The Great War.

The stories told of what Pergalo does to knocked-out drunkards during the nights are enough to deter most people from drinking too much. And woe to the suspected conspirator, spy or dark-minded cultist who ends up in the murky cellar vaults of the Penitentiary!

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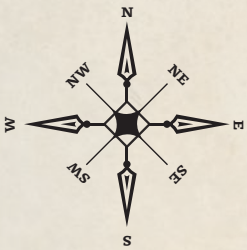
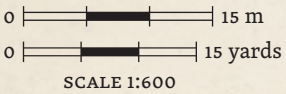
BLACKMOOR

1. Anselg
2. The Blood Robes' HQ
3. Dodramos
4. The Keep
5. Rent a Tent
6. Herdol Partly
7. Kodomar's Huckery
8. The Grubbery
9. The Lindworm's Nest
10. The Missionaries
11. Nodla
12. Redeye's tent
13. The Haymow
14. The Black Square





Blackmoor

IT STARTED OFF as a small camp for impoverished Ambrians who had arrived in the region hoping to earn their livelihood in Thistle Hold. Soon they were accompanied by fortune hunters who could not or would not pay for the shelter of the palisade, and later by clanfolk that did not want to pay tolls for the wares they intended to peddle in the region. And before anyone really had time to react, the population of Blackmoor was the size of the Hold's, only more diverse and with an even higher turnover of individuals.

Those who describe the tent camp as Thistle Hold's darker twin definitely have a point. To the walled town only a select few are welcomed, to live their lives in relative peace and harmony; Blackmoor has no walls and the atmosphere is characterized by an almost complete lack of laws and regulations – they are like light and darkness, day and night. Most who have lived in Blackmoor would also claim that the arrival of the mercenary outfit called the Blood Robes only made matters worse. Sure, they protect the establishments located at the center of the camp, but all other residents have only gotten one more oppressor to fear.

One can indeed wonder why anyone willingly would live or even spend a single night in Blackmoor, but that question is misguided. First, there is still some safety in the crowd,

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not least when the beasts of the forest come creeping out in search of easy prey. Second, there are lots of people who for one reason or another are not allowed to enter Thistle Hold. And third, the Blood Robes and the patrols of Baron Erebus make sure to evict anyone who tries to set up camp somewhere on the surrounding farmlands. No, for those who wish to dwell in the vicinity of the Hold there is but one viable choice.

THE BLACK SQUARE

At the center of the tent camp is an irregular, open area called The Black Square, surrounded by a small newly built stone keep and a number of wooden houses. In the keep resides the bailiff of Blackmoor, Keroldo Erebus, Baron Grafoldo's eldest son. He is said to be a true lounger who spends his days counting coin, gulping intoxicants, and rubbing both shoulders and other body parts with the court of young ladies he has "rescued" from life in the camp. His only real task is to collect taxes from the businesses run in the buildings around the square, and it seems like he is able to do that without any major mishaps.

The wooden buildings accommodate, for instance, Kodomar's Huckery which stands wall to wall with the newly opened guesthouse The Haymow. The leather worker Anselg has his shop a stone toss away, next to the smithy of the war-crippled blacksmith Herdol "Partly," so called because he has lost one leg, an eye, and most of his left ear. Adding to these are an assembly of smaller sheds – for example one where used exploration equipment is traded, one where the farmers in the area sell wares which are not good enough for the Hold's residents, and one where the crone Nodla peddles her pies; pies that are difficult to chew since the dough is mixed with bark, and that seldom taste of what you have ordered.

Finally, it should be mentioned that the Blood Robes always have six ruffians posted by the Black Square and that these are often seen throwing both taunts and spoiled foodstuffs at the missionary sun priests who move among the houses – the latter being disciples of Sarvola, branded as heretics by the First Father and all true believers in Prios.

THE WESTERN MOOR

The ground west of the Southern Highroad is full of tents belonging to more or less desperate fortune hunters. Most of them are looking for a larger group to join up with, and many of them are yet to set foot under the foliage of Davokar. Others have made one or more expeditions, but without finding anything to hoist them out of the mud. Common to all of them is that they seldom stay for long; they are all going somewhere else, either to a place full of delights and contentment, or to a pit in the ground where they can enjoy the thoughtless tranquility of the afterlife.

Most notable in the area are the headquarters of the Blood Robes, made up of three roofed and red-painted wagons, and the soup kitchen near the Keep called the *Grubbery*. And, of course, the collection of colorful pavilions run by Mistress Belina that goes by the name the *Lindworm's Nest* – an establishment where wretched women and men of Ambrian heritage capitalize on the only asset they possess: namely their youthful physique. Of course, aside from Blood Robes and people passing through there are few customers among Blackmoor's tents. But since the services of the *Lindworm's Nest* are not offered in any organized form behind the palisade, the establishment also attracts customers from the Hold.

"Queen Korinthia was killed by the Dark Lords. In fact, the Dark Lord himself has taken her place. Hence the mask on her face, the completely covering garments, and the disguised voice. I've heard she speaks in the voice of a child!"

The town's people speak about the *Lindworm's Nest* in euphemisms, as a *"house of joy"* or a *"pleasure nest"*, but everyone knows what kind of services it provides. In fact, most people do not mind the establishment; even the priests of Prios can respect people for choosing to do the most with what the Sun God has bestowed upon them. But since the place is associated with the spreading of diseases and since the preaching of Father Sarvola has made some people question the morality in paying for carnal relations, all respectable residents are careful to keep their dealings with Mistress Belina a secret – whether by arriving to the *Lindworm's Nest* disguised and in covered carriages, or by sending a wagon to fetch Belina's employees to the privacy of their own homes.

THISTLE SCOLD

The northeastern part of Blackmoor is usually called Thistle Scold and is the most orderly area in the camp. Here lives a large part of the humans who work in Thistle Hold during the days or nights but whose employers are not willing to pay for having them live in town. The district's residents are left in peace by both Blood Robes and the camp's criminal elements, primarily in fear of reprisals from the employers. They do not have permission to build wooden houses, but thanks to hard work and what little remains of their salary, many have managed to create reasonably tolerable homes for themselves.

Some brewing discontent, like the one found among the Karabbadokks, cannot be seen. Sure, it happens that someone is fetched by the Hold's Town Watch, accused of having sold information about their benefactor to competitors or criminal elements. But most seem content with their lot in life – a lot that in all respects is more generously sized than that of the goblins or the Ambrian refugees in Yndaros.

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THE GARBAGE HEAP

Life in the southeastern part of Blackmoor matches the image of the worst misery imaginable. In the area referred to as the Garbage Heap dwell all who have lost their faith, who never had any faith, and a diverse crowd of sickly people waiting to be released from mortal life. They may be of Ambrian heritage, originate from some clan, or be exiled from their goblin tribe – they all have in common that they are viewed as garbage, in most cases by themselves as well as by others.

Father Sarvola's missionary station and the soup kitchen run by his disciples is one of few lights in the dark. Another is the strong sense of solidarity found among the wretched. With time something like a spiritual movement has emerged in the district, organized around the cripple Galamar – commonly known as Red Eye due to a congenital disorder. All who take part in the community have sworn not to let their misfortune affect others, so even if the Sun Church regards the group as a heretical cult, the authorities in the region are yet to intervene.

Regarding the job situation, it has been said that the number of residents who are offered a day's work each day are as many as those who die – that is, one to three persons. The not so lucky ones have to turn to the soup kitchen or starve. It is an unfathomable mystery that the more than a thousand residents of the Garbage Heap do not resort to violence and attack their more prosperous neighbors.

"The top tower room at Arkerio's Guest House is haunted by a wraith. Since the opening, only one single person has been able to stay there for a whole night. Can't remember his name, but now he is tremendously wealthy, because he swallowed his fear and was awarded with the ghost's secrets."

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Karvosti

The transformation is slow enough for most people not to notice. But Okramal does. For nearly two decades she has been tasked by the Huldra to listen to the forest and inhale its wild scent. She will not be deceived by the idle darkness, nor by the occasional resurgence of light and warmth. No, where others see happenstance, she sees design; where others see spontaneous fluctuations, she sees a carefully calculated plan. There is one question neither she nor the Huldra have yet been able to answer: Who devised this scheme?

The newly arrived southerners are gathered at their temple, passing judgements in the last light of the setting sun. They accuse Davokar, the woods that for centuries have nourished Okramal and all her brothers and sisters. She rejects the possibility of them being right; they must not be! Yet she cannot accept Yeleta's suspicions, derived from the Halls of a Thousand Tears, that what is happening is merely a reflection of the Ambrians' ambitions. For behind the howling of abominations and the stench of corruption, Okramal detects the sound and smell of something else, something strange yet very familiar. What it might be she cannot say, but in her dreams it takes the shape of a bleeding heart – a heart beating faster and faster, strong enough for the blood to splatter...

FEW PARTS OF the Davokar region are the subject of as many rumors and legends as the cliff of Karvosti. Yes, songs are sung of Symbar, Saroklaw, and the mythical Dakovak. Yet, unlike these fabled places and others like them, Karvosti is very much alive – and what is more, it is the home of many renowned individuals.

Many people, barbarians and Ambrians alike, fantasize about what life is like up there amongst wrathguards, sun priests and witches; how it would feel to stand on the plateau and behold the mighty forest below. Very few ever get the opportunity to actually set foot on the cliff. Usually, such a visit would require a difficult and perilous journey through monster-infested woods, and a lengthy absence from one's crops or whatever means of livelihood one might have. Hence, apart from its small number of permanent residents and members of the delegations sporadically sent by the clans, Karvosti is visited almost exclusively by people with nothing to lose or live for.

Sure, there are exceptions – meticulously organized expeditions arranged by explorers or fortune hunters who are using Karvosti as a base of operations, or have planned a brief stay on the cliff to rest and re-provision. These may be groups led by Ordo Magica, the Black Cloaks, or possibly some ambitious noble. Such visits tend to aggravate the already tense atmosphere on the cliff, for though the High Chieftain and the witches must accept the Ambrian presence, they do not look kindly on fortune hunters who violate the clanfolk's well-founded taboos. All too often, their fears are confirmed when the expeditions bring with them the darkness of the forest below – as a result of shameful intrusions into some abominable creature's territory, or the theft of its treasures.

This chapter is intended to reflect the first impressions of Karvosti, as experienced first-hand or recounted by Ambrian explorers. In other words, it is reasonable for players whose characters have spent time on the cliff, or who have socialized with seasoned fortune hunters in Yndaros or Thistle Hold, to have access to the following information.

The Gate to the Witches' Dwelling

The arched gateway leading to the witches' dwelling appears to be wide-open, but those who try to enter uninvited will most likely get themselves bruised. There are rumors suggesting that the gate is simply invisible, while others believe it to be guarded by powerful spirits stopping intruders in their tracks.

For whatever reason, it seems that neither people nor thrown objects may pass the witches' threshold without first having been welcomed by Gadramon, Eferneya, or the Huldra herself.

Philip Linden (Order #6334067)

First Impressions

THOSE WHO HAVE made their way up the cliff and reached the sturdy wall at the end of the slope are intercepted by a group of eleven wrathguards, who share little in common beyond the arms they carry and their red-tinted chainmail. Newcomers should not be surprised to be met by just a few guards, probably accompanied by Lumedo, the aged Ambrian who has been the wrathguards' interpreter these last four years. The remaining wrathguards are likely to throw them quick glances before redirecting their attention to the forest, looking for any movement that might signal an approaching threat.

After having answered questions about the nature of their visit, and having their packs searched, the travelers are given some time to let the impressions sink in – the High Chieftain's mighty fortress looming on the eastern edge of the plateau; the fault scarp, hundreds of feet further away, with its entrance to the witches' dwelling; the shiny copper dome of the sun temple perched on the upper ledge near the western precipice.

Then there are the people. There seems to be only a few of them moving around, at the nearby marketplace and in the pilgrim camp below the sun temple. More of them are posted along the edges of the plateau, on the walls and towers of the stronghold, and by the sun temple. They are all looking outwards, at the forest, that dark and swaying sea of leaves. Or is it that they look for what is moving beneath the foliage? Karvosti may be an impressive cliff, but compared to Davokar it is both tiny and terribly exposed. It is imperative for people on the cliff – residents and visitors alike – to get along and assist one another.

Initially, this feeling of solidarity is the predominant one. On Karvosti, everyone stands united against the darkness of Davokar, despite various disagreements and historical animosity. This is taken for granted, more out of necessity than anything else, and all present on the plateau are expected to do whatever it takes to avoid open conflict. Of course, this is easier said than done – especially when situated on an isolated cliff deep within the forest, along with a colorful collection of rash and violent individuals with unwavering confidence in their convictions...

One soon realizes that just about everyone on Karvosti must constantly bite their tongue with regards to the many perceived injustices – some more serious than others. Suppressed, destructive feelings such as jealousy, suspicion, dislike, and pure hatred can be recognized on most faces – in the exchange of glares between wrathguards and sun knights; in the hand reaching for the hilt of a sword when a merchant refuses to haggle; in the whispers behind the backs of newly arrived members of a successful expedition; even in the growing silence as a loving couple sneak into their tent. An inquisitive person may be told lots of grisly stories about times when such feelings could not be subdued – often ending with the aggressive party being imprisoned, waiting to be judged by either the chieftain of their clan or the Queen's legate.

Other blemishes on the peaceful surface are the individuals suffering from physical and mental afflictions, something particularly apparent in the pilgrim camp. At night, the silence is often broken by anguished moans, hysterical screams, or mindless babble – like a ghastly chorale; the spiritually diseased sometimes incite each other and the

"Before the days of the High Chieftains, there lived a dragon on Karvosti, or... Well, some say it was a giant, others that it was a great bear, but I think it was a dragon... Aravax, it was called. Unbelieeevably powerful!"

Endo Evelin sparring with Alonar, a Zarekian wrathguard, in the shade of the fault scarp.

Philip Linden (Order #42324067)

physically afflicted cry out their suffering, thinking their wails to be drowned out by the screams, laughs and chants of the insane. A recently deceased Master of the Order, Eulia Vearra, described the phenomenon as *"the Karvosti Midnight Choir,"* a phrase more or less deliberately misinterpreted in Yndaros and made synonymous with the allegedly wild feasts of the barbarian folk.

Finally, there are the disappearances. After having arrived at the cliff, it will probably not be long before someone asks whether the traveler has met a certain person or two on the journey through the forest. It is difficult to estimate how many have disappeared, but rumors around the pilgrim camp and marketplace suggest the number to be at least a handful every moon. No one really knows the cause. It appears as if a majority of the lost ones were infected by some disease, and most likely threw themselves off the cliff, later to be dragged away by some hungering beast. There are also whispers claiming that the witches might have something to do with it, while others suspect that the ancient being Aloéna is responsible.

At any rate, one cannot fail to marvel at the fact that such a great number of people have managed to disappear without a trace from a place like Karvosti.

"The wrathguards are ancient, honestly! The ones patrolling the area now did the same five hundred years ago; the witches keep them alive, with their potions and witchcraft."

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Memorable Events

IT IS SAID that people were living on Karvosti long before Davokar took root and eventually swallowed the cliff. There are only a few recorded accounts from its early history, and the paintings and mosaics one sometimes finds can all be interpreted in many different ways. People interested in history are therefore referred to the songs and tales kept alive by the clans, or advised to limit themselves to the last five hundred years, when the High Chieftain's chroniclers have been more meticulous – if not systematic – in recording important people and happenings.

The events described below are tales which newcomers on Karvosti will soon come across; some are so widely spread that they are even told by bards and minstrels in the towns of Ambria. They all mention various dangers threatening the cliff, either from the depths of the forests or its own residents and visitors.

THE ELF PRINCE (ABOUT 400 YEARS AGO)

Elves are rarely seen on Karvosti. However, some years ago the aggressive autumn elf Terael-Kael convinced both himself and his minions that the Guard of the Slumbering Wrath was guilty of having mutilated a powerful spirit, Ranan the Bear Herder. A small force of elves ascended the cliff, sheltered by the nighttime darkness, without setting off the alarm. But as they reached the top, every last one of them was slaughtered by an assembly of wrathguards and templars, backed by Yeleta and her Keepers – none of whom would show the injudicious elves any mercy.

However, the infrequency of elven attacks on Karvosti is said not to be the product of fear or caution on their part, but of the legendary parley between High Chieftain Agadan, the Huldra Bovosin, and the elven prince Eneáno. According to myth, the prince arrived unaccompanied, dressed in simple wayfarer's attire, but glowing with an otherworldly light as he requested an audience with the High Chieftain and Huldra. Some stories claim that he stayed for an entire moon, others that it was just a few moments, and in the wildest of tales time itself was suspended during his visit – while everything proceeded as usual on the cliff, the outside world froze in the midst of an autumn storm, with lightning fixed in the sky and the clouds forming a dark, motionless ceiling.

Only those involved know what was said at the parley, but its consequences were obvious to all. The Huldra summoned the witches, and soon all taboos were revised and made even stricter. It is said that peace can only be preserved on Karvosti for as long as the High Chieftain and the Huldra fight to enforce the taboos – leading many to wonder how the current duo's tolerance of the Ambrians will be perceived by Eneáno and other powerful elves.

KARLABAN'S RETURN (ABOUT 200 YEARS AGO)

Karvosti is under constant threat from attacks by woodland creatures, as it has been since the first High Chieftain claimed the area as his domain. Nowadays, common predators have learned to avoid the cliff, although exceptionally harsh winters may compel desperate jakaars, mare cats, and fey beasts to make the attempt. While the attacks are less frequent, they are far more dangerous than they used to be – carried out by packs of blight-born monsters or even primal blight beasts, with no regard for anything but their own hunger and lust for destruction. Should such a foe get

The Law of Karvosti

The last stretch of the steep slope leading to the plateau passes between a mountain wall on its west side and a precipice on the east. The former is about the height of five men, while the path itself is blocked by a stone wall, ten paces thick, with a pair of double gates of iron-fitted oak. The gates are usually open, with three wrathguards posted in the gateway. Another eight sentries are located either along the edges of the ravine or on the crenellated top of the wall, cast in shadow by the statues of two wild boars towering over them.

The wrathguards on the ground proclaim, sometimes through an interpreter, that Karvosti is neutral ground. No creature is denied entrance, except those who are blight-marked or carry objects deemed dangerous to the other residents. Should there be any confusion on these issues, the witches are notified and one of them (usually the male witch Gadramon) comes down to inspect the person or object in question.

Those who pass this inspection are granted free movement on the plateau. Neither Tharaban nor the wrathguards are authorized to pass judgement on visitors who cause trouble or commit crimes – they are all to be judged by the laws of their respective ruler. However, the wrathguards may use force to maintain peace on the plateau and have the right to detain suspects until they can be extradited to (if not judged on site by) the appropriate authority. Allegedly, they are happy to exercise these rights whenever possible, and the vast prisons below the High Chieftain's stronghold are sometimes bursting with inmates.

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past the alarm system and reach the plateau, it could cause great devastation before being neutralized.

The incident that made High Chieftain Dormegor construct the alarm system of thin wires attached to eight bells is often referred to as Karlaban's Revenge. Dormegor's predecessor, High Chieftain Karlaban, was – for reasons unknown – corrupted by darkness, and fled to the woods as wrathguards and the Huldra Fulba came to arrest him. Two years later, the former high chieftain returned with a horde of predatory blight-born beasts. The abominations swarmed up the edges of the cliff, and with them came an impossibly strong and seemingly invulnerable Karlaban to reclaim his throne.

It is not entirely clear what eventually saved Dormegor and his people. According to some legends, the Huldra used a mighty artifact called the Hammer of Fulba, the Iron Flame, or the Witch Hammer; other tales state that the witches unleashed a creature previously held captive, or possibly living, in their caves – a creature of purest light that drove the abominations off and who sank its jaws into their leader. Whichever version one chooses to believe, the artifact or creature is said to remain somewhere deep below the surface of the plateau.

ALOÉNA'S CLAWS (ABOUT 90 YEARS AGO)

The uncrowned queen of the southern edge – the towering, horned she-giant called Aloéna – is rarely seen by anyone. But every two or three years she wanders the plateau, and everything stops. For many moons, people talk of nothing but her – what she looked like, in what direction she was headed, whether she was carrying anything, and to whom (if anyone at all) she paid attention. The latter is a particularly hot topic, as it is said that a look from Aloéna will cause a person to either suffer the worst misfortune imaginable or be blessed with extraordinary luck.

On one of Aloéna's strolls across the plateau, something happened that will not soon be forgotten. A crowd of speechless and paralyzed spectators watched her stop next to three people and pierce their throats with her long, sharp claws. These people – a young Karitian woman and two men of clans Zarek and Baiaga – died instantly. There was nothing to suggest a connection between the victims or that they had even met each other before their executions.

The witches have affirmed that they know nothing about Aloéna's motives, and since the executioner has not spoken of it, the mysterious incident is as incomprehensible as it is terrifying. For without knowing why this happened, it is of course impossible to predict if, or when, Aloéna will choose her next target.

"You know Aniabar, that bald man always sneaking around the plateau? He is a staff mage! He could wipe out anyone... anyone at all... with just a gaze."

List of High Chieftains and Huldras

Since the exact dates are uncertain, the High Chieftains and Huldras are simply listed chronologically, grouped by the century in which they reigned. Furthermore, these lists are not guaranteed to be exhaustive, as some individuals might have been forgotten.

Chieftain	Huldra
–500	
Serembar	Obala
Agadan	Ebrana
Odorog	Bovosin
	Ianbel
–400	
Avedon	Aroaleta
Maiesticar	Ygba
Ragradeon	Kthelba
Vogmar	
Boherg	
–300	
Kvahar	Odrel
Saaroan	Mareb
Gothomer	Yavoba
Kaar	Yagbal
	Soalem
–200	
Karlaban	Fulba
Dormegor	Maragba
Roel	Bagdal
Banthar	Areol
Darg	Unna
Ygval	
–100	
Omorman	Helabag
Saarathar	Boelba
Sotorek	Eaba
Faodan	Moal
Ergmer	Bahakal
Tharaban	Oryela
	Yeleta

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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 a hundred 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.

THARABAN'S CORONATION (YEAR 5)

Due to the nature of the position, the election of a high chieftain is usually quite an orderly affair. Certainly, there are often two or more candidates nominated by different clans, and disagreements between clan chieftains will occasionally put the pretenders to the test with a varying degree of violence. But with few exceptions, the elections rarely threaten the peace between the clans.

A particularly notorious exception was when Gorema, the vain and hot-blooded daughter of clan Yedesa's chieftain, lost the election in favor of Oroman. In an outburst of violent rage, Gorema slew her father and gathered her newly acquired warriors for an attack against their southern neighbors, the Baiags (Oroman's clan), before her own witch killed her with a spear-thrust in the back.

There are many varied descriptions of the High Chieftain, but one particular trait is always mentioned: solemnity.

Tharaban's election also caused great commotion. The northern clans favored another candidate, the Saar Iaholas, and when the new high chieftain was nearly assassinated not long after his coronation, many blamed the northerners. As the chieftains Razameaman, Rabaíamon, and Karona denied any involvement whatsoever, and since there was no proof as to who had fired the poisoned arrow, the situation eventually calmed down. There are still suspicions floating around, but perhaps it is true as many people say – that the attack was entirely Iaholas's doing.

THE KEEPER'S DEMISE (YEAR 9)

Thirteen years ago, four years after Tharaban's coronation, the current Huldra, Yeleta, arrived on Karvosti under turbulent circumstances.

It is widely known that Yeleta came to see Oryela, the Huldra at the time, and brought with her an artifact that had been found somewhere in Zarekian territory. People could hear screams and turmoil from the witches' dwelling; a fight that ended with the death of Deadorna – one of Oryela's Keepers and a very promising young witch. According to the shocked and wounded Huldra, Deadorna had turned into an abomination and been killed by Yeleta in self-defense.

It was widely speculated that Yeleta, who was immediately chosen to succeed the popular keeper, had in fact planned it all as a way of getting close to the Huldra. These speculations gained further credence a few moons later when Oryela too was killed, battling a vile pack of spiders that had managed to enter Karvosti through the Underworld.

Whatever the truth may be, the witches themselves pay these rumors little notice, as was made perfectly clear when they almost unanimously appointed Yeleta as the new Huldra. To be sure, Yeleta has done her part in silencing the skeptics; both the High Chieftain and most of his subjects consider her to be one of the most prominent Huldras in history.

THE AMBRIANS' ARRIVAL (YEAR 14)

In year 14 the first Ambrian explorers arrived on Karvosti. Back then, the Ambrians had not had much contact with the clanfolk, apart from their conquest of Kadizar and obliteration of clan Jezora. They received a bloody welcome – all members of the ten expeditions that arrived between year 14 and 16 were either executed or enslaved. Rumors of the stronghold on the cliff began to spread among the Ambrians and were finally confirmed when the Queen's people formed an alliance with the Odavs.

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The first Ambrian to ascend the cliff and return with her life was an anonymous explorer calling herself Sunflower – most likely a descendent of one of the noble families that were disgraced during the war. With the assistance of a docile Odav named Morak, she smuggled herself onto Karvosti and examined the High Chieftain's stronghold, the entrance to the witches' dwelling, and especially the temple ruin. It was Sunflower who informed the Church of Prios of the sun symbols carved into the ruin, which sparked both the Queen's and the First Father's interest in the deeper parts of the forest.

The missionaries who arrived in the early winter of year 16 were spared. The reason for this is unknown – perhaps their wish to visit and pray at the ruin was considered harmless by the two leaders of Karvosti; perhaps said leaders were afraid to anger the god of the newcomers. Either way, as soon as the snow began to thaw, the Curia proclaimed that Karvosti was to be incorporated into the Lawbringer's realm.

Sometimes even barbarians refer to Yeleta as the true ruler of Davokar.

THE BATTLE OF KARVOSTI (YEAR 16)

The spring rain fell serenely over the trees and evaporated into a damp morning fog as Commander Iakobo Vearra gave the order to attack. There had been no attempt at diplomacy, no request for the High Chieftain to surrender. No, the champions of the sun thought themselves superior in both arms and righteousness – the barbarians had defiled the cliff for long enough, and Prios demanded satisfaction!

Just as the morning sun burned through the somber clouds, engulfing the eastern slope in light, a hundred templars marched on Karvosti. Witnesses describe it as a massacre; the Curia prefers to emphasize the cowardice of the defenders and their alliances with dark forces. In any case, the sun knights were clearly both arrogant and misinformed – they died like flies as the Guard of the Slumbering Wrath launched its counterattack, firing projectiles from above and charging the aggressors on their way up the cliff.

After a swift retreat, the Ambrians made a second attempt, this time with a strategy better adjusted to the actual opposition. Priests and templars prayed for Prios's protection, but could never summon the strength to reach all the way to the plateau, perhaps because so many of them had already fallen in the first attack. There are indications that not a single wrathguard was slain, and while this information can hardly be accurate, there is no doubt whose gods were greater that day.

The Explorer's Haven

Karvosti is not a particularly large settlement, about nine hundred paces between its northern tip and the fault scarp, and only five hundred paces across. Nor is it heavily populated – taking into account the more permanent guests of the pilgrim camp, there are only a few hundred people living on the cliff. But despite its limitations, there is little Karvosti does not offer, especially if one includes the surrounding camps and outposts.

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Accommodation

FEW PEOPLE WOULD ever consider sleeping under the trees of Davokar if they had any other choice. The few worthwhile alternatives found on and around Karvosti are very expensive, and none can match the straw mattresses of inns such as *The Ruin* or the *Seamstress' Rest* in Thistle Hold. On the other hand, it usually does not take much to satisfy those who have spent some nights on the hard roots and rocks of the woodlands.

In addition to the pilgrim camp and the places mentioned below, there is a tent camp directly below the northern tip. There, all who are denied entry onto Karvosti are welcome; one could call it a miniature Blackmoor – but with a larger number of corrupted people and objects. Smaller predators such as mare cats and jakaars will usually leave the camp alone, making it relatively safe from outside threats. However, depending on who occupies the tents, it may well be as Iasogoi Brigo once wrote: *"Safer to sleep in a bog alone, than sojourn with a villainous crone."*

THE STRONGHOLD

The mighty stronghold of the High Chieftain is not only home to Tharaban and his family, but also to the Queen's legate and the entire Guard of the Slumbering Wrath – yet there is still plenty of room for invited or paying guests. The beds and kitchen are not available to just anyone. You must either be of noble birth, be well-connected among the Ambrian elite, or be able to spend a small fortune to enjoy such comforts.

Those who manage to procure a bed in the stronghold are lodged in a sparsely furnished chamber situated in one of the outer wings, where three meals a day are also served. A staff of four Odavs, supervised by the stern Mistress Brana, act as servants and guards, ordered to prevent the guests from entering other parts of the stronghold. It is said that the master thief Doriano Dresel ended his days in Brana's grip, after she caught him trying to use the guest room as a base for his planned break-in into the High Chieftain's cellar vault.

THE VICTORIOUS HAWK

The only proper inn in the region can be found behind the palisade surrounding House Vearra's trading post, about an hour's walk east of Karvosti. Named after the Vearra sigil, the diving hawk, the inn is mainly intended for Ambrian merchants wishing to trade with the clans. Staying at the *Victorious Hawk* is certainly not cheap, but you do get what you pay for – it is a new and lavish establishment, and cook Erella was taught by the great Elindra Aroma herself.

The outpost and the ten buildings within its palisade were raised only a year ago, with the permission of Chieftain Embersind of Clan Odaiova. Several prominent family members – including Count Demetro and his niece Lesena – have contributed finances towards the enterprise, hoping that it will give House Vearra an advantage on the battlefields of both trade and exploration.

The question is, for how long will the palisade and the outpost's bailiff, young Lenela Vearra, be able to stand their ground when beasts, elves, rage trolls, or some rival House decide to undo all they have achieved?

THE CAVE

Those who are not able or willing to enter the plateau, and would pay to avoid the tent camp by the northern tip, can head for the west side of Karvosti. About fifty feet up the rock face are some caves of varying sizes and comfort (though the word "comfort" may be misplaced in this context). They have long been utilized by travelers in the area, but four years ago, the aged – or at least ragged – ogre trio Gruff, Lugger, and Swinga decided to occupy them.

For a fee, the seasoned warriors will provide a place to sleep and keep watch in the night, so their guests

PRICE OF ACCOMMODATIONS ON AND NEAR KARVOSTI

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

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may rest safely. They also offer two bowls of porridge a day – the evening meal often accompanied by Swinga's lengthy accounts of their many adventures in Davokar (for example how they supposedly joined Gorakai the Younger on his trip to the Clearwater ruins). The only reason not to guest at *The Cave* would be the rumors stating that many fortune hunters have been found robbed and killed shortly after their stay. Of course, it might be nothing more than a malicious rumor or a series of unfortunate coincidences.

"Well, just avoid becoming as obsessed as Elmendra the Senseless, and going crazy trying to find Symbar. Hunting for treasure is honorable work, but just that: work. Keep the unreachable out of your head."

The Tent Camp Massacre

Whether one spends the night on the cliff or by its foot, it will probably not be long before one hears the gruesome story recounting the night when the entire camp below the northern tip of Karvosti was wiped out. There is dispute as to who exactly orchestrated the bloodbath – many blame vengeful, man-eating elves; others assert it was raging abominations or some undead lord looking for objects stolen from his crypt.

Regardless, there were plenty of witnesses able to describe what the butcher left behind: fifty torn bodies, shredded canvas and gear, and a ground soaked in blood.

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Food & Drink

FOR PEOPLE SEEKING culinary experiences, Karvosti is most definitely a poor choice of destination. In the forest of Davokar, one eats and drinks to survive – not to tickle taste buds or cultivate palettes! Of course, exceptions are made during certain holidays and festivals. And there are certainly some people who by sheer accident just happen to cook good, or at least interesting, food without even trying.

As to beverages, the most common ones are the deliciously fresh forest water and the nourishing Vesa (a mix of cow's milk and goat whey, served cold or warm). Though popular among Ambrians, Blackbrew is only consumed on special occasions, and excessive drinking is generally frowned upon. Exempted from this moral rule are the elderly and those who have suffered spiritual or physical trauma, to whom intoxication provides some much-needed relief. The rest stay sober, ready to fight the next pack of beasts or rage trolls attacking the settlement.

SALVIA'S KEBROGS

The fortune hunter Salvia is one of those who have retreated up Karvosti and never again dared return to the deep woods. She arrived about a year ago, clawed to bits and thoroughly exhausted, without hope or courage, crying over her fallen friends. Yet, within the span of a moon she had pulled herself together and started selling herbal kebrogs – a dish from eastern Alberetor, consisting of pastries filled with meat and vegetables.

Salvia is not rude, but avoids eye contact and rarely makes conversations with her customers. This shyness, combined with the mystery of her last trip into Davokar, has brought her many admirers – those wishing to protect her from the dangers of the world and especially from other admirers. Sometimes brawls break out between guests on the plateau, as they accuse each other of having bothered or intimidated Salvia, but the situation is usually settled by other visitors or the wrathguards.

- Herbal kebrog, 1 shilling
- Lamb kebrog, 2 shillings
- Fortune Hunter's kebrog*, 1 thaler
- Cup of Blackbrew, 1 shilling
- Mug of wine, 5 shillings

* Extra-large kebrog for the extra hungry, filled with meat, onions, and roka berries

LAKE GREAT WATER

Not far from Karvosti are a handful of different settlements – two barbarian camps, the goblin tribe Braddokkugru, and the free settlement of Jakaar. Every one of them has their own traditional cuisine, and people with culinary interests would surely enjoy visiting them all – the shell-cooked turtle in Jakaar and the Bradokk's elver-stuffed long-eel are not just exotic, they may even be perceived as tasty. But the thing one should make sure not to miss is visiting the Baiaga settlement by Lake Great Water.

All present clan members join each other for the evening meal, which is roasted over an open fire down by the lake. Huberol, the exceptionally skilled master of the grill, keeps whatever the hunters have caught in a chilly root cellar, where the meat hangs for a couple of days before it is seasoned, coated with oil, and roasted over the fire.

For 3 shillings (in coin or items/services of equal value), guests are welcome to join the feast and may of course also help themselves to the barrels of Softbrew.

BELUGO'S ROE WAGON

Once every two weeks, from early spring to late in the fall, the fisherman Belugo has the jolly mule Beata pull his simple cart up to the plateau. With him, he brings seafood from the free settlement of Jakaar – fresh and salted fish, crayfish, and other crustaceans. But what the mysterious monger is best known for, and which makes crowds gather once the wagon is parked at the Thingstead, is his expertly prepared and seasoned roe, harvested from the lakes bottom-crawling sturgeons.

The reason why Belugo comes off as mysterious is not only due to his taciturn and somewhat shy demeanor. He is also rumored to be on the run, probably from someone influential. It is said that there have been two attempts on his life during his visits on Karvosti. On both occasions he had to slay the attackers in self-defense, aptly wielding his cleaver and rolling pin, meaning they could never be questioned. Thus, who has it in for him remains a mystery; one that Belugo himself will not discuss.

- Long-baked pike w. onions, 1 shilling
- Long bread w. spicy fishpaste, 2 shillings
- Bread roll w. seabass & vegetables, 2 shillings
- Bread roll w. crayfish & turnip puree, 4 shillings
- Roe on rye bread, 1 thaler

Crueljaw at the Longhouse

One of the regulars at the *Longhouse* is an ogre called Crueljaw, who about six months ago set up a permanent monster-hunter's shop at the marketplace (see page 42). The burly merchant generates a large part of the establishment's revenue, but has an unfortunate tendency to bother other guests. Not that he is a troublemaker! Quite the opposite. No matter how much Blackbrew is poured down the ogre's gob, he only grows more sentimental, more cuddlesome, and more eager to tell someone his life's story – preferably one-on-one, eyeball to eyeball, so the listener is sure to fully understand the immense sadness of his tragic fate.

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Entertainment

NO ONE COMES to Karvosti to be entertained. That being said, it is not uncommon for people to remain there for long periods of time, perhaps waiting for a companion's wounds to heal. And sooner or later, anyone will tire of just sitting around and sharpening swords.

Many stories are told around the pilgrim camp and marketplace – everyone has at least one spine-tingling tale to tell from their travels in Davokar, and visiting barbarians will happily speak about the plains and woods of their faraway land. Another popular pastime is watching the wrathguards and templars hone their fighting skills, especially when they agree to face each other in bloodless, but definitely violent, combat. Guests may also participate in these exercises, provided that they have something to offer in the form of weapons technique or tactical maneuvers.

GAMES AT THE PILGRIM CAMP

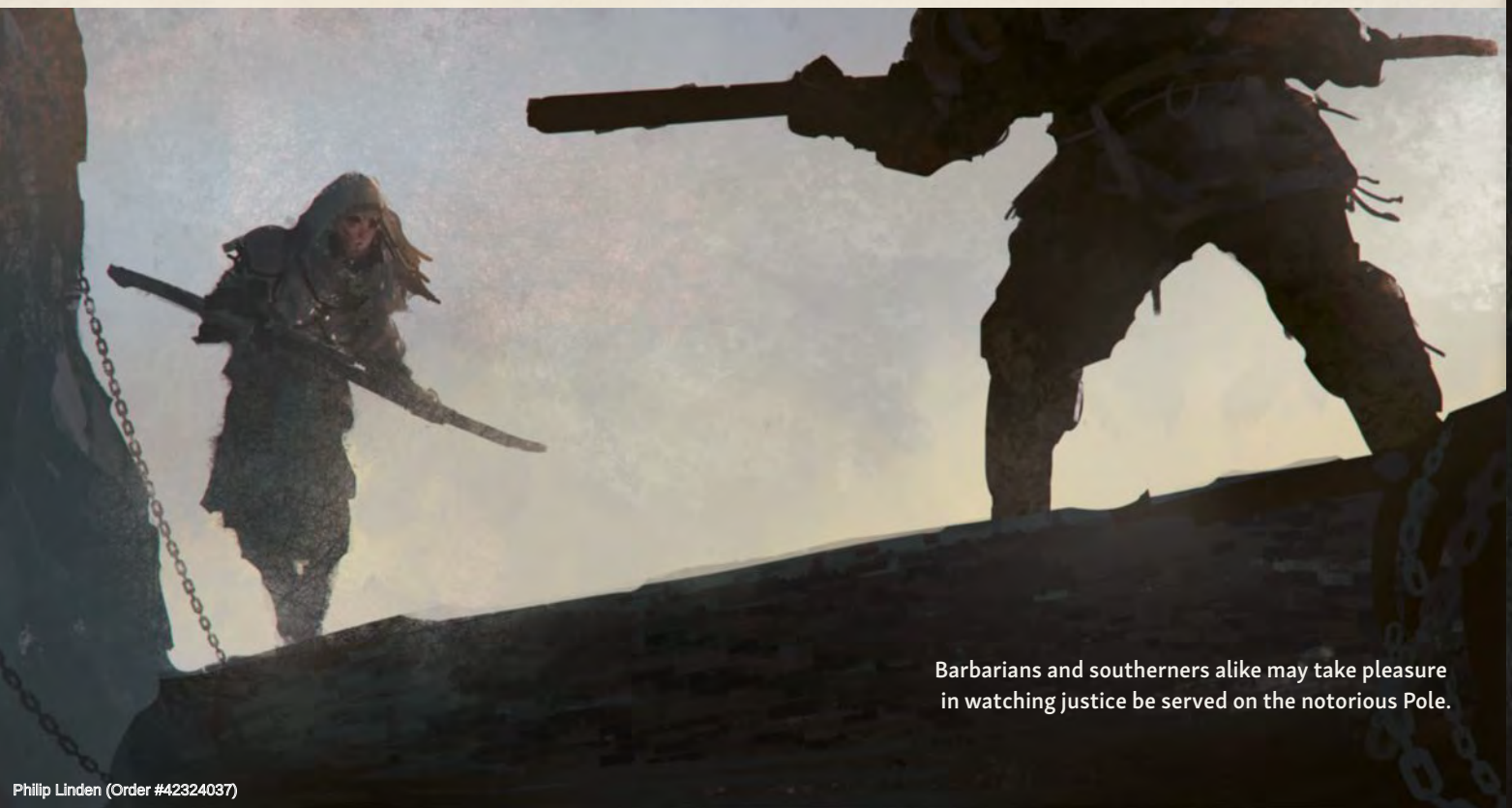
On Karvosti, the average guest spends their waking hours eating, telling stories, and playing games – often all three at once. People play cards, dice, and board games; they compete in arm wrestling contests and duel each other to the first drop of blood or bruise. However, one must be careful not to end up like the fortune hunters Levana and Leda. While Leda was recovering from a bad case of swamp fever, her sister Levana squandered all their hard-earned riches on dice. Although blood may be thicker than water, it makes little difference when it flows on the ground – a lesson Levana did not live to appreciate.

As its bored visitors have a reputation for being easy targets, the cliff sometimes attracts professional gamblers. These masters never stay for long, but often leave with a small fortune in their packs. They say that Mogio Garakel, the unscrupulous card-jakaar, could live like an emperor in Yndaros for years after having ruined Levana and two other fortune hunters during his two days on Karvosti.

MIRJA'S KULOKK

One of a few permanent residents living by the Thingstead is Mirja. It is clear to all that the elderly woman carries a heavy burden, likely a deep sorrow, but she is difficult to befriend and is never heard talking about her past. What is clear though, is that she comes from one of the northern clans, that she has not left the plateau in over ten years, and that she has a marvelous, almost magical, singing voice.

Not that she would willfully give a concert. But even if she rarely speaks, or perhaps for that specific reason, whatever baggage she carries tends to overwhelm her at times, making her burst into singing. And not just any form of singing, but in a high-pitched, emotional, melancholy, and melodic tradition known as Kulokk among clanfolk. It is said that the technique was once gifted to singular members of the northern clans by trolls, and that masters of this style can use their voice to commune with animals and beasts, maybe even abominations – calm, call on, scare, or even control them. True or not, at least once a week, often after nightfall, Mirja's clear voice can be heard through the walls and shutters of her little shack; when it does, people from all over the plateau gather around just to listen, in complete silence, as not to disturb Old Mirja in her sorrow.



Barbarians and southerners alike may take pleasure in watching justice be served on the notorious Pole.

Philip Linden (Order #42324037)

"Oh, the witches this and the witches that! The real treasures and secrets are kept below the stronghold. The High Chieftain has more gold than troll-mother Vouax, that I can promise you!"

THE MIGHT FIGHT

At every full and new moon, there is an athletic tournament taking place at clan Odaiova's settlement by the Arch Bridge. The tournament has a long history and is meant to test the contestants' abilities in various ways. It is a highly prestigious competition and has always attracted challengers from Gaoia in the north to Karohar in the south, and nowadays even from Ambria. Soldiers and gladiators would love to add such a great victory to their list of accomplishments:

The tournament is comprised of five events:

- **Precision:** Five javelins are thrown at a target with colored scoring rings. (Each competitor must make a series of **thrown weapon attacks** at the target, which is AC 15. Each competitor is judged on how many of the five pitches are successful.)
- **Strength:** A large and heavy rock is lifted from the ground as many times as possible, with back and legs kept straight. (This requires a series of **Strength [Athletic] checks**. The DC begins at 10 and increases by 1 after each attempt. A competitor that fails a check counts their number of successes as their score.)
- **Stamina:** Contestants must swim as far as they can against the strong currents of the Malgomor. (After each round a competitor must make a **Constitution saving throw** or gain a level of exhaustion. At level 5 the competitor must end their swim and is judged on how far they swam.)
- **Perception:** Contestants compete to locate the highest number of twenty-three objects hidden in varied parts of the forest. (Each object is more cleverly hidden than the last and requires a successful **Wisdom [Perception] check** to locate. The DC begins at 5 and increases by 1 each time. Each competitor is judged on how many objects they located.)
- **Speed:** The six most successful challengers so far must repeatedly run the same, short distance; the last to finish each race is eliminated, until only the victor remains. (The competitor must make a **Strength [Athletics] check**; roll 1d20 + 2d6 for each other challenger. The character with the highest total is the winner of that race. Repeat the process until you have a victor.)

Trade

SHOPS AND STORES like the ones found in Ambria do not exist on the High Chieftain's cliff. Still, those in need of various items, gear, and supplies are not likely to be disappointed. There are always a handful of wagons parked around the marketplace, most of them owned by traders from clan Odaiova, or even the southern plains, who have come to peddle their goods.

Bartering is a common practice on Karvosti. Fortune hunters may well use their finds as currency when trading with merchants or each other; in fact, many Ambrian merchants go there explicitly to trade cheaply acquired necessities for exotic crafts and curiosities. Needless to say, this has a way of aggravating customers, and said merchants do well to keep bodyguards nearby – at least if they have the nerve to demand exquisite antiques in exchange for a single (though much-desired) bottle of Ambrian stut.

THE FORGE

In the west wing of the stronghold, where the Guard of the Slumbering Wrath has its quarters, the barbarian blacksmith Jorlamar and his aides are hard at work. In addition to forging and repairing the wrathguards' battle gear, Jorlamar offers similar services to paying customers, with the High Chieftain's blessing. Due to the lack of competition and, in equal measure, his tremendous sense of self-worth, the blacksmith's wares are 20% more expensive than normal.

Many stories are told about old Jorlamar. Everyone agrees that his weapons and armor are of the highest quality, but as to where he first learned his craft, and what influenced the rough, yet beautiful patterns he engraves into his masterful work, there is little consensus. Jorlamar himself will not comment on the rumors of him having been taught by elves, trolls, or even the frost ghouls of the Ravens.

CRUELJAW'S TRAPS

When Crueljaw, the aged ogre, finally had to retire because of his bad knees, he chose to settle down on Karvosti. It would surely have been impossible for him to stay there, had the former monster hunter not – on at least two famous occasions – helped the barbarian High Chieftain hunt down and destroy some particularly dangerous beasts, one of which was the blight-marked aboar who attacked Tharaban's eldest son, causing him permanent injury.

Crueljaw has established a shop at the marketplace, where he sells various tools and weapons related to monster hunting.

"That hammer the witches keep hidden somewhere, imagine if you had it – you could squash every abomination in Davokar. Why Queen Korinthia has not demanded that they hand it over is beyond me."

Philip Linden (Order #42324067)

"Salvia is actually married, to an elven prince! But he mistreated her, so she had to leave, even though she loved him. Tragic, so very tragic..."

The big-jawed, one-eyed ogre is always cheerful, and can spend hours listening to his customers' grandstanding stories, until he has a bit of Blackbrew or Ambrian stut. Then he is the one doing the talking. And often also the weeping.

VEARRA'S OUTPOST

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

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

Whether he is bellowing or blubbering, Crueljaw's name is certainly justified.

VEARRA'S OUTPOST

1. The Victorious Hawk
2. Stables
3. Orola's warehouse
4. Storage
5. Lenela's house
6. Guard's barracks

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Knowledge & Information

ONE OF THE staples of both the explorer's and treasure hunter's professions is doing research and gathering information. However, in Davokar one soon learns that all information is subject to interpretation – something easily forgotten in Ambria, where authorities such as Ordo Magica and the Sun Church often present their particular interpretations and conclusions as "truth" or "facts."

In the deep woods, one almost inevitably ends up seeking information in many different places, adding all the pieces together and drawing one's own conclusions. The available knowledge seldom appears in the form of writing, but rather as stories and images – sources that mean very little until one knows who made them and something about the circumstances leading up to their creation.

THE CHRONICLER'S ARCHIVES

For an outsider to be allowed to enter the archives in the stronghold, the circumstances must be very special indeed. Besides, if one is to believe the few people who claim to have actually seen them, the term "archives" is somewhat misleading. Rather, they are a series of underground vaults, full of stone tablets, embroidered textiles, parchment scrolls, and various objects deemed to hold historical significance.

The rumors of what exactly is down there are many, most of them absolutely hair-raising. They speak of the Symbarian Emperor Merébaron's statute book, written on (and bound in) the skin of human offenders; troll-mother Vouax's legendary, doom-brewing cauldron; ancient mechanisms salvaged from the stone ships resting on the shores of the Eastern Sea; and things even more fantastic. Whether or not these rumors are true, there is no doubt that whoever is granted unrestricted access to the vaults will make some astounding discoveries...

Lumedo the Interpreter

Cranky old Lumedo who for the last four years has served as the wrathguards' interpreter, is something of an enigma. Every morning he saunters down to the wall, and then returns to his stronghold chambers by sundown, ready to work nights as well if his services are needed. No one knows who he is or why he resides on Karvosti, as he keeps his mouth shut whenever he is not working. There is no doubt that Lumedo knows a tremendous amount about everyone who visits or has previously visited the cliff – but since his peevishness is only matched by his pride, extracting this information from him is virtually impossible. On the other hand, should it be necessary, there are of course both mystical spells and methods of violence that just might loosen his tongue...

OLD MARGANDA

The pilgrim camp is still home to Marganda – one of the first three missionaries to pray by the temple ruin on Karvosti. She was already old back then, and time has not been kind to her hearing, eyesight, teeth, or mind. But if you have questions regarding the Sun Temple, the Ambrians' time on Karvosti, or events which have transpired on the cliff since her arrival, it will only take a hot meal for her to start talking.

According to Marganda, she has remained on Karvosti due to a combination of laziness and age-related frailty, but the content of her absentminded ramblings has led many to suspect that she may in fact have ulterior motives for staying on the cliff. Some say she found something in the ruin, something that scared her, but which was glossed over (or at any rate ignored) by the Sun Church; others claim that she, for reasons unknown, has developed a profound hatred for Prios and his representatives. When asked about it, Marganda simply snorts in response.

LERULG THE SHAMAN

Lerulg, the shaman of the Braddokkugru tribe, is not versed in either the Ambrian or barbarian tongues, but she is said to possess great wisdom and deep knowledge about the region surrounding Karvosti. In order to gain an audience with her, one must either have noble intentions (that is, aim to do something beneficial for the tribe or Davokar) or manage to catch a specimen of the mudskipping Bottom Eel – a type of oily fish that lurks on the murky bottom of Lake Volgoma and happens to be Lerulg's favorite food.

There are also many stories about fortune hunters who, in exchange for information, agreed to perform certain tasks on the goblin tribe's behalf – such as hunting down some monster with an appetite for goblin flesh, or carrying out attacks against their arch enemies, the clan Odaiova or the Gurrmurrlg tribe. It may sound extreme, but in Davokar fortune hunters often have no choice but to do whatever is required to obtain the information they so desperately desire.

"The girl who died last week, that newcomer from the north... They say she was jabbering something about the Emperors of Symbaroum having returned, that they had sworn to destroy the world. Creepy."

Philip Linden (Order #42324067)

"The last Baiag chieftain was murdered, you know that right? Well, now they know who did it: Tharama, the tracker, who many would like to see as the new chieftain."

Authorities

IT IS PERFECTLY obvious to everyone that Karvosti is the High Chieftain's cliff, and that the Huldra also has legitimate reasons to call it hers. Although neither of them have, nor want, the lawful right to pass judgement on barbarian or Ambrian offenders – it is the extended arm of said leaders, the wrathguards, who uphold law and order – they are completely authorized to remove visitors from the plateau and detain whoever disturbs the peace in any way. Apparently, the High Chieftain may also banish people from Karvosti, although he only exerts this right in exceptional cases, like when a clan chieftain fails to punish someone who is clearly guilty of a serious offense.

However, Tharaban and Yeleta are not the only powerful figures on Karvosti. Even if they cannot act independently of the formal authorities, there are others who hold a great deal of influence on what does, and does not, happen on the plateau – Lothar Grendel and the Captain of the Wrath Guard, Farvan, are mentioned in the *Gamemaster's Guide*, and three others are introduced below. Such people can probably put some pressure on the High Chieftain, as he is required to maintain good relations with the factions they represent. To be sure, there are political tensions on Karvosti; it is always best to treat people with a soft hand, though sometimes combined with a pair of shiny brass knuckles ...

FATHER PIROMEI

It could be argued that Father Piromei Lethona, theurg and inquisitor, is unfit to be head of Karvosti's sun temple. His fanaticism and immense love for Prios is certainly an asset in many respects, but the very same traits often have a way of exacerbating tensions between the church and other authorities on Karvosti. Moreover, his unpleasant appearance is repellant enough to make both Ambrians and barbarians recoil whenever he comes near – he is tall as an ogre, with the jaw of a troll, hair as white and wild as his beard, and small, deep-set, pitch-black eyes.

Generally speaking, radical tendencies have a way of mellowing with time, but if it is true what they say about Father Piromei, this does not apply to him. His views have only grown more extreme, and he does not refrain from weaving provocative insinuations into his fiery sermons – insinuations about the witches being in league with the evils of Davokar and the barbarians carrying a latent darkness inside, one that will surely bloom if not properly subdued by whip and cane.

Lothar does not look much like the noble he is, something many attribute to him being a bachelor.

EMON GARLAKA

He is not a popular man, Emon Garlaka. Even though he is one-eyed, crooked, and in such a decrepit state that he cannot walk more than ten steps before losing his breath, his mere presence is enough to make people uneasy. It is the piercing, dark gaze from his remaining eye, shaded by a scared brow, lined with grim wrinkles. And his voice, which is still as thunderous as it was when he led the Queen's forces in war against the Dark Lords.

Most people on Karvosti assume that Emon Garlaka is Ambria's true envoy on the cliff, and that Lothar Grendel is nothing but a front to facilitate dealings with the High Chieftain and other clanfolk. But there are other rumors of a more ominous nature, trying to explain why such a decorated war hero has been positioned so far away from the Ambrian halls of power. The wildest speculation says that he was captured and charmed by the enemy during The Great War, and that he studied blood magic directly under the Dark Lord himself before being rescued and passably rehabilitated. Others claim that Emon actually died in captivity, and that what was "rescued" was in fact an imposter – one of the Dark Lord's Apostles, or even one of the Judges.

EDRAFIN

Another one-eyed and not very popular authority-figure is the informal Mayor of the pilgrim camp, Edrafin. He came to the plateau four years ago, and quickly befriended the current spokesperson of the camp's residents, the pensioned

"That goblin tribe out west, Brado... Baradou... Br... Oh, you know, the goblins! Anyhow, they are cannibals. Well, not cannibals – man-eaters!"

Philip Linden (Order #6334067)

Edrafin, unofficial leader of the pilgrim camp, is usually the first person newcomers encounter on the plateau.

Many describe Alisabeta as the sun knights' most zealous warrior, when she is so inclined...

wilderness guide Ionna. When she died two years later, Edrafin stepped up, and has been even more zealous in trying to help newcomers, mediate in conflicts, and speak up in the interests of both visiting explorers and actual pilgrims. Not that he does any of this for the good of his heart; after the first few freebees, he uses his position shamelessly to earn thaler (or tradable items) in exchange for information and services provided.

Returning visitors know this about him and have learned to look past his welcoming and servile approach. The fact that they still need his help from time to time, is probably a main reason behind all the rumors circling about Edrafin's "true nature." According to one story, he greedily killed all other members of his last expedition four years ago, only to find them rise as vengeful undead – this explains why he has not left Karvosti since then. Another widespread rumor has to do with the death of Ionna. That she fell over the edge of the cliff is an established fact, but was this really due to sleepwalking or a broken heart, or was it because someone gave her a push?

Alisabeta's Exploits

Among the Ambrian people, The Knights of the Dying Sun are probably the warriors most associated with the triumph over darkness. A striking number of paintings in the Legacy Gallery in Yndaros portray templars battling the advancing hordes of the Dark Lords; when children play war games it is sun knights who eventually come to save the day; and there are hundreds of ballads and sonnets about lone templars fighting against overwhelming resistance. But there are also more recent tales describing the knights' heroic feats, and many of them feature Alisabeta Vearra.

One song, composed by the acclaimed sun bard Danio, has become particularly popular among the Queen's people: the Ballad of the Sun Princess and the Blood Dancer. The story is about Alisabeta's hunt for an abomination that had long terrorized the countryside south of Mergile. She found the beast – a great ram with curved horns which (according to the bards) had been reshaped into three-feet-long tusks sharper than swords – in a valley, where they fought for eight days and seven nights, before the "Sun Princess" finally struck a killing blow.

One does not hear quite as much about the many brutal attacks launched by Alisabeta and her brother against free settlements throughout the border regions of Ambria. However, within the Church she is just as famous for punishing human heretics as she is for her relentless fight against the forces of darkness, and many assume that she will one day put an end to Father Sarvola and his followers.

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Clan Lands

People traveling between Thistle Hold and Karvosti are, sooner or later, bound to come across members of clan Odaiova. Having done so, they are sure to hear stories about clan Baiaga and their settlement near Lake Great Water. These are two very different barbarian cultures, and together they (supposedly) present a good example of how the woodland folk live and operate.

Odaiova

CLAN ODAIOVA CLAIMS to be the largest clan in Davokar in terms of population, which would also be in accordance with Ordo Magica's estimates. The more than fifty thousand Odavs have always valued spirituality and culture as highly as the art of war, which is why they throughout history have often subjugated themselves to clans with a greater capacity for violence. Chieftain Haloban was the most recent warlord to protect and exploit Odaiova's lands and people, until Queen Korinthia's troops obliterated both his fortress and clan. Ever since, Odaiova has slowly come to accept and conform to the Ambrian presence – a change that would not have been possible without the diplomatic brilliance of Chieftain Embersind, but which also has caused serious divisions among his subjects.

HISTORY

Like all barbarians, the Odavs are a proud people, but they have always seen greater honor in cleverness and cunning than in brute force. According to legend, the Odavs come from a region that was relatively autonomous from the emperors of Symbaroum, a status they maintained through diplomacy and political scheming rather than by resorting to violence. The clan's original ancestor, Odamagála, was allegedly both physically and spiritually enormous – an ideal for all Odavs to this day, regardless of gender and social standing.

The Odav's ancestor, Odamagála, is often depicted as a luscious woman.

After Haloban's defeat there were many rumors, from within and without the clan, saying that the Odavs helped coordinate Queen Korinthia's attack on the Jezite stronghold. However, such speculations are refuted by the fact that Odaiova and Ambrian explorers and colonists waged total war on each other until year 14, when Lasifor Nightpitch and the witch Eferneya came up with a plan which made both sides lay down their arms. A great deal has changed since that day – much too quickly, and in the wrong way, according to some of Embersind's subjects.

The first step to ensure lasting peace was the establishment of trade relations – Ambrian knowledge, technology, everyday objects, and silver thalers poured into Davokar, and from the woods came timber, pelts, herbs, and handicrafts. Further progress was made after the Battle of Karvosti in year 16, when the Queen and the Chieftain of Odaiova signed a treaty granting Ambrians safe conduct on the route between Thistle Hold and the cliff. A year later the treaty was expanded, allowing Ambrian soldiers to patrol the route, in exchange for their assistance in fighting any rebellious tendencies within the clan, thereby reducing the risk of full-scale civil war.

A final major development was Chieftain Embersind's decision to move the clan's main settlement from the shores of River Eanor to their new home by the Arch Bridge. The official story was that Embersind returned his people to the place where Odamagála once founded the clan, but the actual reasons for doing so were probably to get closer to Karvosti and position the settlement on the road between the cliff and Thistle Hold.

SETTLEMENTS

Clan Odaiova currently has two major settlements and another ten or so small villages. They are all predominantly comprised of longhouses, with mortared stone walls and wooden joists and roofs, the latter often sealed and covered with moss. Most of these houses are built in two sections – one for the residents and the other for pets and livestock (domesticated hogs, goats, and sometimes workhorses).

Odama

The clan's oldest settlement is found on the northern shore of the River Eanor, about a day's march east of the road between Thistle Hold and Karvosti. It is completely dominated by the three-hundred-and-fifty-year-old Odama Citadel – a five-story fortress, surrounded by a wall of birch stakes erected on a massive rock base. There is a lower wall

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encircling the settlement, and though it is not high enough to hold back all woodland monstrosities it does give the defenders a much-needed advantage. All trees outside the wall, as well as south of the river, have been cut down to make room for crops – mostly turnips and root vegetables, but also a variety of utility plants and herbs. The jewel of the region is the so called All-Tree growing in the settlement's center. The berry bush was supposedly planted on top of Odamagála's tomb many centuries ago, and according to legend, its dark yellow fruit brims with her ancestral power.

The Arch Bridge

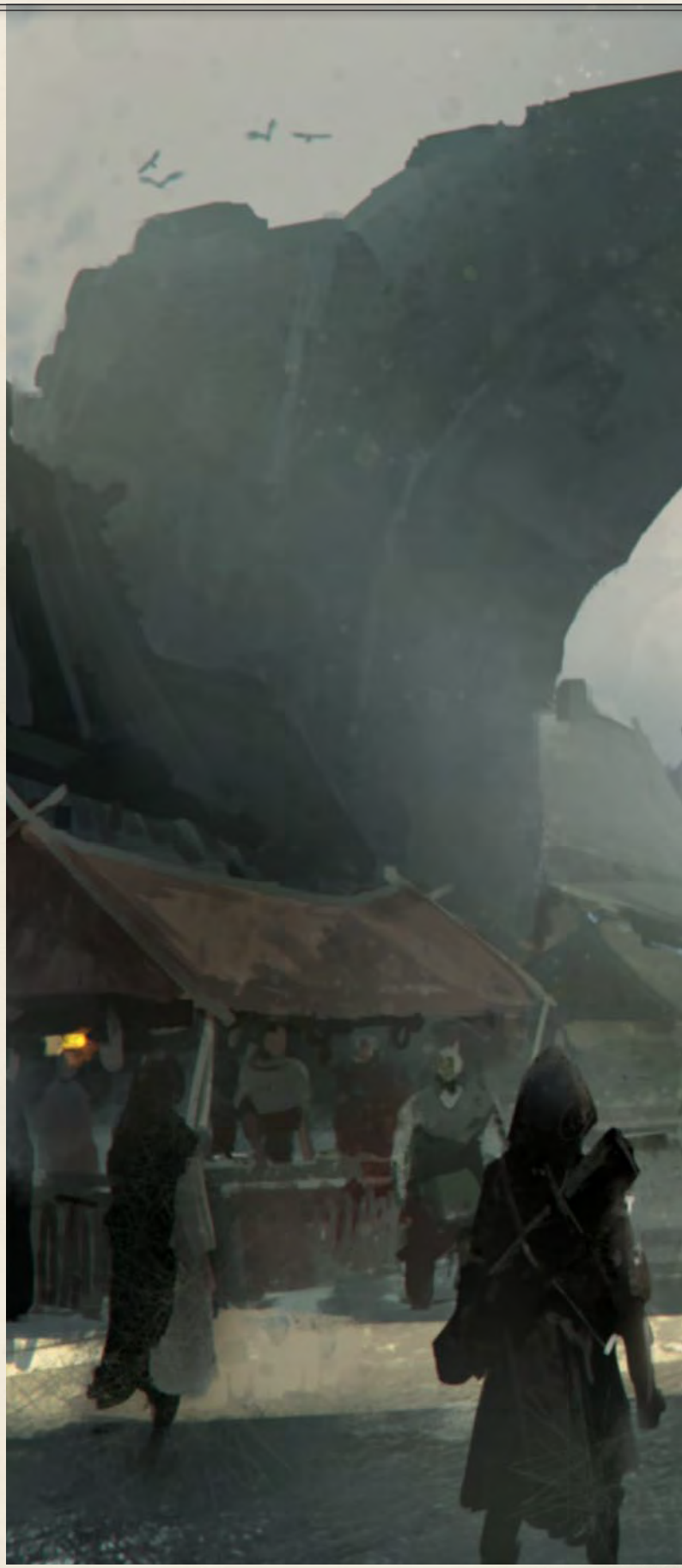
Chieftain Embersind's new stronghold is located on the Malgomor's southern shore, built around the ancient Arch Bridge which, in Symbarian times, stretched across the river. Since then, the riverbed has moved a few hundred feet to the north, but the bridge itself remains where it has always been. It is almost two hundred paces long, supported by massive stone pedestals sunk deep into rocks and dirt. The houses near the bridge, and the marketplace located beneath it, were built in the traditional stone and wood fashion, with one notable exception: the Chieftain's stronghold. The all but completed structure was designed and built by Master Aspelo, the Royal Architect of Ambria, who borrowed techniques and styles from the great palaces of his homeland and embellished his creation with details from both barbarian and Symbarian architecture. When finished, the fortress is supposed to be impossible to penetrate without razing the wall or breaking through the gates, as demanded by the ever more paranoid and incredibly wealthy chieftain.

KNOWN CONFLICTS

The Odavs should be grateful for everything their current chieftain has accomplished; it is an irrefutable fact that the alliance with Ambria has significantly improved the lives of most clan members, even if no one has benefited from it more than Embersind himself. And indeed, a majority of Odavs have come to accept, or even embrace, this new era. But there are some who have not...

The Rebels

There are at least two rebel factions operating in Odaiova. They are seen as bandits and rogues by both Ambrians and other Odavs, and very little is known about their numbers, how coordinated they are, and what they wish to achieve. One of those notorious groups is led by the witch Serbaga, also known as the Robber Crone, and the other by Embramer – Embersind's own nephew. These raiders move around the vast area called Odovakar, attacking Ambrian caravans and settlements along the borders of the forest. Though the Chieftain denies it, most people are convinced that either Serbaga or Embramer was behind last year's two attempts to assassinate Embersind in his stronghold on the shore of River Eanor.



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Market day beneath the Arch Bridge; an event which nowadays attracts an equal number of Ambrian and barbarian merchants.

Philip Linden (Order #42324087)

"Do you know why the Ambrians have not conquered Karvosti yet? No? Well, I do: the High Chieftain has been replaced by one of the Queen's cousins. Honestly! It is the only reasonable explanation, right!?"

Trade

The increased trade has also resulted in people losing some of their communal loyalty in favor of smaller, more immediate groups such as family, relatives, or colleagues. Everyone wants a share of the Ambrian wealth – hunters have, for example, started to compete with each other over who can offer the finest pelts at the lowest prices, which sometimes leads to quarrels or even violent clashes.

Lineages

Lastly, one must mention the age-old conflict between the clan's principal lineages. To the Odavs, transcendental entities like Uron, Oroke and Eox are not Gods to worship, but spirits to learn from and communicate with. Instead, they revere their three original ancestors – nearly two thirds of the population adhere to Odamagála, while Yesalom and Embayal are embraced by a fifth each. Put simply, in order to clarify the nature of these conflicts, Odamagála is said to have been a peaceful and pragmatic woman, always striving for cultural and technological refinement, whereas Yesalom advocated a materially simple life devoted to spiritual growth, and Embayal urged the Odavs to conquer the woods through military force and seek dominion over all of Davokar.

There is obviously much overlap between these conflicts – Serbaga claims to be a descendant of Yesalom, and many of the smaller groups fighting for the attention of Ambrian merchants are more or less linked to the aforementioned lineages. However, it appears that the Ambrian presence in the region has had a mitigating effect on the historical animosity within the clan. For example, some of Embayal's descendants make a good living by guarding storehouses and transports belonging to an Odamagálian family, and similar collaborations are becoming more and more common.

PROMINENT ODAVS

As in all barbarian clans, the Keeper of Odaiova is highly regarded and has considerable influence over the Chieftain's actions. Embersind's witch is called Lobaya, and is old enough to have kept her position under three Huldras, Yeleta included. She openly states that, had she only been younger and seen any hope for the future of the clan and humanity itself, she would object to much that has happened in the last decade. But, being neither young nor hopeful, she obliges her chieftain as best she can while grumbling about the good old days – sometimes adding comments like *"that Robber Crone woman sure has grit, and some wit to add..."*

The leader of the Chieftain's guard is a woman named Yoroun. Despite being descended from Embayal, she seems to be unswervingly loyal to Embersind and allegedly supported him against the much older and deeply critical Theodar (also of Embayal's line). The latter has never accepted his lineage's lower status; even back when the Odavs were vassals of Haloban he threatened to leave the clan, along with all his fellow Embayalans, if the Chieftain would not fight for an independent Odaiova. So far he has not followed through on his threats, but still, there is great dissent among Embayal's descendants about what their future should be.

When Serbaga's mother died, having eaten berries from a poisonous bush, the daughter replaced her as unofficial head of the Yesalom line – a position she would not occupy for long. After a grievous and public confrontation with the Chieftain regarding clan taboos, she was forced to flee the settlement. Most remaining Yesalomites now occupy two remote villages in the woods, where they keep to themselves. Their ill will towards Embersind grows ever stronger, not least because of Ambrian rangers appearing unannounced to search their homes for Serbaga. The village chieftain, Arnomer, will apparently tolerate just about anything, though one can assume that he too has his limits.

Other well-known Odavs are Valagar, the highly successful jakaar breeder whose pups are sold to Ambrians as well as to other clans, and Golthor, a merchant who quickly realized the importance of learning the Ambrian language and establishing contacts in Thistle Hold. This made him an incredibly wealthy man, and some say he has paid to assume ownership of the Chieftain's citadel by the River Eanor when Embersind leaves. Other Odavs are bothered by his close relationship with Yoroun, a woman of his own lineage, despite Golthor's endless proclamations that this whole bloodline business is no longer relevant to the clan.

DARKNESS FALLS

Stories about the growing darkness of Davokar are told every day around woodland campfires and in taverns across Ambria. Odaiova is probably the clan who has suffered least from the forest's sinister powers – they live far to the south, where woods are sparse and deciduous, and it is said that Yesalom's descendants maintain strong relations between the clan and a handful of powerful forest creatures who have not yet succumbed to Corruption. Still, they are not completely unaffected.

The smaller settlements north of the Malgomor have reported an increasingly large number of attacks by wild beasts, while southern villages and hunting parties have suffered brutal raids by the Beast Clan. Then there are two particularly unsettling stories describing something altogether different...

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Torn Asunder

About fourteen moons ago, an entire village northeast of Karvosti was corrupted overnight. Two young siblings were the only ones to escape this gruesome transformation, and fled south to tell their story – how they awoke to horrifying screams, just before dawn, and soon witnessed their deformed parents ravage neighboring children with their sharp claws and bloodstained jakaar fangs. The wrathguards and witches who arrived a few days later found that at least half the village's population had been torn asunder, while the others simply disappeared. The abominations had also taken the village chieftain's treasured rune axe, Anthem – an artifact allegedly forged by trolls, and which is still missing.

Anthem, ARTIFACT

Legends tell of a troll warrior named Oramox and her battle against the wolf chieftain Fergos. Fergos' unnatural intelligence had been a gift from the Spider King, who wished to punish Oramox's tribe for having aligned themselves with a human settlement. It is said that Oramox succumbed to the corruptive powers of Anthem, but not before the mighty double axe had sung her people to glorious victory and cleaved the skull of the devious wolf.

Inspiring Echo

When the artifact's master spends their action on striking Anthem repeatedly against something hard (rock, tree, or mountain wall), a deep clang echoes across the battlefield. For one turn, all the master's allies have advantage on Strength checks and saving throws as well as Wisdom checks and saving throws.

Requires: Action

Corruption: 1d4 temporary Corruption per use

Strengthening Harmony

After having sounded the clang of Anthem as described above, the master can combine it with a song of their own. The master must use their bonus action on their turn to sing the song and the effect requires concentration (as if it was a spell). While it is in effect, the master and any allies within 30 feet have advantage on Strength and Dexterity checks and saving throws. They also have advantage on any attack rolls and regenerate 1d8 plus their Constitution modifier hit points at the beginning of their turn.

Requires: Bonus action and concentration

Corruption: 1d4 temporary Corruption per round

The Bloated One

The other story recounts a situation which would have ended just as badly, had it not been for the swift actions of an adolescent hunter. Young Oran sat perched on a rooftop, heartbroken, as his beloved had left him for another man. His quiet lamentations were interrupted by a disturbing noise – a rising, polyphonic hum. Realizing that it must have come from some unnatural creature, he put an arrow to his bow, and released it. The following morning Oran was found dead next to his victim: a grotesquely bloated woman, completely naked under a swarm of both crawling and flying insects.

Oran's father was brave enough to approach them, but came no closer than three steps from his son before falling to his knees, regurgitating repeatedly. The others soon threw jars of oil at the three bodies and used flame arrows to set them ablaze. To this day, no one has been able to identify the creature or determine its origins.

Baiaga

THE BAIAGS ARE constantly moving around. The clan is thought to comprise about thirty to thirty-five thousand members; the exact number is difficult to determine due to the clan's scattered and nomadic nature. To the Baiags, home is where their families are. Often consisting of four generations, every family is led by its oldest member, who – through spiritual conversations with their god, Arex the Bloodwolf – decides where next to hunt, fish, gather berries and mushrooms, or just rest. However, it is not considered strange for some people to leave their families, even for long periods of time; sometimes Arex reveals trails that are meant to be followed by one person, and that person alone.

Arex is the reason why these nomadic families are referred to as a clan. They regard the Chieftain as chosen by the Bloodwolf, the clan witch as the voice of God, and their lands as Arex's domain. All Baiags are obliged to defend their territory while awaiting Arex's return from his hunt in the Yonderworld. They have waited and fought for centuries, patiently, for the most part in harmony with each other. But the arrival of the Ambrians and the darkening of Davokar have put their solidarity to the test. This has become particularly evident since the death of Chieftain Hohax.

HISTORY

It is said that clan Baiaga's ancestor, Areman, was the son of Grabando and Gohalfu. Apart from being husband and wife, they were governor and general of the Khalasaar province during the final years of the Symbarian Empire. When Symbaroum began to fall apart and people's fear bordered on hysteria, the couple took drastic action to maintain order in their province – alleged instigators, deserters, and protesters were tortured or executed in the hundreds. According to

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"Listen, I saw a sun knight and a priest fight. With their fists. Last week. They screamed at each other like mad, yelling 'heretic' and 'blasphemer' back and forth. It was over pretty quickly, though, when the knight landed a punch..."

legend, it was Areman who ended his parents' tyranny. He killed them in their sleep and led the people of Khalasaar to safer lands in the south, where they remained for over a hundred years before returning north.

Davokar has been the Baiags' home ever since. Before the threat from Angathal Taar, known as the Spider King, forced the clans to unite and agree to certain arrangements, the descendants of Areman were involved in many prolonged and brutal conflicts – with other clans, elves, beasts, and finally with the Spider King's ravaging hordes. The establishment of rough borders by no means put an end to these conflicts, but certainly made them less frequent, and thus easier to deal with.

Furthermore, the clan is haunted, if not cursed, by a lingering menace: the vindictive and extremely powerful Grabando who sporadically returns to life in spectral form. There are stories about a number of occasions when the undead horror left its crypt and proceeded to claim tens, if not hundreds of Baiag lives, before being driven back (or returning willingly) to its tomb. There have been attempts to identify some kind of pattern to the wraith's awakenings and, with great effort, seal his crypt by mystical means – all without any real success.

The Baiagan god, Arex the Bloodwolf, in one of his many forms.

The clan's violent past is obviously vital to understanding their current situation and way of life, but so is the incident which befell the Baiags about six months ago – the murder of Chieftain Hohax at a clan meeting by Lake Great Water. It is still unclear who swung the axe at his neck, and as his potential successors in many cases had both motive and opportunity to do so, Arex has been without a human representative ever since. All Baiags would like to believe that the killer came from another source – from Ambria or some other clan – but considering the circumstances it is difficult for them not to suspect each other. In fact, they would probably need the help of an outsider to clear things up once and for all, provided that the Baiags can bring themselves to trust someone who does not follow the trail of the Bloodwolf.

SETTLEMENTS

There are about a hundred campsites scattered around the Baiaga forests, most of them small with between one and five simple (but well made) log huts. Neither settlements nor individual buildings have permanent residents – apart from solitary elders who no longer have the energy to move around and thus have settled in their favorite spot. Instead, a vacant hut may be occupied by whoever is first to claim it. If a certain camp is too crowded to house every single visitor, the most recent arrivals must sleep in their own tents until some indoor space becomes available.

Lake Great Water

Two campsites are much larger than the others, as they have evolved into important meeting places for the people. The largest one is located near Lake Great Water, with a hundred log houses for lodging and many additional buildings well-equipped for various kinds of crafting – there is, among other things, a smithy, and a water-powered mill which anyone is free to use. By the lake one also finds most of the clan's stationary members. To name a few, there is Altrod, the storyteller who lost his legs to a raging aboar; the butcher and grillmaster Hubero and his family; and Bera, the Elder chosen by her fellow clan members to represent them before Arex (that is, before the Clan Chieftain and Keeper) and who is bound to the artifact known as the Drum of Gohalfu.

Strangers are welcome at the camp site, but are expected to offer goods and services in exchange for food, accommodation, access to the smithy, and so on. The Baiags are a curious and inquisitive people, and there are usually some with a good enough grasp of the Ambrian language to act as interpreters. They are also cautious and suspicious. Many outsiders are said to have died by Lake Great Water after having behaved in a threatening or worrying manner – from the Baiags' perspective, it is better to be safe (violent) than sorry (use words).

Whitewater

The second largest settlement is found along one of the forest's smaller rivers, known to the barbarians as Morankor, about a day's march north from the northern tip of Vologma. The Whitewater settlement is practically uninhabited for most of the year, but during the summer months, when trout are playing upstream, hundreds of Baiags come to feast, socialize, and gossip about what they have seen and heard while traveling the woods. Furthermore, the summer months are when the Whitewater Maid – an ancient being inhabiting the river, seemingly protecting it from all perceived threats – is at her most serene.

Legends describe the Whitewater Maid, sometimes called Daughter Manaud, as a female being the size of an arch troll, with toad-like features and milky white skin. She has not been seen for a long time, maybe because the Baiags have learned not to anger her. Her victims are always found in the woods near the river – tainted and

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blight-born creatures, sometimes even primal blight beasts, who have suffered the claws and acidic bite of the Whitewater Maid. Ordo Magica and the Sun Church call her an abomination, but the Baiags see her quite differently: as long as one does not mention her by her true name and has not been tainted by corruption, the Whitewater Maid is not a threat, but rather a guardian spirit.

KNOWN CONFLICTS

The Baiags have no concept of personal ownership. The land they roam belongs to Arex, and all who participate in defending it may share in its rewards. It is true that individual clan members are responsible for personal equipment, and families often have a selection of weapons, tools, and household objects at their disposal. But should any of their brothers and sisters be in greater need of them, it is not uncommon for people to give such items away. At any rate, Baiags simply do not fight over possessions and belongings – the very notion would seem absurd to them.

When they ever fight and argue amongst themselves, it is usually in regards to one of two matters: the enactment of new taboos (and the revision of old ones), or how the clan as a collective should deal with strangers.

Taboos

Many young Baiags, Keeper Makaba among them, believe that the darkening of Davokar calls for stricter enforcement of their taboos and the addition of some entirely new ones. Traditionally important regions are no longer safe; many border areas are being raided by dark creatures; strange and troublesome tracks have been spotted around certain ruins; more game and fish are being plagued by disease.

The older folk, however, will not be persuaded, and propose a different course of action. Bera the Elder maintains, and many agree with her, that clan Baiaga must fight the oncoming darkness, not retreat behind taboos. What would Arex say if he returned from his hunt to find his territory diminished and riddled with corruption!? Both factions are slowly succumbing to impatience and desperation.

Outsiders

The question of how to treat strangers is rather more complex – or so it may appear when described to an outsider. The Baiags' sentiment towards the Ambrians ranges from hospitable amiability to distrust, loathing, and in some cases even murderous hatred. Their relations with foreign barbarians vary from family to family, depending largely on marriages and/or personal friendships between people of different clans. Hence, it is very difficult to predict how one will be received when meeting a group of Baiags. Outsiders approaching a clan settlement may well be welcomed with bowls of berry stew, or in other cases by axe wielding warriors ready to spill their blood.

"Did you hear about Father Piromei, the head of the temple? Apparently he has bastards in every barbarian settlement. From his days as a missionary, I mean."

A New Chieftain

Both these conflicts become apparent as the clan prepares to elect a new chieftain, and though Baiags rarely fight among themselves, they are a people of strong convictions, ready to fight for what they believe is right. None of Hohax's three potential successors enjoy majority support, and many Baiags consider someone else (if not themselves) to be more worthy of the position. Sources on Karvosti, and in some of Thistle Hold's taverns, are confident that clan Baiaga is on the verge of civil war – all it would take is a catalyst to unleash the repressed anger and desperation in all its destructive glory.

PROMINENT BAIAGS

There is no greater honor for a Baiag than to valiantly defend Arex's territory. Their finest warriors, especially those who fight alongside baiagorns, enjoy a high standing within the clan, and heroes like Ranokrag and Eradana can expect to be well taken care of wherever they go. But prowess with the axe is not the only skill lauded by the clan members; they are Arex's people, after all, and value proficient trackers and pathfinders just as highly.

As for individual Baiags, Makaba is probably one of the youngest Keepers in the history of the clans. She came to power less than a year before Hohax's murder, no more than nineteen years old at the time. The Chieftain chose her over the older apprentice of the previous Keeper, and many Baiags would like to see this "mistake" rectified once a new Chieftain is elected. But Makaba is apparently unfazed by their threats – perhaps she would not mind being replaced; perhaps she deems herself more powerful than her challenger, Garagor, and is not afraid to prove it in a mystical duel, should it come to that.

The Elder, Bera, has a reputation for being stubborn and harsh, and lacking capacity for tolerance or mercy. The previous chieftain despised her, and the common folk are losing faith in her as well, not least since the views she represents ("defend Arex's territory at all cost!") are slowly losing ground. It would hardly come as a surprise to anyone if a future chieftain immediately called on his people to elect a new Elder to represent them, and Bera was defeated in that election.

The three nominees most likely to succeed Hohax have little in common. The bear warrior Eradana demands that clan Baiaga adapt to the forest's altered conditions and form alliances with other clans, mainly Zarek and Godinja. Like Makaba, she wants to establish new taboos to stop people from visiting certain ruins and border regions, and prohibit the consumption of various plants and animals.

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Her main opponent is Karloar, a former wrathguard and fanatic traditionalist who wants the clan to cut all ties with the outside world and drive the darkness from Arex's territory by any means necessary. But even though many clan members share his isolationist views, it might not be enough to win him the title of chieftain. Like many homecoming wrathguards, Karloar is forever scarred by his time on Karvosti – his trembling hands and voice, his violent mood swings and sometimes unquenchable thirst for drink cause some people to hesitate. His greatest chance of winning is said to lie in the third candidate's ability to sway large numbers of Eradana sympathizers. The tracker Tharama has a very similar vision for the clan, but has lived in Ambria for more than a decade and believes that the Baiaga should follow the Odav example and open their arms to their southern neighbor.

DARKNESS FALLS

In the east, the clan's territory borders to what the Ambrians call Wild Davokar, and is made even more vulnerable by the proximity to Karvosti. Many horrors – elves, abominations, and tainted beasts – must cross Baiag lands on their way to the cliff. But there are three locations where the dark transformation is particularly evident and menacing.

Jerak's Sinkhole

On the outskirts of the territory lies Jerak's Sinkhole, which has always spawned all sorts of trouble – goblin tribes, predator packs, disease-spreading insects, and ravenous abominations. But the threats emerging from Jerak's deep places are clearly increasing in numbers and severity. Some say that the part of the Underworld to which the sinkhole is linked has changed; that something has awakened down there, something that drives other Underworld creatures towards the surface. Whatever it is, the clan has agreed that five families with a minimum of two bear warriors each must be stationed in the settlement near Jerak's at all times, to keep a close eye on the sinkhole, and avert or report all threats they encounter.

"There are lots of elves on Karvosti, probably nine, ten, maybe more. But they are all disguised with elven magic. And not only are they spying on people; they are murdering them too, in their sleep!"

The Drum of Gohalfu

They say that Gohalfu, the warlord, had this mighty copper cauldron made so that she could issue orders to her subordinates from afar. The drumming on its lindworm skin is received and passed on by almost two hundred shell-shaped earrings which nowadays are worn by the heads of clan Baiaga's most important families. This way, Bera can reach more or less the entire clan with simple messages – convene council meetings, warn people of danger, or call for the children of Arex to defend his territory.

Rhan Mahaar

The vast ruins known to the Baiags as Rhan Mahaar are another cause for worry. Explorers who claim to have visited the ancient city sometimes describe it as a temple complex, sometimes as a graveyard of magnificent mausoleums. But they all mention how its wildlife is undergoing a remarkable transformation. Instead of withering from corruptive darkness, the ground seems to have sprung back to life: the thin, gray vines and hawthorns which long ago covered the ruins are growing rapidly once more, blooming in white and pink. Explorers also claim that all animals have fled Rhan Mahaar. Birds have abandoned their nests, voles no longer scour the ground for worms – even the insects have left the area, making the flourishing thorns all the more extraordinary.

The Termites

Lastly, the Black Plague Termites must be mentioned. It has been five years since the first reports of these nasty pests reached Karvosti and, shortly thereafter, Thistle Hold. Back then there had only been a few incidents near clan Baiaga's eastern border, but now the plague has spread, even though every nest found is set aflame. The red and black, thumb-length insects attack both living and dead trees, and in addition to hollowing them out, they bring corruption to everything they touch – the trees they devour, the ground they walk on, and the earth in which they nest. For once, the barbarian witches and the scholars of Ordo Magica are in agreement: the well-coordinated termites possess some form of hive-mind intelligence, and are most likely controlled by at least one cunning queen, hiding somewhere in the wilds. If she is not found, and the vermin continue to spread at the current rate, Arex's territory may be completely lost in just a few years...

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Even though its surrounding vegetation has sprung to life, the cursed inhabitants of Rhan Mahaar still walk among the ruin's monuments and megaliths.

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Yndaros

Had she not been so short on time she would have ordered the coachman to take the long way around. But the sun was already low in the sky, and under no circumstances was she going to miss the party over at Junia's place. All her friends would be there, or rather, all who mattered.

The carriage slowed down as they crossed the Sharp Stream, continuing at a gentle pace past the wooden buildings of East Yndaros. The coachman had been wise enough to choose the northernmost entrance, as far away as possible from the filth of the refugees. Still, she leaned back and kept the curtain closed. The swaying cloth offered a few glimpses of the locals, including a bunch of children lined up along the houses, their hands stretched out. With her grandmother's instructions still ringing in her ears, she sighed and threw them a dozen coins, hoping they would not kill each other over her charity.

When the horses turned onto the Boulevard, after passing through Old Kadizar and the Harbor District, she finally pulled the curtain back and leaned forward. They had to make a few stops on their way to the Temple District. The preparations for the New Year festivities were well underway: cobblestones were being scrubbed, facades repaired and polished, and banners with the Queen's emblem were mounted on some of the buildings. Tomorrow she too would make herself presentable for the feast, but that was then. First she would have a magical night in the company of good friends, heightened by the dark intoxication of Krusean Berries, singing their thanks to the highest powers of the Eternal Night.

YNDAROS HAS EVERYTHING. Everything! In Taubio's acclaimed poem Bane of the Night he refers to the city as *"every rainbow's cradle and tomb"* and surely no one could have said it better. No matter what desire burns in your flesh, what goals you have in life, what dreamlike visions float before your inner eye – Yndaros is often where the dream is born, where the quest begins, and where it ends. But the analogy fails to capture that this rainbow is not always sparkling with color; its nuances are often matte, and sometimes it is colored in shades of black. In reality, the only thing one can be sure of is that the treasure chest at the end of the rainbow contains nothing but a corpse.

Yndaros is a fantastic, vibrant, and immensely diverse city with room for anything and anyone. Its hundred thousand residents have little in common, at least in terms of how they live their lives. In the capital of Ambria, the obscenely rich can be seen just across the street from destitute children and elders; the spiritually inclined only a room away from the morally indifferent; public officials next door to (and often on friendly terms with) leaders of the city's criminal element.

"You do know that the First Father has moved here, to Yndaros? The sun knights drove him from Templewall; made him flee for his life. They've lost their minds, the templars, no better than the elves, I tell you!"

Newcomers may ask themselves, quite rightly, why the city has not exploded, why the disadvantaged masses do not throw themselves at their lords' throats. Every day, the anger manifests itself in insults and ridicule aimed at local authorities, and sometimes in large protests and riots. But it never takes long for order to be restored, with or without involving the City Watch and the Pansars – the agitator who in the morning shouts out his anger from a makeshift podium on the Monger's Square may in the afternoon be clinging to some scaffold at the Temple District. Anyone who has lived in the Queen's city for some time can understand why.

After all, the despised leadership did defeat the Dark Lords. And when the enemy's evil turned Alberetor to ashes, they conquered a new land for their people. Apart from the angry minority who will not be persuaded, everything suggests that Korinthia, the dukes, and the powers that be

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The Queen's palace is a splendid view, not least when it slowly appears out of the morning mists, backed by the light of dawn.

are doing everything they can to give the Ambrian people a brilliant future. It will be a long and perilous journey, with many lost along the way, but all are welcome and all are needed – Yndaros is the Queen's new battleship with which she will bring safety, peace, and prosperity, something that can only be achieved if her diverse crew row as one, no matter how badly their backs hurt and their palms bleed.

This chapter describes Yndaros as viewed by its residents and frequent visitors. Players whose characters come from the capital, or have lived there for long periods of time, may find the material both useful and entertaining – they will feel more at home in the city and certainly be more self-reliant in situations involving social challenges and general problem-solving.

First Impressions

THE THINGS GUARANTEED to overwhelm newly arrived visitors are the crowds and the noise. Thistle Hold comes close in terms of the former, at least periodically, but the loudness of Yndaros is truly in a league of its own. The clatter of construction sites is mixed with tramping hooves and boots, the luring calls of vendors, and a cacophony of general chatter.

As soon as the shock wears off and the visitors can make sense of their new experiences, the contrasts become apparent: between new and old, stylish and simple, luxurious and cheap, Ambrian and barbarian. The contrasts can be seen in everything from people and how they dress, to buildings and monuments, to commodities and the songs played on street corners and in taverns. Compared to the human-dominated realm of Alberetor, the diversity is greater still, thanks to the ogres, goblins, elves, and dwarves residing in the capital. Individuals accustomed to other Ambrian cities need days to acclimatize; those who have never known anything but the villages of the countryside may find the impressions downright unbearable.

Another clear difference from the realm's other settlements is the high level of security. The spear-wielding patrols of the City Watch are ever present, often accompanied by one or two younger Pansars; almost all taverns, shops, temples, and inns have armed guards posted at the entrance,

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"From what I've heard, it would not surprise me if Baron Manvar Grendel is actually in league with his daughter, that Ice Witch woman. I mean, how else could he survive with no one willing to do business with him?"

and it is not at all uncommon for people to move through the city with a bodyguard or two. One soon learns that many of the city's various establishments will not accept customers without memberships, personal recommendations, or invitations. These places are usually for the rich and powerful, but not always – there are also bars and taverns for other social classes wishing to maintain an exclusive clientele. Moreover, the watchful mindset reveals itself in the remarkably distrustful atmosphere. A visiting wizard seeking access to the library of the Triplet Towers, or an aristocrat hoping to visit the House of Nobles at the Palace District, may have to navigate a maze of bureaucracy before being allowed to do so. Spies are very much a tangible reality in Yndaros, sent by enemy factions, the local thieves' guild, or foreign powers (usually the City States, the Realm of the Order, or the northern barbarian clans).

Furthermore, the people of Yndaros differ from those in other towns in their relation to Prios and the Sun Church. There is at least one temple in each district, and priests are often seen on the street outside, speaking to passersby and administering blessings. Even the common folk tend to wear tokens of their faith and loyalty, usually the symbol of the Setting Sun, as necklaces, cloak-buckles, or ornamental brooches. To defy the church as Father Sarvola does in Thistle Hold would be unthinkable in Queen Korinthia's city, but this may be about to change, and perhaps that is why its priests and theurgs are spending more and more time meeting and speaking to the people.

Recently the church instituted an event called the Sun Parade: a radiant celebration of the Sun God's glory, taking place every seventh evening. The march begins at the Cathedral of Martyrs with Father Peonio leading the way, followed by a dozen lantern-carrying younglings, then by the city's theurgs, liturgs, and initiates, as well as the Black Cloaks who are able to participate. The procession grows on its way to the harbor, continues through Old Kadizar, and reaches its full size below the palace gates on the way back – always with thousands of marchers carrying torches and lanterns, and the streets lined with spectators. Most welcome the parade as proof of Prios' greatness; a few shake their heads, echoing the rumors currently circulating – rumors of a growing schism within the church.

But regardless of hostilities, spies and ecclesiastical conflicts, the Queen's battleship stays on course. There may be tears in its sails, cracks in its tiller, and some filth below deck, but nothing Korinthia Nightbane and her capable subjects cannot patch, mend and scrub clean if need be. Yndaros stands firm, literally on the ruins of Lindaros, figuratively on the fallen civilization of Alberetor, and whatever is being whispered, there is no doubt that the ship's captain is steering her people towards a brilliant future.

Memorable Events

IT IS QUITE obvious that the area where Yndaros now stands has been inhabited for centuries. Exactly how long is impossible to say, but no one disputes that there are ruins as old as those from the glory days of Symbaroum. The most obvious example would be the tower-ruin in Old Kadizar, but the remains of other ancient structures were also incorporated into those built by the Lindarians.

Based on what little is left from the time before the rise and fall of Lindaros, one can only speculate about the people who preceded it. Symbarian legends found in Davokar suggest that a master/mistress by the name of Sanator established "a southern realm, in the shade of the wild mountains," but any connection between such a person and the ruins in the area has yet to be confirmed. It is possible that Ordo Magica has unearthed new information during the excavation currently underway below Old Kadizar, but if so, it has not spread to anyone outside the Triplet Towers.

Thus, the songs and legends heard throughout the capital all focus on the period from the fall of Lindaros to the present, which has certainly been eventful enough to offer everything from tragedy and drama to epic tales of glorious triumphs.

THE MASS DEATH OF LINDAROS

Much of today's Yndaros consists of restored and expanded structures from Lindarian times. This is particularly true of the city's largest buildings: the Palace, the Cathedral of Martyrs, the Dome, the Triplet Towers, and the towers at the harbor basin. By analyzing these structures along with finds from various excavations, combined with the clans' stories and a few surviving fragments of text, the scholars of Ordo Magica have gained what they believe is a decent understanding of who the Lindarians were and how they lived.

They worshipped a deity called the Guardian, who gave them the power to influence nature – to control the weather, enrich both water and soil, fatten their cattle, and thereby live in great abundance. It is clear that, eventually, they all perished due to a terrible bleeding disease. Most of today's scholars link the epidemic to the decadent lifestyle, but there are those who disagree. The most widespread interpretation is that the Lindarians' downfall was their punishment for worshipping false gods. While they did cultivate Prios' gifts, they did so by "planting crops in blackened soil, growing them in darkness, watering them from the spring of the Eternal Night."

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It is said that Ordo Magica has a completely different view on the matter, and according to some of the Sun God's most zealous servants, the Queen shares the Order's belief that the Lindarians merely went a step too far, that they became arrogant and careless. This, in the church's eyes heretical stance, scares a lot of people senseless – not just due to the prospect of another epidemic, but because the revival of old Lindarian practices could mean the finishing blow to the already battered, dying Prios.

KADIZAR SURRENDERS

The surrender of clan Kadizar does not make a very exciting story around the campfire – it was a brief, relatively bloodless, and in most respects unremarkable affair. Sure, there is some talk of the (according to many Ambrians) unreasonably large reward received by Clan Chieftain Manvar for the arrangement, and tales are certainly told about the heroes who died in the Ambrians' initial charge – a defeat, to be sure, but also a decisive display of strength that sent a clear message. But the detail people usually find most interesting is the breakup of the chieftain's family.

Manvar's oldest child, his daughter Maridja, refused to see her father trade away her future position as head of the clan. It is said that, in the heat of the family conflict, she took up arms and crushed her father's nose, causing the disfiguring scar which now runs across his face. Legend also has it that Manvar should have died that day, had his beloved third wife – the beautiful Unraga – not leapt between him and the axe, so that both of their hearts were split in two, literally in Unraga's case, figuratively in Manvar's. Allegedly, the furious daughter then fled the oncoming guard warriors with the bitter words: *"Father, your heart may bleed, but mine you have turned to solid ice; it shall not beat again until your heart has shed its final drop."*

What role the chieftain's son, Lothar, played in this drama remains unclear – some stories suggest that he led the warriors whom Maridja escaped, others that he took his sister's side but was captured and persuaded to bow to the chieftain's will. In any case, there is no doubt that the family relations nowadays are quite frosty: Maridja, better known as the Ice Witch, hides in the Titans with the rest of her robber scum; Lothar makes a sorry figure as the Queen's representative on Karvosti; and the Baron of Grendel keeps a large and well-trained guard, probably to protect himself against his daughter's (and possibly his son's) wrath.

THE BLOODBATH

Most of those who leave the dying Alberetor, cross the mountains and gain the Queen's blessing to enter the Promised Land, believe this to be the end of their hardship. That is not always the case. Far from it. Gratitude and subservience usually go a long way in keeping the refugees' frustration in check; sometimes particularly enraged voices must be silenced with alms and a heavy hand. But on a few occasions in the city's twenty-year history, even this was not enough.

"There are several Iron Pact warbands hiding here in Yndaros. Ten, I bet. Maybe more. I'm sure it was they who set those beasts loose on the Dome last Feast Day! The victims' blood is on their conscience, if they even have such a thing between those pointy ears."

It is a well-known fact that enemies of the realm are hiding among the refugees, and that they are the reason why the discontent of the masses sometimes escalates into violence. Whether it was some barbarian scoundrel or an agent of a foreign power who caused the Bloodbath of year 14 is a much-debated topic, the most popular suspect being the Realm of the Order, followed by a theory that the refugees were under the spell of a surviving Dark Lord.

It began early one cold winter's morning when a group of disgruntled refugees waited in vain for the breakfast soup they had been promised. In retrospect, it turned out that the cook Varga had overslept and, realizing she was already too late, decided to stay in bed – but her misconduct does not excuse what happened next. The protests grew into a deafening chorus, and when a troop of young Pansars arrived to defuse the situation, some foolish ingrates threw stones at them. Naturally, the victims had no choice but to draw their swords in self-defense. That was the spark that ignited the breaching pot!

By nightfall, the Pansars, supported by the City Watch and a troop of rangers, had been forced to consign almost three thousand refugees to their final rest. But they, too, suffered many casualties, with dozens seriously wounded. In the days that followed, blood was scrubbed off the streets all over eastern Yndaros, as the Queen vowed both to increase alms for the rest of the winter, and to punish the person responsible.

Three days after the Bloodbath, Varga was hanged from temporary gallows in the middle of the refugee camp. They say the hangman, the guards, and some children were the only ones watching.

THE APOSTLES OF SUPREMACY

Although neither the City Watch, the Key Master, nor any other authority, has confirmed the story, a persistent rumor is circulating in the city regarding a darkness-worshipping death cult, based in an attic in the Temple District, supposedly uncovered in the spring of year 17. It is not uncommon for members of various factions to be exposed as cultists and face imprisonment or execution, but of course, the situation becomes particularly delicate when it concerns local dignitaries.

In this case, the cult in question was a large group calling itself the Apostles of Supremacy, headed by five prominent nobles. Two of the names most frequently mentioned are

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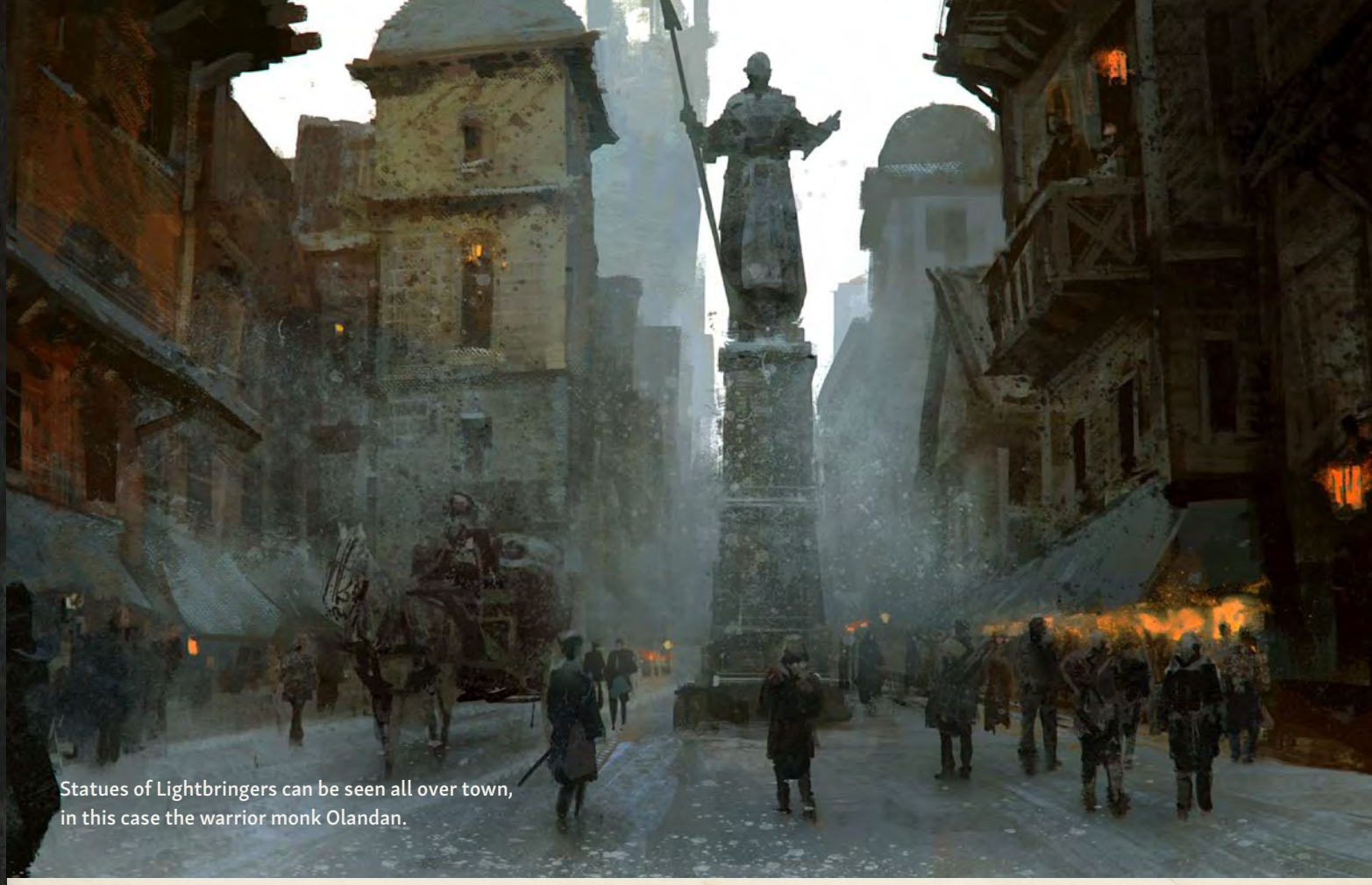

Statues of Lightbringers can be seen all over town, in this case the warrior monk Olandan.

Armangai Brigo (Iasogoi's less successful younger brother) and Aldol Attio (the Key Master's oldest son). None of them have been seen in the city since that infamous spring day, and the rumor mill pays little mind to their families' hollow excuses (a trip to Alberetor and a secret mission in a faraway land).

The many stories of the Apostles' deeds are blood-curdling indeed. Among other things, they were said to worship a daemon whose worldly existence was maintained through monthly human sacrifices. The victims were all female, and in return the Apostles gained knowledge which helped them oppose women in positions of power, hopefully restricting their influence. They believed that all women were essentially witches, filled with dark desires and therefore dangerous. If these tales are correct, the Apostles apparently considered the threat so grave that pacts, murder, and idolatry seemed like justifiable means...

ALOÉNA'S VISIT

Elves live dangerously in Yndaros. Not that many of its citizens have personally experienced the cruelty and evil attributed to the elves, but virtually everyone agrees that the "pointy-ears" consider humanity their mortal enemy. Sure, some elves present themselves as peaceful, diplomatically inclined individuals, but the overwhelming majority of people believe they can see through that charade – the elves are no more than spies, intent on sabotaging the city and gathering information!

Until the summer of year 20, the people of Yndaros felt distanced and relatively safe from the elven menace; it was something that mainly concerned the realm's northern provinces. But then, one sunny summer day, Aloéna arrived in the city. They say that she walked across the surging surface of the river, near Fortress Doudram, without even getting her feet wet, and made her way through the streets and alleys until reaching Envoy Elori's residence down the hill from the palace. The news of a creature of Davokar moving through the city spread like wildfire; its presence sparked fear in the populace, but none could resist the urge to catch a glimpse of the she-giant as she continued unfazed and unhindered through the crowds – crowds that immediately parted before her and closed behind her.

No one knows what was said between Aloéna and Elori, but as the fascination (or "enchantment", as some called it) waned, the suspicion began to grow. The predominant view is that Aloéna is the dark queen of Davokar, that Elori is one of her captains, and that their meeting concerned some sort of scheme against humanity – an attack on Yndaros, perhaps, or even a full-scale war. Naturally, no one dares lay a hand on Elori and his aides, as he is clearly on good terms with the Queen of Ambria. But other elves (and changelings who in the haze of intoxication are mistaken for elves) have since become a greater target for Yndarian suspicion, loathing and aggression. The expression *"a dead elf is a good elf"* can be heard in public spaces throughout the city.

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City of Contrasts

A chapter of this limited size could not possibly cover all establishments and noteworthy characters in Yndaros. And the rapid changes always taking place in the city do not make it any easier – a tavern packed with customers could next month have been turned into a smithy; the temporarily famous captain of the City Watch who wrestled a highly inebriated ogre to the ground is forgotten as soon as the next bar fight begins.

NEVERTHELESS, DESCRIBED BELOW, in addition to what is covered by the *Gamemaster's Guide* (pages 33–41), you will find a number of people and places which most citizens of Yndaros know and have opinions about. Note that in many cases, these have characteristics that make them stand out in one way or another; the reader should not expect the entire city to be equally remarkable – there are plenty of perfectly ordinary shops, taverns, inns, and people in the Queen's city.

However, visitors and residents alike are naturally more interested in the extraordinary, and the business owners know it, as do other fame-seeking individuals. Though it does not always succeed, each establishment does its best to carve out a niche that will attract customers and keep them coming back. At the moment, the most popular niche is to specialize in "high quality," be it food, belt buckles or copper cauldrons. But since people have different tastes, these establishments are often precisely the ones which deserve to be described as ordinary.

Food & Drink

PERHAPS IT IS their memories and stories of wartime and post-war austerity in Alberetor; perhaps it is their hard labor, or their wish to praise the Sun God by relishing his gifts – whatever the reason, the Yndarians are a voracious, not to say gluttonous, people. Food is constantly being consumed, enjoyed, and discussed as passionately as treasure grounds are in Thistle Hold.

Throughout the year there are food vendors on every square and street corner, with their wagons and vending trays full of simple fare such as pies, sausages, kebrogs, and bread. The competition is brutal, and those whose reputation exceeds that of their rivals can make a good living from it (like Madame Elinora, who after three years as a street vendor had saved up enough to open a tavern, the *Victory Vault*, in the Bohemian Quarter).

As for taverns, bars and other establishments, there is something for everyone, regardless of wealth or taste. Classical Ambrian cuisine, rooted in the traditions of Alberetor and inspired by the culinary habits of the nobility, is of course the most prevalent, but many have also developed a taste for the more rustic dishes served among the clans. As night begins to fall, the city is filled with a rich mix of mouthwatering scents, which, if the wind is coming in from the west, makes the people at the refugee camp weep with hunger.

"I know why so many people rise again as undead these days. It's because of the First Father being here; they are simply part of the hordes of the Eternal Night, sent to test him and all of us righteous folk."

THE MYSTIC'S APPRENTICE

In a back alley close to the Triplet Towers, a cellar entrance leads down to one of the city's most disorderly taverns. The *Mystic's Apprentice* is located in a series of culverts and underground chambers from Lindarian times, possibly built as a wine barrel storage or a grain depot. Either way, nowadays the twenty-four rooms with red brick walls and vaulted ceilings are overflowing with cheap intoxicants, pipe-smoke and heated debates that often turn into fistfights. Not that anyone ever gets seriously injured during the brawls between members of different disciplines or the underlings of feuding masters; the combatants are far too drunk, slender-limbed, and untrained for that to happen.

No, what causes patrons to die at "The Apprentice", in addition to the odd hepatic failure, is knives or poison. And that happens quite a lot, at least once a week. The town watch rarely gets involved, as Ordo Magica regards the tavern as part of their organization and demands to handle any investigations internally. But according to inside information,

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it will take a lot before such murders are examined seriously – unless the victim is a prominent magistrate or master, the cases are written off as caused by the much cherished and basically vital practice often referred to as *"academic knife-throwing."*

- Goblet of Wizard's Ale, 2 ortegs
- Goblet of Goo (simple stut), 3 ortegs
- Goblet of Urtal , 3 shillings
- Porridge, 1 shillings
- Fried Porridge, 3 shillings

THE DAVOKAR FEASTERY

The *Davokar Feastery* is a tavern located in the city's most affluent district, which is also where most of its customers are based. The menu offers classic Alberian dishes, but all ingredients come directly from either the great forest in the north, or from the Titans. The brawns, pies, pastries, and soufflés all have a distinctly wild flavor – familiar and at the same time exotic.

Like *Zoltar's Inn*, the *Feastery* is often accused of deceiving customers by serving food that is not what they say it is. And there may actually be more grounds for suspicion in this case. The *Feastery's* owner, Madelia, is said to have made her fortune by seducing wealthy old men and then blackmailing them for information, dubious favors, and money. The origin of this rumor has yet to be determined, as none of the presumed victims have come forth to confirm it. But if it is true, surely it would not be unreasonable to suspect other forms of foul play on her part.

- Wild boar stew with beets, 1 shilling
- Piglet collops, 2 shillings
- Can of Vesa, 5 ortegs
- Cup of Blackbrew, 2 ortegs

MADAM HOT-POCKET

In the southwestern corner of Monger's Square, backed against the wall surrounding Old Kadizar, you can find the stall and simmering pots of Gulda, better known as Madam Hot-Pocket. At all times, every day (save Sun days), the fatty smoke oozing from her three cauldrons spread out to engulf shoppers and passersby. The chatty middle-aged madam behind the counter serves four forms of deep-fried hot-pockets while smiling her toothless grin, and the customers come from all over town, from all walks of life.

The nosy, not to say inquisitive, character of Gulda has many believe that she may be an informant or even agent for some faction or organization – may it be the city watch, a crime syndicate, or even a foreign realm. What speaks to the latter, is that her dialect is difficult to place and she sometimes use words that seem old or misplaced. Whether you believe the gossip or not, it is almost impossible not to give some form of honest response to her probing and often provocative questions, regarding everything from earnings and wealth, to conjugal habits, and workplace secrets.

- Mushroom & chicken, 2 ortegs
- Beef & peas, 5 ortegs
- Spicy shrimp, 5 orteg
- Spinach & cabbage, 2 ortegs

Hubble

Hubble is a goblin delicacy made almost entirely from fermented hops. It is horribly bitter, but also said to have miraculous effects on one's mind, hair growth, and virility. Few humans would want more than one glass (or maybe just a half), while goblins can happily consume many liters of it – provided they do not plunge into the fabled "Hubble Abyss", of course.

THE SCRATCH & RODENT

One of the shabbiest, filthiest, most decrepit buildings in the Laborers' District holds the only goblin-run tavern in Ambria. It is owned by three Karabbadokks named Unkh, Dudo, and Pulsuk, but does not in any way discriminate against other folks – all are welcome, and all may eat as much as they like. However, humans are often too blinded by prejudice to even give it a chance, despite the fact that those who do usually contend that the *Scratch & Rodent* offers better value for money than any other establishment in town. Sure, their ingredients (leeches, insects, mice, moss, fir sprouts and the like) can be a challenge for both stomach and mind, but once accustomed to it, many people attest that they have never felt better than they do after a bit of goblin grub.

Lately, the owners and their establishment have been subjected to continual acts of sabotage. It all started quite harmlessly with someone smearing butter on the outside walls, and then on the benches and other furniture inside, without ever being detected. But more recently this elusive shadow (or shadows) has nailed dead animals to the well-buttered facade, and even tried to set the building on fire. The City Watch shows no interest in the matter, especially as Unkh, Dudo, and Pulsuk keep pretending that nothing has happened. Fortunately, local goblins have formed a small guard and assumed the task of keeping watch outside the *Scratch & Rodent*, which is why it still attracts customers.

- Field mouse on bark bread, 2 ortegs
- Fish offal soup, 4 ortegs
- Can of fine water, 1 orteg
- Mug of Hubble, 2 ortegs

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Housing

COMPARED TO THISTLE Hold, there are not that many inns and guest houses in the capital. People usually have specific reasons for visiting, often summoned by a certain person or organization who can also provide accommodation. Besides, one can always pitch a tent at the refugee camp; it does come with certain risks, but on the other hand it is completely free and may also include a daily meal of soup and bread.

Another option is to lodge with locals who happen to have a spare bed or two. Those willing to do so need only ask around in taverns, squares or on the street – there is always someone who knows someone who would not mind having guests sleep on the kitchen couch, at a fair price. This also has its risks, especially inside the walls of Old Kadizar, where the thieves' guilds are systematically breaking up groups of traveling companions by scattering them across different lodgings, before giving them an unpleasant awakening in the middle of the night.

THE TOWER

The Tower is the largest inn in Yndaros. The building, whose outer walls date from the time of Lindaros, is located in the city center and is almost as tall as the Cathedral of Martyrs, though not as beautiful. The rooms on its nine floors vary greatly in size and quality – from the two dormitories sharing space with the kitchen and dining room on the bottom floor, to the top floor's two luxurious suites. The latter are reached by an elevator which runs up the southern facade; thanks to the wizard Elarea's ingenious design, the power source (an ogre named Bauta) is able to hoist up (or down) one whole family at a time, luggage included.

Valotzar's rune

The Tower is owned and run by the elderly couple Dunia and Safia, who acquired the building in year 9 when Ordo Magica moved its Yndaros chapter into the restored Triplet Towers. The cleaning, cooking, and customer services are managed impeccably by the women's fifteen children, all adopted from penniless families at the refugee camp. The only thing that makes some people consider other housing options are the rumors of items left behind (perhaps deliberately) by the building's previous occupants. Everyone knows that Ordo Magica studies and experiments with hazardous powers, and allegedly, the evil of the Eternal Night can cling to corrupted objects and buildings for a very long time.

THE SEEKER'S FORTUNE

In the outskirts of eastern Yndaros lays the crappy tavern the *Seeker's Fortune*. Aside from serving crappy ale and brutebrew to a motley crowd of regular drunkards, the widower Faram has three rooms for rent on the top floor of the three-story building. It is not clean, not wholesome, and never quiet, but the rent is set to reflect the negative aspects of the experience and the rooms are seldom occupied.

Some say that if you want credible and in-depth information regarding The Great War, the regulars at the *Seeker's Fortune* are your best bet. And that may actually be true. The dozen or so elderly men and women how frequent the establishment on a daily basis are all war veterans, and between them they have participated in all notorious battles, and in all sorts of combat situations. All it takes to loosen their tongues is a jug of their favorite brew or a few ortegs in the palm of their hands.

THE DEPTH OF THE TITANS

Right next to one of the city's smallest sun temples stands the inn called the *Depth of the Titans*. Previously known as the *Crown and Scepter*, it used to be one of the most popular inns in Yndaros, at least among those with limited means. But since the change of name and owners, at least half of its beds are usually unoccupied – even though the food and service are the same, and the staff is entirely human, many customers are put off when they learn that the place is now owned by the dwarven Valotzar family.

The dining hall, however, remains as well-attended as ever. It is one of the Bohemian Quarter's liveliest, most boisterous venues for food, drink, music, and song. Its modest stage is graced by hopeful newcomers as well as renowned greats like the bard Taubio and the vocalist Elia Silkensong. Festivities often last into the early morning hours, to the great annoyance of the liturgs next door, who would prefer to greet the radiant face of Prios without having their chants drowned out by *"disgraceful bellowing."*

The owners are never seen at the inn; the only signs of their involvement are the establishment's name, and the Valotzar family rune which can be seen all over the place: on the engraved silver plaque mounted above the entrance, burned into the furniture, and embroidered onto aprons, bed linen and napkins. However, many are convinced that dwarves are hiding in the building, or rather under it – in excavated tunnels and caves, whose entrances have been well-concealed. The wildest rumor speaks of a tunnel system stretching all the way to Küam Zamok; of countless dwarves dwelling beneath the Bohemian Quarter, and the Depth of the Titans being a central location in their invasion plan.

"The entire city of Yndaros is undermined by tunnels and caves, that's a fact. Some are ancient, as old as the ruins above ground; others were dug more recently, by dwarves and other criminals. Smuggling tunnels..."

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FOOD & DRINK

1. Brother Humlu's
2. The Davokar Feastery
3. The Flaming Fist
4. Scratch & Rodent
5. Kumuma's Corner
6. The Mystic's Apprentice
7. Town Hall's Loft
8. The Victory Vault
9. Soup Kitchens
10. The Staff & Tome
11. The Croft
12. Ynedar's Legacy

HOUSING

13. The Bear Trap
14. Kohinoor's
15. The Seeker's Fortune
16. Depth of the Titans
17. The Tower
18. The Howling Wolf
19. The Axe & Cauldron
20. Zoltar's Inn

ENTERTAINMENT

21. Bego's Basement
22. The Dome
23. The Lucky Charm
24. The Islet
25. The Fortune Smithy
26. The Palace Park
27. The Steel Glove
28. Tuvinel's
29. The Savage
30. The Vivisectory
31. The Steam Bath

TRADE

32. Baldan's Gems
33. Boska's Silver
34. Grondel's
35. Iskandro's
36. Master Alinard
37. The Chance
38. Steelwife's Weapons

OTHER

39. Library of Anearia
40. Elori
41. Prison Tower
42. The Legacy Gallery
43. Tannery
44. Nobleman Dastan
45. The Royal Sekretorium
46. Claystone Plant
47. Cathedral of Martyrs
48. The Key Seat
49. Odbolg
50. Ordo Magica
51. Fortress Doudram
52. Pansar Barracks
53. The Triumph Theatre
54. The House of Nobles
55. The Royal Archives
56. Convent School of the Last Light
57. City Watch HQ
58. City Watch Offices

SQUARES

59. Traders' Square
60. Immigrant Square
61. Monger's Square
62. Triumph Plaza
63. The Sharp Stream

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Zoltar's Inn has one of the city's most popular kitchens – especially when Aboar Stew is on the menu.

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THE COST OF LODGING IN YNDAROS

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

WAGON REST INN

Just north of Immigrant Square is where you will currently find the mobile inn of spouses Meriver and Juleia. It basically consists of eleven sturdy caravan coaches, fitted with two bunkbeds each, placed tightly together in a corral formation with a cooking pit in the middle. Three meals a day are served, prepared by the couple's children – flatbread with milk at mornings, a soup for lunch, and some form of vegetable stew for dinner. No alcoholic beverages are allowed.

Cheap as it is, renting a wagon is still much more expensive than raising a tent or assembling a makeshift shack somewhere else on the grounds of the refugee camp. Hence, the guests of Meriver and Juleia differ from most people inhabiting the southeastern part of town – they often have plenty of funds but are for some reason reluctant to, or prohibited from, immediately claiming their place in The Promised Land. Almost all live under an assumed alias, and most stay for up to a year before they have their plans and affairs in order. Rumor has it that both Balean Heranor, now strategist at the Royal Sekretorium, and the famous explorer known as Elmea Rabbit's Foot lived their first year north of the Titans at the *Wagon Rest Inn*.

Entertainment

THE SEVENTH DAY of the week is called Sun Day, but in Yndaros it has become better known as Feast Day. Shortly after Korinthia arrived at her new capital, she declared all work prohibited from lunchtime until Earth Day morning. Feast Day afternoon, evening and night is a time for everyone to remember and pay tribute to the victorious dead – with parades, plays, singing and dancing, gladiatorial games at the Dome, and general festivities.

In between Feast Days, most Yndarians have neither time nor energy for much more than eating and sleeping; at most, they might stop to enjoy a group of jesters or actors performing on the streets of the capital or find time for a glass of blackbrew at a tavern, to the tales and tunes of some bard. But there are also those who do have plenty of both time and energy, and who love to boast about their privileged position. Besides, there must be things for visitors to occupy themselves with after dark.

"Ever heard of the Suns, the Templar vengeance squads? They've struck again, massacred an entire village of free settlers in Davokar, on Vajvod territory. Apparently the settlers were worshipping the Wildling, openly."

The Palace Park

On one Feast Day every month, Queen Korinthia opens the gates to her magnificent park. Its sculptures, songbirds and caged beasts attract people from all walks of life, but the most eminent ones always wait until nightfall, when only those with special invitations are welcome.

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"The saying 'Odbolg sees you!', it's true! Odbolg is a changeling who used to work for Nobleman Dastan, but is now his own master. Commit even the slightest misdemeanor and he'll know, and then, sure as the wind blows, the blackmailing begins!"

THE SAVAGE

By the harbor basin, along the southern rim of Triumph Plaza, lies a really cozy establishment with the misplaced name *The Savage*. What may be considered a bit wild, is that the owner and barkeeper Master Oleol serves nothing but beverages; moreover, all drinks on the menu adhere from the brewery traditions of the clanfolk, though sometimes with an Ambrian twist. The music is mellow, played on fiddles and alto flutes, sometimes accompanying the popular narrator Keena as she recites poems and tales of Aroaleta.

It is said that Oleol traveled through the outskirts of Davokar for three whole years, following his arrival in The Promised Land. During that time, he picked up hundreds of recipes for variations on the beverage commonly known as Blackbrew, the most exotic being flavored with surprises like berries, mushrooms, sap, roots, tree bark, and even meats. The brewing process that goes on in the basement below the building – rumored to be a multi-leveled maze from Lindarian times – is kept strictly secret. Supposedly, the work is carried out by the members of a goblin tribe who prefer the underground and are too afraid of humans to ever visit the surface.

- Standard blackbrew, 4 ortegs
- Select blackbrew, 1 shilling
- Blueberry brew, 2 shillings
- Sweet morel nectar, 2 shillings
- Grouse liver draft, 4 shillings

Exemptions

In addition to the City Watch and other professionals the city cannot do without, many people are exempted from the Feast Day work prohibition. Employers may apply for such an exemption, and if the business they are operating can somehow contribute to the festivities, their application will of course be accepted – whether it be taverns, theater companies, dance troupes, or something of that nature. These regulations are often discussed in Yndaros' eastern districts, especially the arbitrariness regarding which requests are being granted. How Lord Manselm managed to have his claystone workers exempted from the festivities is as mysterious as it is infuriating.

THE STEEL GLOVE

Want to put your fighting skills to the test, knuckle to knuckle? If so, you should head for the Bohemian district and follow the screams to the *Steel Glove* – a chorus of screams, from excitement, triumph, fury, and pain. Sure, there are similar establishments in the eastern part of town, and spontaneous price fights even take place at the refugee camp, but if you want some form of order and reasonably fair odds, the *Glove* is the place for you!

The former gladiatrix Barabarba bought the establishment four years ago, and turned it from a tea salon to a two-story fighting den. There is one fenced area on each floor, surrounded by tables for drinking and snacking, and chairs that has seen more foot soles than butt cheeks. It costs a shilling to enter the ring, which anyone can do; the winner of the two shillings at stake is the one who knocks the opponent out (or makes them yield); the looser gets a complimentary orteg from the house, as thanks for participating. At the same time, the crowd places bets according to odds established by Barabarba or one of her goons, odds that are fairly modest and always leans in favor of the favorite, giving the broker a nice cut.

Right before closing-time, Bigpaw enters the jolly fray – the ogre that otherwise works as the *Glove's* bouncer. He has never lost a fight, according to some because he only ever faces severely drunk opponents, according to others because he really is that good. To learn the truth, you must take your chances...

- Simple blackbrew, 1 orteg
- Simple stut, 2 ortegs
- Crude brutebrew, 2 ortegs
- Fried carrots, , 2 ortegs
- Boloney platter, 5 ortegs

THE LUCKY CHARM

In Ambria there are a number of ways in which people may put themselves at risk in the hope of securing a better future. Those with the conviction and ability to pursue the treasures of Symbaroum head for Kastor or Thistle Hold; the rest must settle for other hazardous ventures. Besides betting on fights at the Dome, one can play dice, cards, or board games like Prios' Sun. The most daring (or desperate) people engage in prizefights themselves at places like the Steel Glove, where even losers are paid a small sum as consolation for their broken bones.

The *Lucky Charm* is known as the top players' favorite venue, but there is also room for ordinary, hardworking gambling enthusiasts who bet parts of their salary hoping to see it multiplied. The lowborn noble Beramei Elderra took over management three years ago, and has since transformed its previously violent atmosphere into an oasis of concentrated stillness, largely thanks to the bouncers Ugla and Bruta. Guests may still disrupt the peace from time to time, but when they do, the ogres are quick to react.

The high rollers occupy the upper floor, while everyone else must stick to the smoke-filled, dimly lit rooms below. Many dream of achieving the same success as young lady

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Merlinda. The story goes that she walked into the *Lucky Charm* two years ago with four shillings and sixteen ortegs in her pocket; in six weeks she had won enough money on Prios' Sun to be invited to the high-stakes games upstairs, and only six months later Beramei declared that one of the rooms was at her sole disposal. Even though they are more or less guaranteed to lose, lots of people hope to one day be invited into Lady Sun's private chambers.

- Pie of the day, 2 shillings
- Can of Brutebrew, 5 ortegs
- Can of Blackbrew (unspecified), 1 shilling
- Cup of Urtal, 3 shillings

THE STEAM BATH

The pools at the old Lindarian steam bath were originally used to prevent terrible diseases from breaking out among prisoners of war – they were regularly forced, fully clothed, into the lye-laden water. In year 8 Glorea Garal acquired the building in exchange for the piece of mountainous land the Queen had awarded her family, of which she was the only member to survive the war. The transaction also included enough money to renovate the bath house and purchase a loft in the Temple District.

Today the old building is one of the most beautiful in Yndaros, with brilliant white facades, shining domes, and interior walls, floors and ceilings decorated with tasteful mosaics. Men and women bathe in separate areas with hot and cold pools and a number of steam saunas. No goblins or ogres are allowed inside, due to what Glorea calls their *"inherent filthiness,"* but otherwise the bath is open to all. The price depends on what time it is – visits are most expensive in the middle of the day, and cheapest after sundown.

Some time ago, the owner appointed the changeling Grimorio Abramelin to the position of bath house manager. Many were concerned about whether the well-known former street performer was the right person for the job, but their skepticism appears to be unfounded. Sure, there are still people who whisper rumors that Master Abramelin was once involved in some rather shady business dealings, but overall the establishment seems to run as smoothly as ever.

- Bowl of frozen fruit, 5 ortegs
- Oil-cooked cinnamon bread, 2 ortegs
- Oil-cooked cinnamon bread (sugar sprinkled), 4 ortegs
- Can of wine (unspecified), 15 shillings
- Spring water, Free

Trade

Keen consumers can find just about anything they want in Yndaros. The only things which might not be sold openly are blight-stricken objects and ones that may have corruptive powers – but even those are said to be available for buyers with the right connections and sufficient knowledge of the city. Cons and scams are quite common, mainly aimed at newcomers and visitors; victims reporting such trickery to the City Watch are often met with derisive laughter, unless he or she is of noble birth or has friends in high places.

Most of the city's commerce takes place on the public squares, where people buy and sell everything from raw material, food, and used and refined objects, to elixirs and clothes. Alternatively, Yndarians go directly to the producers and manufacturers, where the risk of being cheated is not as high, and the goods, quantities and sellers can be chosen according to one's budget. There are also shops whose products are made by other people, but these often have a reputation for offering lower-quality goods. The latest example is the jewelry shop called Baldan's Gems which, since being taken over by the dwarven family of Statzak, mostly sells jewelry manufactured by clanfolk or amateurs in the countryside – admittedly both beautiful and low-priced, but dismissed as knickknacks by wealthier individuals.

"A guy I know said that Captain Kathia will soon have two thousand soldiers in her army of refugees – war veterans, ex-robbers, outcast mystics, mad priests, and so on. The rebellion will begin any day now, I guarantee it!"

THE CHANCE

Just east of Triumph Plaza lies a shop called the *Chance*. Its owners, spouses Lyssa and Davido, purchase objects that people have brought with them from Alberetor, and resell them at a substantial profit. Their customers are mainly affluent Ambrians who can afford to pay good money to satisfy their nostalgia and revel in old memories, but even those who go there just to browse, wonder and remember often end up buying something small before they leave – a piece of jewelry, trinkets or perhaps a stone allegedly carved from the wall surrounding House Kohinoor's palace in Kandoria.

Business is so good, in fact, that Davido and Lyssa can afford to employ three salvagers: former army officers whose job is to scour abandoned properties south of the Titans and send whatever they find north with the caravans along the mountain routes. It can be anything from clothes and shoes, to furniture and linen, to jewelry and artworks. The owners then pay Ordo Magica to examine the objects before they are offered for sale, to make sure that they are free from contagions and shadows. The rumor that a set of embroidered bed linens sold at the Chance caused the outbreak of the Pale Death is therefore, in all likelihood, false.

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STEELWIFE'S WEAPONS

Just below the entrance to the Palace District is where you will find the smithy of Petrona Steelwife, the head of the country's blacksmith guild. It is a three-story storefront, with items on display on the lower floors and the master's living quarters up top. The spacious backyard is where the magic happens, fitted with four furnaces and a handful of anvils where three adepts and eleven novices work to perfect everything from carving knifes and cauldrons, to weapons and armor. Petrona herself can rarely be seen in the backyard, and when she stops by, it is only to inspect the work and hand out scalding reprimands, more or less warranted.

Many a know-it-all claim to know the reason behind the master's reluctance to work – she is busy trying to get rid of Master Alinard and other invasive foreigners. The general theory is that she is plotting and scheming on a political level, trying to get the authorities to take action; a less vocal group whisper about her planning to go even further, to actually have unwanted competitors killed or forcefully removed. But maybe the truth is simpler than that: maybe she feels inferior and hence uninspired, now that the Ambrian elite often take their business elsewhere?

ISKANDRO'S

Healing elixirs and other drugs can be found anywhere in Yndaros. Prices vary depending on what part of town one is in, even though the products themselves are the same. Still, they say that pricing is the clearest indicator of a charlatan – a relatively low price in the Temple District should raise suspicion, and a relatively high price in the eastern parts of town could mean that someone is trying to sell you a bottle of dyed syrup or a pound of ground sunflower seeds. No, where alchemical substances are concerned, it is always wise to buy directly from members of the Alchemists' Guild.

With mystical artifacts the situation is different. Ordo Magica has so far kept the secrets of artifact crafting to themselves; those who are not connected to the witches, elves, and trolls of Davokar must go to the Southern Tower to purchase lesser artifacts. But there is one exception: the newly opened shop Iskandro's in New Town, which specializes in ritual codices, spell scrolls, and seals for mystical powers as well as rituals.

However, there are speculations that Master Iskandro, once active at Ordo Magica's chapter in Ravenia, is running the shop on secret orders from Grand Master Seldonio, as a test to see how such a business should be managed. After all, how else could Iskandro offer artifacts with the properties of all the mystical powers and rituals included in the Wizardry tradition?

THE BLACK MARKET

During the last couple of years, one of the small squares on the western shore of the Sharp Stream now and again transforms into a buzzing marketplace. It is never there for long; the tables, lorries and bigger wagons that suddenly appear vanish within a couple of hours or even faster, if word has it that the City Watch is on the way. During that limited timeframe, the commerce is wild. Voices are raised, blood runs hot and sometimes customers can be seen fighting each other or even the vendors over particularly interesting items. What all items have in common, is that they for one reason or another are prohibited in the city of Yndaros, because of their corruptive or otherwise unsavory nature.

The fact that a crowd of eager buyers seem to appear just as abruptly as the market itself has many speculate about the existence of a secret, dark network of vendors and potential customers. What adds to this suspicion, is that many of the latter apparently arrive from the western part of town – dressed in anonymous clothes, with faces hidden behind expensive masks, and often seen vanishing in lavish, unmarked carriages. You can be quite sure that both the Black Cloaks and the Royal Sekretorium is on the case, and that the ones responsible for this abominable activity will soon be caught and duly processed!

Knowledge & Information

IT HAS BEEN said before and bears repeating: the Queen's capital is where one finds the strongest muscles and sharpest minds in Ambria. It may not always be easy to gain access to the great bastions of learning and wisdom, but with the right contacts (or plenty of well-spent thaler) anyone can tap into the knowledge stored in the Triplet Towers, the Royal Archives, and the Convent School of the Last Light.

This is not to say that all information is easily accessible. Each scholarly institution has its restricted sections, or secrets most of their own staff are unaware of. That goes for previously mentioned examples as well as the archives of the City Watch, the Army, the Royal Sekretorium, and the Anchorage Asylum, to name a few. In order to obtain such classified information, one must resort to much more unscrupulous measures – burglary, infiltration, or gaining some kind of leverage over (and blackmailing) people with the proper clearance.

THE LEGACY GALLERY

Down by the harbor stands the five-story building which houses the Legacy Gallery. Connected by a spiral staircase, each floor is filled with objects salvaged from the withered lands of Alberetor. One is dedicated to furniture, another to crafted metal, and the top floor is crammed with screen walls displaying carpets, paintings, and tapestries. On the ground floor is a room with relics relating to the Young Gods,

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now regarded as heretical idols in the shadow of the Lawgiver. There is also a small stage where skalds and minstrels take turns performing works which were popular in the old homeland.

The largest crowds are usually found on the second floor, engrossed by the exhibition commemorating important events from The Great War. On display are, among other things, the white dress worn by Korinthia as she was rescued by First Father Jeseebegai, and an alleged replica of the Dark Lord's crown. Those with time on their hands may read about other noteworthy happenings – such as the death of King Ynedar, the Battle of Haaras (now known as Black Haaras), and the significance of the so-called Exaltation, when Prios was officially recognized as the One God and the Giver of Laws.

THE TORCH

While the Legacy Gallery may be glorifying history, many believe the Torch is wrongfully dragging both the past and the present through the mud of the gutters. The first criers arrived ten years ago – children of modest backgrounds who got up on their distinctive crimson stools and shouted out "news" in East Yndaros. The message remains the same: the rulers are corrupt, the City Watch discriminates against people, other news outlets are spewing false propaganda, and the time has come for people to stand up against injustice!

The Royal Sekretorium is no doubt doing their very best to locate the financier and source of the Torch's lies, but so far without success. And perhaps it does not matter; so long as the target audience struggles to get by and hopes for alms from the larders of the slandered elite, it will take a lot for such a rebellious call to take root. Nevertheless, many cannot help but wonder about the founder of the Torch – what motives such a person might have; how they obtain what is clearly secret information, and the means by which they manage to avoid getting caught.

Whatever the truth may be, a lot of people still regard the Torch's criers as an indispensable source of knowledge, since they seem to have direct access to otherwise classified information – assuming, of course, that there is some degree of truth in the organization's anti-Ambrian outcries.

VIVISECTORY

It is always a gruesome affair, the shows at the Vivisectory (*Gamemaster's Guide*, page 35). Master Molgan who runs the establishment is always looking to shock and startle, which is quite ambitious in a city like Yndaros where most people have seen butchers at work, and worse. But he is accomplished, the seasoned wizard. It is rare that anyone leaves a show without being impressed, in one way or another – children tend to either laugh or cry, while adults can display anything from nausea and disgust, to excitement and pure joy. Whatever the case, patrons emerge onto the streets with a newfound respect for their Queen and all else who make it their business to protect common folks from the horrors of Davokar.

"Stay away from the wagons picking up daythalers in East Yndaros. At least half of them are kidnapping people, selling them to the barbarians as slaves, or to cultists as human sacrifices. Get up on one of them and you're dead!"

Below the showroom, in the dark caverns beneath, lives a group of people said to be the most horrid in Yndaros, if not the realm. They are called Caretakers, and are tasked with tending to the Vivisectory's objects of study, before and after they have done their part in the advancement of knowledge. Since it is known that Ordo Magica, with few exceptions, never pays well, everyone assumes that the caretakers have other reasons for tolerating the job – such as sadism, nihilism, and a profound displeasure with living. Then again, to anyone seeking knowledge about how to best harm and kill different kinds of creatures, they are probably a wellspring of tips and tricks...

THE LIBRARY OF ANEARIA

The institution known as the Library of Anearia was founded more than two centuries ago in Berendoria, Alberetor. Its objective, which was stipulated by the original curator Anearia, is still the same as ever: to create "a comprehensive archive of everything worth knowing." It is funded by nobles who like to boast about their sizable donations to the library. But its main patron, and the manager of its finances, is House Karnak, currently represented by Duke Sesario – the new husband of Queen Mother Abesina and father of Duchess Esmerelda.

One might ask how the library managed to move its clearly enormous collection across the Titans. But in all likelihood, the secretive group of librarians who manage the vast stores of knowledge will not answer. Then again, if rumors are true, the transportation would have been quite easy, since almost the entire archive is kept in the Yonderworld, the Spirit World, or some other reality beyond that of humans. If so, the impressive tomes occupying the library's modest three-story building in the Temple District would merely be the dusty tip of a mountain of knowledge.

Becoming a member of the Library of Anearia, and thereby entitled to the librarians' help in seeking answers to one's questions, is something many people are reluctant to do. For it requires more than just a signature in some ledger; a small chunk of one's hair must be submitted for archiving. Once this is done, one is free to pay the nine thaler required to gain insight into things that are, things that were, or things that will be. Whether or not the answers are always accurate is difficult to say, as members are not allowed to pass on their knowledge to others.

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Authorities

WITH FEW EXCEPTIONS, the most powerful people in Ambria are all gathered in Yndaros – the Queen, the Field Marshal, the Grand Master of Ordo Magica, the Grand Masters of the craftsmen's guilds, and the owners of prominent establishments, to name a few of the most famous ones. In addition, there are numerous informal, yet highly influential individuals in the form of advisers, assistants, and agents, not to mention the secretive leaders of various cults and crime syndicates.

Relations between these powerful figures are riddled with conflict; they represent organizations with different interests – often opposing ones, which collide when they are finally acted upon. Just like in Thistle Hold and other Ambrian cities, the arguments are held behind closed doors, sealed so tightly that nothing but vague rumors ever seep out to common folk. There are exceptions, but mostly such that concern controversies about the city itself or its surrounding area, and rarely between the top representatives of the groups involved; the people of Yndaros will never witness a public conflict between Korinthia Nightbane and First Father Jeseebegai, but must settle for watching the Key Master quarrel with First Theurg Peonio.

THE KEY MASTER SEAT

Though Yndaros is formally run from the Key Master Seat, it is common knowledge that Herakleo Attio and his colleagues are working in the Queen's shadow – at the end of the day, everything they do requires Korinthia's implicit or explicit approval. It would therefore be unfair to blame the Key Master for the increasingly harsh rhetoric and measures used against displeasing elements.

Herakleo oversees and coordinates the administration at the Key Master Seat, but all major decisions are made in consultation with the leaders of its other branches, or at the top – by the Queen and her council. As First Justice, Father Matheo Brigo has a place on both the city's and the Queen's council; they say that he often sends one of his subordinate Judges to attend the Seat's meetings, but the honorable sun priest must still be described as one of Yndaros' most powerful individuals – especially since he is the one who records and communicates the laws of Prios.

The other council members are Tax Commissioner Eudora Garlaka and Construction Commissioner Jurlio Berakka, both of whom run vast organizations with many branches and sub-departments. The Tax Commissioner is personally responsible for the city's finances, while her underlings manage day-to-day activities such as payments, disbursements, debt collection, audits and so on. Master Berakka's subordinates are in turn responsible for sanitation, construction, renovation, roads, and parks (including monuments and such).

Persistent rumors suggest that the seasoned Construction Commissioner, Duke Junio's father, who by the end of the war held an equivalent position in Kandoria, is often at odds with the much younger, lowborn, yet completely disrespectful Eudora. Naturally, the issue causing the arguments is whether the Tax Commissioner allocates enough funds for construction and maintenance, which – as Master Berakka sees it – she does not. And the general population are equally divided. On the Construction Commissioner's side are the people living in the city's eastern districts, with rugged streets, unreliable wells, inadequate drainage systems, and no barrier between them and the diseased and desperate wretches at the refugee camp. Most other citizens would like to stay on the current path, with more money being spent on the City Watch, the prisons, and other security measures.

Some astute observers are sometimes heard wondering whether the need for guards and prisons would not decrease drastically if only the lives of refugees, daythalers, and common laborers were made a little bit easier.

Crime & Punishment

Keeping people in prison is both expensive and unsafe, which is why various forms of corporal punishment and humiliation are much more common than incarceration. Disturbers of the peace must often spend a period of time in one of the pillories found on many of the city's squares; repeated offenses will cost you an ear or two, as a permanent sign of shame and guilt. Property crimes or fornication result in a number of lashes, followed by the loss of fingers or a hand, but could ultimately send the inveterate sinner to the gallows. More serious crimes such as murder, treason, heresy, and rebellious activities are almost always punished with death.

In Yndaros, incarceration is reserved for three kinds of criminals. High-ranking nobles may be allowed to live out their lives behind bars; the same goes for spies and other agents of foreign powers, as they can be pumped for information and used for diplomatic purposes. The third kind is of course those who, in one way or another, have been tainted by corruption, and may therefore be valuable as objects of study for Black Cloaks and wizards.

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The giant executioner Ripe has become the symbol for law and punishment in Yndaros.

THE CITY WATCH

The proud City Watch of Yndaros is led by Commander Alvo Steelneck, a fifty-year-old army veteran who earned his nickname on the exodus across the Titans – he was captured by a group of plunderers who despite repeated attempts failed to decapitate him; a story which many find hard to believe, even though he has the scars to prove it.

Steelneck answers directly to First Justice Matheo Brigo, and has in recent years seen an increase in both budget and personnel. The headquarters lies just downhill from the palace; there are also smaller guard stations in every district, manned by two to seven captains, each commanding between five and fifteen watchmen. The largest station is the one by the Monger's Square, as it is also responsible for patrolling, and answering distress calls from, the refugee camp.

Each guard station can hold a handful of prisoners for short periods of time, either in simple cells or chained to the walls. The headquarters' two-story dungeon has room for a larger number of people, who may be detained for months before they are sentenced (some in the isolation cells on the bottom level, where the blight-stricken and blight-marked are kept). After their sentence has been passed, the prisoners are usually taken to the Triumph Plaza for some kind of corporal punishment or public humiliation; less often to the Prison Tower in the Palace District, or to Anchorage Asylum – a sanatorium run by Ordo Magica on an islet an hour or so west of the city, where slightly blight-marked patients are held, cared for, and studied.

Serious cases of stigmatization are rarely seen in Yndaros, either in jail, on the Triumph Plaza, or at Anchorage Asylum. Instead they are most likely taken to the Twilight Monastery up in the Titans, though some say that they, too, are kept in the city – in secret levels below the City Watch headquarters, the Triplet Towers, the Cathedral of Martyrs, or even the Palace itself.

"According to my sources in the army, the northern clans are planning to rebel against Karvosti. The northerners must have tens of thousands of barbarian warriors, no doubt supported by a whole bunch of witches. Mark my words, war is coming!"

THE CATHEDRAL OF MARTYRS

The year after Korinthia's arrival to the Promised Land, it was finally ready for inauguration – the Cathedral of the Hallowed Martyrs, better known simply as the Cathedral of Martyrs. It was built on foundations from the time of Lindaros, fitted with the hemispherical copper dome of Prios, and with new exterior ornaments and interior paintings. The atrium, with its balconies, can accommodate more than a thousand worshippers turning their collective gaze to the golden podium where First Theurg Peonio conducts his sermons, in the light which streams through the temple window portraying a triumphant Queen Korinthia on her prancing steed. Along the edges of the hall are towering statues of martyrs and lightbringers, and incense burners emitting the same scent as in the temples of old Alberetor.

In Yndaros, Prios is ever present. His spirit watches over family dinners, court proceedings, business transactions, solemn ceremonies, births and deaths, and the people must all praise "Prios, the One" in good times and in bad. The city's residents still live as much in the shadow of war as they do in the radiance of triumph, and none are allowed to forget who brought victory to the Ambrians during The Great War. Guilt, gratitude and duty are recurring themes, preached by the First Theurg as well as his eminent liturgs – the Ambrian people have a long way to go before Prios has regained his strength; darkness must be vanquished, the wilds must be cleansed, and the gifts of the One must be harvested and cultivated. And these themes are undoubtedly being given a more prominent role with each passing year.

In fact, lately this development has accelerated even further, due to the First Father's relocation from Templewall to Yndaros. The sun priests' stricter emphasis on duty and guilt, as well as their presence on the city's streets and squares, is probably linked to Jeseebegai's arrival and the increased resources and activity of the City Watch. In turn, this development is most likely a reaction to rebellious, or even heretical, tendencies within the church and the realm in general. Citizens are discouraged from placing too much importance on divisions within the church, conflicts between the First Father and the Queen, and a growing, tacit support for the likes of Father Sarvola. But perhaps there is some truth to the claim that the absence of external threats has allowed for potentially serious internal conflicts to grow more and more threatening.

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"The Blood-Daughter, the ruler of clan Saar-Khan, she drinks human blood, a jug a day. To stay young, they say. That means she's a witch, doesn't it? Hardly a surprise if you ask me..."

THE TRIPLET TOWERS

Like the nearby Cathedral of Martyrs, Ordo Magica's residence is built on Lindarian foundations – three tall and narrow towers which supposedly served a similar purpose back when they were first constructed. The northern tower is shared by the three schools of the wizardry tradition – the pyromancers at the bottom, the illusionists in the middle, and the mentalists near the top, below the two floors reserved for Grand Master Seldonio and his staff of novices and adepts.

The southern tower is dedicated to alchemy, medicine and, more recently, artifact crafting, while the eastern one houses magistrates and students of the learned disciplines – linguistics, history, culture, art, philosophy, and so on. People who once studied or worked at the Triplet Towers claim that Ordo Magica's headquarters is a boiling cauldron of conflict, where infighting over resources, recognition, and authority is fierce. One of the most widespread stories is thought to have come from a notary named Tera, and describes the literally murderous planning of a party at the Southern Tower. The story seems to indicate that, within Ordo Magica, friends are always temporary, and only meant to be mobilized in the struggle against a (for the time being) common enemy.

But no matter how bad things might be, many are still attracted by the security which Ordo Magica can provide for its students and members. Admittance does not rely as heavily on contacts, wealth, and family as in other organizations, but rather on proven skill and diligence. There are countless stories about people of modest background winning great riches and influence thanks to Ordo Magica. But perhaps this is also the very thing which triggers the conflicts – those who achieve success are afraid of losing what they have gained, and will use all their newly acquired power and influence to avoid falling back into the wretchedness from whence they came.

ARTEK VALOTZAR

If rumors are true, and Artek Valotzar is one of Yndaros' leading authority figures, he must be one of history's most secretive, or at least private, holders of power. Everyone knows where he lives, in the fenced part of the Temple District below the palace, and several establishments are commonly known to belong to him. Yet almost no one would be able to point him out, and the number of people who can convincingly say they have met him are nowhere to be found – probably because the few he has met have reasons not to talk about it.

One reason could be that they have a blood-coin debt hanging over their heads. Or maybe they are on bad terms with the patriarch's brother? Kertel Valotzar is more feared than his older sibling, and probably rightly so. He is often seen on the streets of Yndaros, overseeing some construction project, inspecting the family-owned establishments or staring down the self-proclaimed dwarf king Morek Baldysik's underlings. It is said that his knuckles have turned permanently red after a life of violently forcing the will of Artek on others.

Blood Coin

It is said, that when favors are used as currency among dwarves, those who place themselves in debt are given a red coin the size of a palm. On one side of the coin are two steel-clad fists shaking hands, on the other is a stylized noose. The coin supposedly serves as a reminder of the agreement, and also of what awaits the debtors if they do not honor their part of the contract. When the favor is returned, the coin is as well, and if the owner accepts it the deal is concluded.

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Yndarien

Queen Korinthia's duchy is the most populous in all of Ambria, and also the most densely populated, with approximately one million inhabitants scattered across five counties, eight baronies, and two regions under the direct control of the crown.

The lush, rolling landscapes in the shadow of the Titans are divided by the River Veloma and lots of smaller streams and lakes. Well-traveled country roads crisscross through swaying fields of corn, wheat, and rapeseed as yellow as the sun. The view is occasionally blocked by apple trees, grapevines or fields overflowing with sunflowers, but is otherwise perfectly clear from on top of the rolling hills.

Indeed, were it not for the predators, plunderers, and contagious diseases, Yndarien would probably be the paradise which it is rumored to be. Other well-known, but less talked about cracks in the facade are the many dispossessed refugees struggling to survive, in the villages and areas bordering the mountains, and the hate and fear which still cloud the minds of many inhabitants. The myth may say that the Promised Land has room and shelter for all, but one does not have to be a cynic to understand that such assertions are part of the dream, and have little to do with reality.

THIS CHAPTER CONTAINS brief descriptions of regions which stand out, for one reason or another, and are often discussed in Yndaros – beginning with five counties or baronies, followed by four natural landscapes. The focus is on the people dominating the respective region and what makes them such a popular topic of conversation, not least in terms of what dangers threaten the population.

Counties & Baronies

THE AMBRIAN KINGDOM comprises sixty-five regions, not counting Prios Domain which is ruled by the Sun Church. There are also a handful of regions governed by appointed Princes of the Realm, of which Thistle Hold is the largest.

It is said that the Queen and her council divided and distributed the properties of the Promised Lands based on the principle of "keep your friends close but your enemies closer." Whether this is true or not, Yndarien is home to several families which throughout history have been accused of treason and rebellious activities. Among their neighbors are many of the noble houses which traditionally are closest to House Kohinoor, such as Herengol and Brigo.

At the moment there are not many open conflicts between noble families, and with few exceptions, the known ones seem rather minor – presumably because most of the families are still fully focused on establishing and developing their territories. The independent "kingdom" of New Dekanor is one such problem (see the *Gamemaster's Guide*, page 33); the intensifying diplomatic dispute between Houses Vereo and Elsbet regarding the mountain area still governed by the crown is another. But given the region's history, and the nobles' general desire for more, bigger and better, it will probably not be long before new, more grievous conflicts erupt.

VEARRA

All Ambrians know that the venerable House Vearra would like to see Korinthia dethroned and replaced by one of their own; they always have, and they always will. Count Demetro is spotted more frequently in Templewall than in the capital, and is apparently on very good terms with the First Father – most likely due to the Count's well-attested piety and generosity toward the representatives of Prios.

The latter is clearly demonstrated by the cathedral currently being raised near the town of New Vearra. It is being built from scratch and will eventually surpass the Cathedral of Martyrs in both size and grandeur, provided that no future attempt at sabotage succeeds where the previous ones

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34. Elvelin (Barony)
35. Oralak (Barony)
36. Argom (Barony)
37. Mekele (Barony)

NEW BERETOR

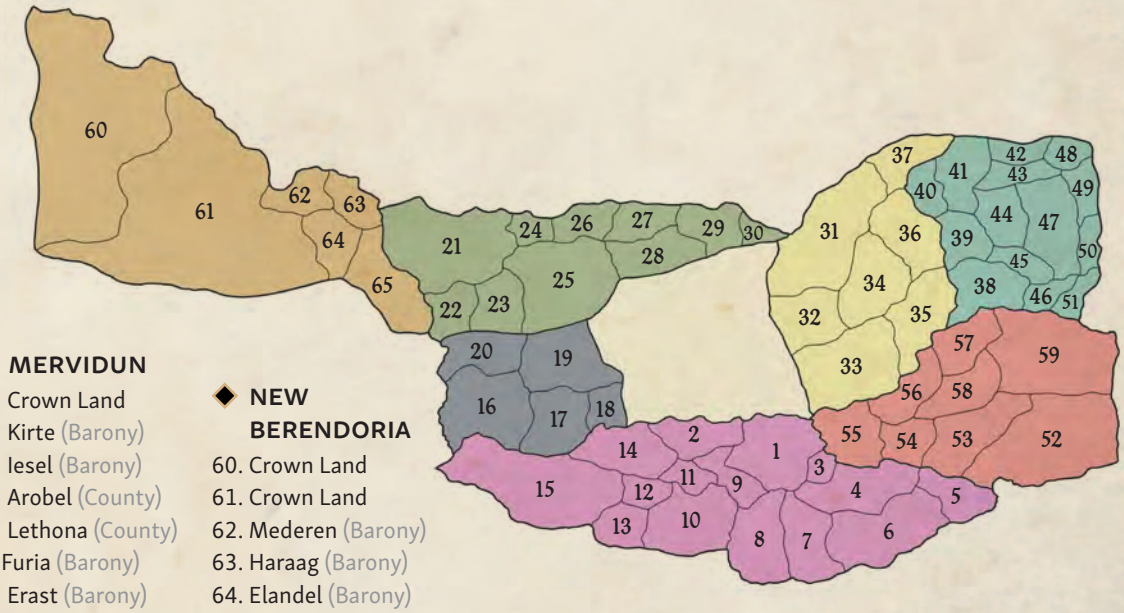
38. Crown Land
39. Nidel (Barony)
40. Ferlas (Barony)
41. Melion (County)
42. Garlaka (Barony)
43. Konlos (Barony)
44. Heranor (Barony)
45. Mirelgos (Barony)
46. Parfas (Barony)
47. Crown Land
48. Starak (Barony)
49. Crown Land
50. Crown Land
51. Crown Land

MERVIDUN

52. Crown Land
53. Kirte (Barony)
54. Iesel (Barony)
55. Arobel (County)
56. Lethona (County)
57 Furia (Barony)
58. Erast (Barony)
59. Crown Land

NEW BERENDORIA

60. Crown Land
61. Crown Land
62. Mederen (Barony)
63. Haraag (Barony)
64. Elandel (Barony)
65. Galaldo (Barony)



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Vearra

Brigo

Grendel

have failed. Whether it is rebels, heretics, the rival House Argona or even the Queen herself who wants the project stopped is yet to be determined, but in some of the more free-spirited taverns in Yndaros, people are taking bets on when and how the structure will be razed.

BRIGO

Back in Alberetor, House Brigo was not a very prominent one, but its representatives have long been close to House Kohinoor, and upon their arrival in the Promised Land the Queen awarded the head of their family the title of Count. With its one hundred and thirty thousand inhabitants, the county of Brigo is the second largest region in Yndarien and has the most arable land in the kingdom, due to the tributaries of the river Noora, allegedly combined with some mystical assistance.

For on Count Edogai's land stands the Moonlight Monolith, an enormous crystal cliff with a surface which appears to have been cut and polished into irregular facets. Towering above the plains, a transparent dark blue with streaks of black and gray, it is said to be some kind of mystical power source, or a place where mystical power lines intersect. Whatever the case, it is definitely the source of a deepening conflict.

The Powers of the Moonlight Monolith

Those who visit taverns like the *Staff & Tome* or the *Flaming Fist* while the Moonlight Monolith is being discussed can expect a lot of agitated and frightened voices. According to Ordo Magica the crystal is extremely dangerous – so powerful that careless use can cause an explosion drowning large parts of southern Ambria in the darkness of the Eternal Night. That such an artifact may be handled by anyone but Grand Master Seldonio's subordinates is not only a scandal; it could destroy all that has been achieved since The Great War.

For the past five years the Count, presumably at his son Iasogoi's request, has provided funds to establish an organization of mystics independent from Ordo Magica. It is called Ordo Ambra, led by a former order member named Mergoi Soleij, and serves mainly to develop practices which will fully shield mystics from the influence of darkness. The Moonlight Monolith is apparently central to their efforts, which is why Master Mergoi and his colleagues are the only ones allowed to examine and use it. Grand Master Seldonio, and the wizards who until five years ago studied the monolith themselves, are currently discussing the issue with the Queen. Rumor has it that the debate is becoming increasingly heated, and that Korinthia keeps referring to the Count's right to decide in the matters pertaining to his domain.

GRENDEL

To most people in Yndaros, the Huldra is more of a fairy tale than an actual threat, but of the Ice Witch they are truly afraid. Her band of plunderers regularly attack caravans, river transports and less fortified villages, and show no mercy to anyone who gets in their way. What is more, everyone is convinced that she has large parts of the refugee camp in her clawed grip, through covert agents hiding among its tents and wagons. Allegedly, the Ice Witch has but one goal: to exact vengeance upon the Ambrian intruders, with sword and fire and witchcraft.

Despite being the Ice Witch's father, Baron Manvar Grendel is as badly affected as everyone else. But that does not stop many Yndarians from accusing him of secretly supporting his daughter, or even hiding her on his estate. There seems to be no evidence, not even any clear indications of this being true. But ever since their elevation to nobility, House Grendel has struggled to earn the Ambrians' trust. Many are boycotting goods produced in the barony, and despite rich soil, they have had difficulties attracting crofters to their lands – they must settle for newly-arrived refugees (who will not stay longer than necessary) and barbarians tempted by the Ambrian lifestyle. Settlers come and go, and the only ones to stay for a longer period are those of the unruly goblin tribe Lokkmalakk, whose megalomaniacal chieftain, Garulubbulug, has publicly expressed his wish to conquer the region.

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Valtar Brigo, King Ynedar's brother-in-arms, has been honored with a statue at the Traders' Square in New Town.

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Attio

Soleij

ATTIO

Baron Valero and Baroness Herela of Attio, proud parents of Key Master Herakleo, were close to King Ynedar and are equally close to his daughter. Their relationship to each other, however, is anything but close. Gossips claim that a long and grievous quarrel regarding their second son, Serex, has torn them apart – a conflict which over time has had catastrophic consequences.

Rumors have swirled about the Key Master's parents ever since they came to Ambria, but in this case, the reality is much more dramatic. A few months ago, the baroness moved all her belongings to the recently restored fortress of Storm's Home near the southern border; she enlisted three hundred highly experienced sellswords, and proclaimed half the barony under her rule and protection.

This may all seem mad, or even ridiculous, but no one is laughing (except their son, Serex, who allegedly laughed himself purple when he learned what had happened). Everyone who knows Herela Attio understands that she is dead serious, so it is no wonder that people were quick to submit, and that Count Valero is having intense discussions with the Queen's strategists in the hope of finding a peaceful solution.

SOLEIJ

It was no accident that someone from House Soleij eventually ended up on the Evening Throne in the Sun Church's most hallowed building – the Templewall Cathedral.

Long before the exaltation of Prios, its members worshipped the sun god as the One and publicly denounced the other Young Gods. No matter what positions their family has held –ecclesiastical, worldly, or scholarly – they have served their god faithfully and selflessly. And though some conspiracy theorists suspect it was intended as some form of punishment, this is surely why House Soleij was given stewardship over Yndarien's most vulnerable territory.

Dowager Baroness Eudela Soleij, mother of the First Father and of the prominent Master of the Order, Levia, does not shy away from the challenge. The plunderers pillaging the mountain regions, the refugees trying to sneak into Ambria after having been rejected at Prios Pass, even the groups of Dragouls who occasionally stray north through the Titans – they have all had a taste of her brutal methods. Many also believe there is a significant risk that she will turn her icy gaze inwards, towards the heretical neighbor of New Dekanor. Most assume that it was the Dowager Baroness who orchestrated the two known assassination attempts on the self-proclaimed King Mergai, and that she will soon send her troops east, unless Korinthia resolves the situation.

Wilderness

EVEN THOUGH YNDARIEN is quite densely populated, there is ample room for the wild and the savage. Predators, plunderers, and others who defy the Queen's order are hiding in vales and copses, in secluded ruins from the times of Lindaros and Symbaroum, or among the inhabitants of smaller settlements.

Living and surviving outside the major cities and villages is surely a challenge. Still, many are evidently willing to pay a high price for the relative freedom offered by the countryside – this is where they feel at home and at ease, even though they must often take up arms to defend homes, family, and neighbors.

This section includes a brief and general description of some particularly vulnerable regions, along with examples of the stories being told about the dangers that lie within them. Together these entries will hopefully paint a pretty clear picture of why so many people choose to lead their lives in the capital, despite the crowds, the crime, and the poverty.

THE RIVERS

The rivers Doudram, Noora and Veloma are part of the reason why the lands between the Titans and Davokar could be colonized so quickly. People, as well as raw and processed goods, are transported along the wide and gentle waters – most of them passing the cargo docks of Yndaros on their way to their destination. Pirates are more common up north, but may also be encountered on the rivers of Yndarien, disguised as merchants in distress, or with fast, agile longboats hidden on the shore until their next

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prey comes sailing by. The most famous of all is the pirate queen Aganda, better known as Captain Hag because of her assumed use of witchcraft to conceal her two-masted vessel – otherwise the rangers would have found her hideout long ago.

Many stories tell of water beasts threatening those who travel the rivers. Some creatures are quite small, such as the **drilling leech**, which can attach in heavy clusters to boat hulls and eat through the wood in about 24 hours, in order to feast on the crew of the sunken ship. Another example is the **vapaya**, which has learned to stalk pirate ships, waiting for someone to fall overboard. Larger marine monsters, like the **river hunter**, the **hammer eel**, and the enormous, poisonous toad creature which barbarians call **skullan**, are more common in the north, but can all stray as far south as the roots of the Titans. (Bolded creatures can be found in the *Bestiary*.)

THE TITANS

Where the rivers have pirates, the Titans have plunderers. The largest and most feared groups are the barbarian bandits of the Ice Witch and the mighty ogre Mound's motley crew of goblins and rage trolls. The former is based in the eastern parts of the mountains, while the latter usually raid farther west. But these are by no means the only ones terrorizing travelers and caravans. Smaller bands of lowlife scum pop up every so often, ready to kill and die to get their hands on the hard-earned possessions of others. Some believe them to be outcast refugees and other unfortunate souls who have been forced into a life of crime just to survive. Such sentimental sob-stories do not weaken the resolve of the rangers and the major bandit chiefs. Apparently, newly emerged groups rarely last more than a month before they are put to the sword.

As for beasts, the mountains are heavily dominated by the **kotka** – large feline creatures living in packs which sometimes head down to the plains in search of easy prey. There are plenty of **jakaars** as well, sometimes accompanied by a lone **hunger wolf**. Wilder tales tell of giants, often called Titans, supposedly living in remote ravines or hiding underground. The scholars of Ordo Magica reject the notion of an unknown race of giants, and maintain that the observed creatures on which the stories are based were most likely **liege** or **rage trolls**. And the alleged existence of dragons and pack-living manwolves have been dismissed as equally preposterous. (Bolded creatures can be found in the *Bestiary*.)

THE HILLS OF GHOSTMOOR

Sandwiched between the baronies of Vereo and Elsbet and the county of Herengol is a hilly province controlled by the crown. Experts have identified two reasons why the Queen chose to pay such a hefty sum to reclaim the region from the widow Glorea Garal: easily accessible mines, and the hills of Ghostmoor.

Regarding the former, nothing in the Promised Land is easily accessible in the literal sense, but according to reports there should be a vast network of tunnels with rich deposits of iron, lead, copper, and other valuable minerals. Unfortunately, the same rumors say that predators, bandits and the fact that the mines are connected to the perilous passages of the Underworld, have posed great challenges to the Queen's enterprise and made it a military one more than anything else.

Ghostmoor is the name of the rolling fields of burial mounds resting in the shade of the Titans. Queen Korinthia has granted Ordo Magica the exclusive right to excavate and study the tombs, to uncover the region's history. The man in charge, Master Lasandro, is still not sure about who lies buried there, why they were buried on that particular spot, or whether the tombs have some connection to Symbaroum or Lindaros. But, of course, none of this matters to the plunderers who dare challenge the Ghostmoor guard patrols, hoping to reach the heart of some burial mound before the wizards do.

THE VELOMA VALLEY

The Veloma Valley is the stretch of land where the river flows straight from east to west – from the country road between Prios Pass and Yndaros, to the area where the tributaries of Herengol converge with the main stream. It is a famously scenic place, a popular destination for painters and other artists in search of motifs or inspiration for their masterful works. The grapevines covering the south-facing slopes are also the basis of the finest wines in Ambria; House Karella, for one, has resumed production of the delicious Southern Slopes, although they still struggle to recreate the deep and dry fruitiness characterizing the barrels produced in Alberetor.

But even the Veloma Valley has its problems. Predators and plunderers rarely roam quite that far to the north, but its sparse population living on solitary farms scattered across the countryside seems to attract other malevolent elements. In the taverns of Yndaros one sometimes hears talk of no less than three blood cults who once held their ceremonies on precisely such farms – one of them led by the fallen Master of the Order Maragandol, found guilty of poisoning three fellow wizards in Agrella. But even more famous is the group of twenty blight-stricken refugees who managed to slip past the ranger patrols and continue all the way to Veloma, where they massacred a family of winemakers and their farmhands, only to take possession of their property. For six months they remained undetected; once found, it took a squad of theurgs, templars, and pansars less than a day to purge the area of the disease, as well as the diseased.

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N THE WEST, the last rays of the setting sun caress the azure sky, and the priest's hateful sermon comes to a close; silence and darkness sweep over the High Chieftain's plateau. With few exceptions, either merry or angry, the voices around the fires of the pilgrim camp drop into murmurs and whispers. The wrathguards engaged in weapons drills outside the witches' dwelling all lower their axes, spears, and battle claws. The noise from the Longhouse abates, as the window shutters are closed to keep the chill out.

A troop of eleven wrathguards move out from the Chieftain's stronghold. They march south along the edge of the plateau, towards the fault line's towering wall; then west, passing the gaping entrance to the Huldra's caverns. Soon they reach the pilgrim camp. Some twenty fires are burning among the tents. Roaring laughter is heard from where Iarlo serves his meals, and someone is sobbing in a tent near the log bridge. Otherwise, it is a calm evening, with quiet songs and conversations accompanied by mellow strings.

Just as the patrol leaves the camp and continues north, just as its leader smiles, expecting a peaceful night, an ominous clank cuts through the silence – a faint, almost hesitant chime which makes the patrolling wrathguards look up at the bell tower only twenty paces away. The bell tolls a second time, more firmly than before. Then another bell is heard from across the plateau.

Before long, all the alarm bells are ringing, continuously and with force. The wrathguards grasp their weapons, glance at the sun temple and the Templars assembling outside, and see panic spreading among the guests of the pilgrim camp. Then the horde comes swarming over the edge of the cliff – a horde of creatures with souls as black as their ragged furs.

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What Lies Beneath...

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Introduction

Whoever serves as Gamemaster and portrayer of Symbaroum's game world is assumed to know more about its persons and locations than the players and their characters. The Gamemaster should make it possible to "discover" the world, not only that which can be perceived at first glance but also what is kept secret and hidden away from the common folk. That way, the game world becomes more intriguing, more alive, maybe also more lifelike.

ALL YOU GAMEMASTERS out there are of course welcome to decide what is hidden below the surface, also to alter or develop the actual surface to your liking. What is written in this book is nothing more than suggestions to use as a point of departure and as inspiration. Sure, it is also the foundation on which we will build future adventures and supplements but, again, this does not mean that everything is written in stone; it only means that when Gamemasters rework and remodel the original text they also have to be prepared to adapt upcoming scripts to the unique world created by and for their gaming groups.

After a deep dive into the early history of the Davokar region, this section presents four chapters about Thistle Hold, Karvosti, Yndaros and the noble houses of Ambria. In contrast to the opening section, the content below is strictly meant to be read by Gamemasters. Save the one about the nobles, all chapters are divided into two parts – the first covering well-guarded truths behind commonly known events or conflicts, and the second diving in behind the facade of specific establishments or family homes. Hopefully the content will prove useful as inspiration in the creation of adventures and when portraying the setting at the gaming table.

Early History

MANKIND'S HISTORY IN the Davokar region is hardly clear-cut. The information is there, but it is scattered, fragmented and only accessible through cryptic, sometimes near incomprehensible, secondary sources. The few primary sources that could provide proper testimonies from various historical periods are unreliable and their stories clouded by the passage of time or poor mental acuity – whether it is an undead spirit, an eternity elf or an arch troll telling the story, they all have reasons to lie and a view of existence which the person receiving the information can never fully understand.

This following account is as fragmented as the sources on which it is based, and certainly shaped by their poor reliability. The focus is on explaining the most widely accepted view, not on presenting a complete record of historical truths. And do not forget that truths are seldom mutually exclusive; even if something in this account differs from what you have already established at your gaming table, you will no doubt be able to reconcile these differences thanks to the uncertainty that always surrounds historical facts. History is never set in stone – it is forever changing.

ARRIVAL

There is much to suggest that humans came to the Davokar region from another world. The elves of the Iron Pact have always argued that this is the case, and many of the paintings, writings and carvings found in Davokar and east of the Ravens indicate roughly the same. The barbarian legends also say something along those lines, in more or less cryptic terms. Furthermore, many people point to the huge stone ships resting in the ashen deserts of the east, beyond the Ravens – vessels that could not possibly stay afloat, but may have traversed the darkness between worlds by mystical means.

Most Ambrian scholars, whether members of Ordo Magica, the Sun Church or other organizations, are highly skeptical about these assertions. The predominant view is that humans have always existed on this world, possibly on a distant, lost continent. The sources that say otherwise are discounted in various ways. The elves are assumed to be lying in order to present themselves as the rightful rulers of the world, and paintings and texts are thought to reflect the ancient belief that humans are gods who have come to seek dominion over the plains, mountains and forests – a belief that supposedly was common in earlier cultures and also echoed through later eras.

But most people, of whatever persuasion, agree that the island known as Landfall is central to the early history of humanity – a rocky isle that is reportedly impossible to visit; the waters are treacherous, as is the air, and all attempts to reach the island by mystical methods are said to have failed. Reaching Landfall and uncovering its secrets is a dream

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shared by the rich and powerful as well as less prosperous fortune hunters, although it is usually overshadowed by the dream of Symbar and its legendary Throne of Thorns.

THE FIRST REALM

Some describe it as a city state, others as the capital of a great realm, but regardless, the city of Asbarast (possibly Esberest) appears to have been the heart of the civilization that emerged beyond the Ravens. According to Ambrians who have visited the place, either on the Queen's initiative or their own, there is virtually nothing left of Asbarast, not even ruins, either above or below ground. The only exceptions are the three city walls, partially crumbled but still doggedly defying the ravages of time – the outer wall roughly the height of five men, the middle one twice that, and the inner one so towering that even the Palace of Yndaros could hide behind it (except for the Central Tower).

There are those who argue that parts of Asbarast's population had access to what is called Pure or Raw magic – creative powers untainted by corruption or other negative side effects. And some legends do support this claim, including a verse by Aroaleta that mentions *"a city beyond mountains and vales, where the power was pure as freshly fallen snow, where Wratha was blind and deaf, lost in carefree sleep."* Others dismiss this as a lie, rooted in the myth of humanity's divine omnipotence. The critics' main arguments are twofold: first, that the lands that once sustained enough people to populate Asbarast are now a barren wasteland of ash and dust; second, that the civilization in question eventually banned the use of mystical powers except for Symbolism.

No matter how much the scholars disagree on the underlying reasons, there is complete consensus on what caused the downfall of Asbarast. It was not abominations or Dark Lords that forced the people to flee, nor some deadly epidemic – it was the earth that died, withered, became infertile, turned into desert, despite being crossed by rivers and awash with rain. It is estimated that hundreds of thousands of people, possibly more than a million, migrated across the Ravens to make a new home for themselves in the rolling moorlands that today are covered by Davokar.

DIVISION

The new country was vast and fertile, full of virgin fishing grounds and farmlands. The exodus across the mountains seems to have divided the people early on, when the heads of various powerful families and factions brought their followers along and found their own areas to control. Many legends describe Ambal Seba as a kind of spiritual or cultural center for humanity's conquests, with its leader Cidriana (High Priestess, Queen or possibly elected regent) as a partly unifying force.

However, in the centuries that followed, the humans suffered greatly at the hands of the power that ruled the land before them. Opinions vary as to who this might have been – there is talk of great troll realms, nature spirits, and even a giant named Arvarax – but whatever the case, this power was supposedly based on the cliff today known as Karvosti.

Cidriana is said to have negotiated a treaty that gave humans the right to cultivate the land in exchange for sacrifices and a promise never to develop weapons or powers with the intention of harming Karvosti. This allowed a large number of petty kingdoms to be established near rivers and lakes, on mountain slopes and moors – about twenty according to some, between fifty and a hundred according to others. The cultural beings who already inhabited the region, by the grace of Karvosti, were more or less violently pushed aside. Some say the trolls were particularly brutalized, nearly wiped out, and that those who survived fled underground.

This is not to say that humanity did not have its own problems. The early days were plagued by numerous conflicts with the Lord of Karvosti, who responded with force whenever some petty king appeared to have violated the treaty, killing ruthlessly and indiscriminately, sometimes entire villages and cities. Additionally, some argue that the region was tormented by two (if not more) insatiable dragons – Fofar and Sakofal, also known as the Destroyer and the Slaughterer. Last but not least, the wars for the region's resources became more frequent and deadly, as the influence of Ambal Seba diminished. The refugees from Asbarast were no longer one people, but many.

DARKNESS IS BORN

Not much has been written about the Kingdom of Symbar, at least not its early years, implying that its regents managed to avoid major conflicts with Karvosti as well as with other human rulers. Based on what happened later, however, certain conclusions can be drawn. Unlike the other realms of humankind, the Symbarians ignored the treaty with Karvosti, and also managed to keep their mystical discoveries secret – most likely by developing concealing magic and moving all questionable activities to the halls and passages of the Underworld. It is also clear that the notion of human divinity – mankind as the masters of the world and existence itself – was widely accepted at the time.

Perhaps it was their encounter with the might of Karvosti that gave rise to the belief that humans had lost some of their divine powers; maybe this is where the pursuit of exaltation was born? For whatever reason, the Symbarians started abandoning Symbolism in favor of more aggressive mystical practices, without the guidance of the traditions that were later developed to reduce corruption's impact on the body and world. It seems that what are now known as blight marks were considered a status symbol, and that blight births were seen as a sacred sign. Along with the corruption grew a lust for power, and eventually

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Timeline

The following timeline must be taken for what it is – based on questionable sources and highly contentious among Ambrian experts on ancient history. But at least it presents the most widespread version of history, giving a rough indication of when major, transformative events took place.

≈ 2100 years ago
The eastern city of Asbarast is abandoned and its people journey across the Ravens.

≈ 2050 years ago
Ambal Seba is founded in a western valley and the people start spreading across the plains; the ruler Cidriana negotiates a peace treaty with the Lord of Karvosti.

≈ 2000–1500 years ago
Humans claim dominion over the plains, constantly plagued by local wars, conflicts with Karvosti and predator attacks.

≈ 1400 years ago
Ambal Seba is destroyed; the Symbarian conquest begins and their realm grows.

≈ 1100 years ago
Queen Serala-Han Urel's armies are massacred; the Symbarian Empire reigns supreme over the moorlands.

≈ 1000 years ago
The Eternal Night descends on Symbaroum.

≈ 800–600 years ago
Humans start to return; the clans are established.

≈ 950–900 years ago
The elves arrive and start combating the corruption; decades later they reach Symbar and the empire fights its final battle; Davokar is planted and takes root.

≈ 500 years ago
The Spider King declares war on humanity; Serembar is elected the first High Chieftain of Karvosti.

≈ 480 years ago
The Iron Pact is formed, in the midst of war.

≈ 450 years ago
The Spider King falls and the war is over; Lindaros is founded in the south.

≈ 350 years ago
The Kingdom of Alberetor is founded; Almara Argona becomes its first queen.

≈ 200 years ago
The entire population of Lindaros is wiped out by a terrible epidemic.

≈ 40 years ago
The Dark Lords attack Alberetor and The Great War begins.

≈ 20 years ago
The Ambrians arrive in the Promised Land, searching for a new home.

Symbar (the name of both the realm and its ruler) raised his sights, hungry for more – more land to dominate, more people to rule.

The legends of Ambal Seba do not specify who orchestrated its downfall, but one theory that is becoming increasingly popular among Ambrian scholars points to the kingdom of Symbar as the main enemy. Perhaps the guardians of pure magic discovered what the Symbarians were up to and demanded an immediate end to their activities, with threats of reprisals. Whatever the case, we know for certain that Ambal Seba was destroyed, quite literally, and that this event marked the birth of the Symbarian Empire.

THE CONQUESTS OF SYMBAR

The centuries that followed brought the expansion of Symbaroum – a Symbarian word meaning "the autocracy of Symbar." Sometimes it happened through wars of conquest, sometimes through diplomatic maneuvers, and sometimes through lesser kingdoms joining the empire voluntarily rather than going through a violent annexation. Why this did not spark a reaction from the power on Karvosti is a mystery that has caused many to speculate whether it perished early on, or whether it even existed in the first place. But maybe the majority of experts are right in stressing that centuries of peace can make even the most paranoid ruler blind to threats and rebellious plots.

According to Black Cloaks and learned monster experts, this development caused the previously widespread veneration of natural spirits and wild animals to be replaced by daemon worship, probably because the Symbarians viewed abominations and other unworldly creatures as powerful versions of the chosen and exalted human form. As Symbaroum continued to grow, so did the zeal to free humanity from the inhibitions oppressing their divine being. Morphology, the study of the human being's shape and form, seems to have been predominant among the learned, and from it emerged the theourgical practices which were meant to set their divinity free: to ennoble, improve and strengthen the human physiognomy.

Many scholars refer to the war against Queen Serala-Han Urel and her vast kingdom in the north as the Final Battle – that is, the battle that made Symbar the unrivaled human power west of the Ravens. After that, the emperors, princes, and former warlords of Symbaroum had time to think about more than just the next conquest. The emphasis on spiritual and physical enhancement grew, and the importance of challenging oneself became vital for retaining one's honor, power, and status. The animals, spirits and wardens of the wild were slaughtered – even abominations (many of them almost certainly blight-born Symbarians) were hunted down and slain by humans seeking to affirm their power and supremacy. But the unbridled development soon began to cause problems; problems that would only get worse.

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Proving your dominance over nature was vitally important to the lords and priests of Symbaroum.

The Knowledge of the Learned

Player characters with the Loremaster feature will probably know much of what is mentioned in the section about the region's ancient history. The Gamemaster may let players with such characters read some or all of this text. A more ambitious alternative is to put together an abridged version based on what a specific character may know or have heard of – a summary which the player should then have access to while playing.

THE FALL OF SYMBAROUM

Roughly one thousand years before Queen Korinthia Nightbane led her people to the Promised Land, Symbaroum began its steep and relentless decline. Evidence suggests that the destruction started at the heart of the empire and spread from there. The details are vague, but that corruption played an integral part in what happened can hardly be disputed. Legends credited to elves and trolls tell of princes who continued their reign even after they were thoroughly corrupted; priesthoods that made pacts with dragons who in their thirst for power allowed themselves to be blight-born; and areas where both land and water were so heavily tainted that all who lived there turned into ravenous daemons. The central authorities lost control; the Eternal Night fell over Symbar.

But apparently there were opposing forces as well – voices, even whole priesthoods, who had long warned of an imminent disaster; people and organizations who passed on the wisdom of Ambal Seba and did their best to reverse the development. Perhaps Emperor Symbar finally listened? There are tales, pictures and obscure scriptures indicating that the Emperor issued a decree forbidding all forms of "magical/mystical manipulation of Creation" under pain of death. Other sources mention the establishment of Night Patrols – armed units who together with specially selected mystics (most of them presumably Staff Mages and Symbolists) were tasked with seeking out and destroying all corrupted creatures and sources of corruption. But Symbar's realm had grown far beyond anyone's control. The catastrophe could not be stopped.

There are different views on exactly when the other cultural beings in the region really started revolting against the empire. Some troll experts insist that the trolls never stopped opposing the humans; others claim that the arachs still lived in certain areas, sometimes cooperating with Symbarian provinces, sometimes involved in rebellions. Whatever the case, it is clear that mankind's dominance remained unchallenged until the darkness they had created started to overtake them. And then came the elves.

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The Theourgs

The word "theourg" which is mentioned in this text is not to be confused with "theurg". Sure, both refer to priest mystics, but the former more precisely to the priesthood of Symbaroum, not to Ambrian worshipers of Prios. Read more about the Theourgs of Symbar in upcoming modules.

THE BATTLE OF SYMBAR

Though there may be reason to question the elves' accounts, the ones about the darkest hours of the empire are largely consistent – especially as the stories are supported by human sources. The elves came from the west to combat corruption, not humans. They found allies in arachs, bestiaals and trolls, but also among humans who were already preaching moderation. Together they started a purge which led to even greater aggression from the hordes of the night. Consequently, even though they were not the elves' primary target, the humans were hit hard and ruthlessly, and so, desperate and terrified, they fled in all directions.

Those who believe that the power on Karvosti survived the rise and expansion of Symbaroum also claim that its ruler fought the elves, leading an army of beasts and abominations – probably because the newcomers seemed like more of a threat than the pact-bound humans. But the people of the west and their allies would not be intimidated, nor stopped; slowly but surely, over what must have been decades, they advanced closer and closer to the Mother of Darkness, the high seat of Symbar.

If it is true that the Emperor had started taking measures against the corruption, he must have been dethroned or killed at some point during the war, because all sources agree on how it ended: the battle of Symbar was long and exceedingly bloody. Stories tell of elves, spiders, and bestiaals, against humans and abominations – tens of thousands killed. Even wilder legends add nature spirits, colossi and arch trolls to the elven army, and primal blight beasts, blight-born dragons and companies of undead sorcerers to Symbar's. But whoever fought and died, Prince Eneáno emerged victorious.

And Symbaroum fell, into dreamless sleep.

IN THE SHADOW OF SYMBAR

The battle was won, but the struggle of the elves was not yet over. The task of singing and weaving the region's remaining corruption to sleep and planting Davokar to bind the darkness with its roots must also have taken them decades. Some reports state that the trolls provided help, especially with the corruption that had seeped down and taken root in the Underworld. Numerous blight-born humans, beasts and primal blight beasts were lulled to sleep, covered by earth, moss, and mycelium. They could have been killed, but Prince Eneáno's orders were clear: *"Let this evil that mankind awakened remain, in idle slumber; let it live on as a reminder of the gravity of our undertaking. What happened here must never be repeated. Nevermore!"*

More than a century passed before the first humans dared return to the lands of their ancestors. The elves would not let them enter the burgeoning Davokar, so they settled on its outskirts, divided into clans which had emerged during the years of exile, often based in what used to be provinces of Symbaroum. Wise from memories that lived on in stories, songs, and plays, most of them submitted to the elves' will without a fight. According to the stories of the Huldras, this was also when the already existing Witchcraft was refined – a form of mystical practice which the elves accepted, maybe even helped develop.

While the humans started to regain their former strength, the spiders and the spider people (the arachs) thrived under the ocean of leaves. Neither witches nor elves can explain exactly why Angathal Taar, better known as the Spider King, declared war on humanity, but many potential reasons have been theorized: good old lust for power, according to most Ambrians; self-preservation, according to many barbarians; a belief that the humans would repeat the sins of Symbar, claims the elven version. In any case, the threat of the Spider King accelerated the collaboration that had already started to form between the clans; the office of High Chieftain was established, and the clans united under a common banner.

Perhaps it was the war that made the humans forget their agreement with the elves; the passage of time certainly contributed as well – the tales, songs and plays started to seem more like myths and pure fiction. In any event, the High Chieftains and their warriors and witches pushed deeper and deeper into the forest, in a way the elves could not accept. But after a few violent confrontations, Prince Eneáno chose a diplomatic approach; he walked alone to the High Chieftain's stronghold on Karvosti, where he made Agadan and his Huldra, Bovosin, understand the importance of preserving the slumber of Symbaroum. The Iron Pact was founded, during a meeting between ten clan chieftains and three elven princes, and the elves swore not to interfere in the war against the Spider King – a few decades later, the fifth human ruler of Karvosti, High Chieftain Maiesticar, was finally able to slay Angathal Taar and put an end to the war.

THE LONG REST

Having won the war against the spiders, with Iron Pact rings on their fingers or upper arms, the barbarian chieftains and witches were able to establish a new order of life, in harmony with both the elves and the growing forest at large. Some were less enthusiastic about this than others, and the change did not occur without protests and outright revolts. But nevertheless, the order that arose after the Spider King's death lasted for hundreds of years. There were exceptions, perhaps most notably the city state of Lindaros, which was founded

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Alberetor

Not all humans returned to the Davokar region. Among those who remained in their place of refuge were the founders of Lindaros and the people who had fled all the way down to the sparsely populated area which 350 years later would become the kingdom of Alberetor.

shortly after the war and over the course of roughly two and half centuries managed to repeat enough of Symbaroum's mistakes to bring about their own destruction.

Davokar continued to grow vaster and wilder, as untamed wilderness always does. The trolls returned to the surface, the battered arachs hid in the depths of the forest, and both herbivores and carnivores thrived in the uncontrolled vegetation that blanketed the ruins of the old empire. The elves of the Iron Pact kept watch over particularly blight-stricken areas, warned the witches of budding threats, and put ravenous abominations back to sleep whenever they awoke. The ruins of what was once the Heart of the Eternal Night, the city of Symbar, required constant supervision and care.

But no harmony lasts forever, not without discordant notes and raspy vibrations infecting its melodies. Reports differ on when the change first became noticeable. But though there are mixed opinions about what caused it, few people alive today would deny that Davokar is darkening – and at a time when the elves of the Iron Pact are becoming too few to maintain control, and barbarians and Ambrians alike are becoming increasingly reckless in their efforts to explore the forest and plunder its riches. Perhaps it is true that the darkness is returning, that old Symbaroum is twisting in its sleep, that Davokar is about to awaken...

In the Shadow of the Beacon

This chapter opens with a segment that accounts for a number of misconceptions regarding the officially accepted version of Thistle Hold's history, supplemented with some hitherto unspoken truths. After that follows a collection of specific cases where one can say that appearances are at odds with reality – cases which the Gamemaster can use as a basis for creating homebrew scenarios and adventures, or even lengthy campaigns.

Blood of the Past

THERE IS PROBABLY no one living in Thistle Hold who has not heard the story of how Lasifor Nightpitch delivered an armful of Twilight Thistles to the court in Yndaros, how he instructed the medicus of the gravely ill Queen Mother in how to prepare and use it, and later paid for the construction of Thistle Hold with the reward gained from his heroic act. This story is not purely fictional but it leaves out a very important detail: Abesina, Queen Korinthia's seriously victimized mother, is not sick. She is undead.

When it was announced that an immense reward would befall the person who could cure the Queen Mother of her "severe inflammation," the war veteran Lasifor realized the truth behind the vague diagnosis. If theurgs and wizards had done all they could without succeeding, the ailment had to be of a very particular nature. To a veteran with fresh memories from The Great War the explanation was evident – Abesina had fallen victim to the vile, reanimating magic of the Dark Lords.

The fact that what has died can be awoken to a kind of half-life is something well-known among the barbarian clans. According to the witches there is no real cure, but the symptoms can be mitigated with an elixir made from the rare Twilight Thistle. Lasifor took the opportunity, both to enrich himself

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and gain a hold on House Kohinoor – today he is the only Ambrian who knows where the Twilight Thistle grows, and one of very few who knows a family secret that the Queen is prepared to safeguard at almost any price. Thus, when Lasifor with an insinuating look "wished" to exchange part of the promised reward into a title as Prince of the Realm and the ownership over an area close to Davokar, it is hardly surprising that Korinthia reluctantly went along with the agreement.

Aside from this unofficial condition for the founding of the town, Thistle Hold has over the years suffered several crises which have been handled without public knowledge. Below you will find an account of the most serious ones, with a special focus on how the events are affecting the current relationships between those involved.

BY SWEAT AND BLOOD

It is totally true that the palisade and a major part of town were constructed in less than six months and that the goblin tribe Karabbadokk was involved in the project. What is not known is that two other tribes were nearly annihilated in the process.

Lasifor Nightpitch became friends with the current chief Idelfons' father, Ederlug, at the time when he lived with clan Zarek. The Karabbadokks had developed close and friendly ties to the Zareks, and that alliance made them strong enough to subdue two other tribes who were trespassing on their hunting grounds. When Nightpitch and Ederlug shook hands and spat upon each other's cheeks, thereby sealing the agreement that made the Karabbadokks leave the woods, the fate of the tribes Buhulgus and Skakkragas were simultaneously sealed.

Under the supervision of the witch Yagaba, large quantities of the drug called Wild Chew (*Player's Guide*, page 183) were prepared. The chew was given to the Buhulgs and Skakks, making them docile and also capable of toiling until they literally worked themselves to death. Several thousands of goblins died, whipped by the Karabbadokks, who in turn obeyed the instructions of their human construction masters.

Idelfons and many other aged Karabbadokks still remember the atrocities they were driven to by the encouraging cheers of Mayor Nightpitch. Every time the chief reminds Lasifor of the promises made, he also takes the opportunity to remind him of the dreadful price paid by the Buhulgs and Skakks. Thus far, youngsters like the hot-head Ugtuls (*Gamemaster's Guide*, page 29) know nothing of the misdeeds of the past. But if the truth became known, most of the Karabbadokks would probably rally behind the insurgents – a fact that both Idelfons and Mayor Nightpitch are painfully aware of.

ALMOST DOOMED

Nowadays, Nightpitch is on good terms with High Chieftain Tharaban and most chieftains of the southern region, but that has not always been the case. During the autumn of year 14, as the town was preparing to celebrate its one-year anniversary, the Hold was all but doomed.

Thanks to Thistle Hold, the Ambrians had started to journey further and further into Davokar. Battles had been fought with the clans Karohar and Odaiova, and it was clear that the people of the Queen would not abide by the witches' taboos. When they also awoke the horned toad beast of Clearwater, the High Chieftain decided to act – an army of Wrath Guards, bear warriors from Odaiova, claw fighting Karits, and five witches riding on colossi was put together and marched on the northernmost outpost of the Ambrians.

Had it not been for the ambitious and treacherous Chieftain Embersind of Odaiova, the two thousand barbarians would likely have burnt Thistle Hold to cinders. But luckily Lasifor was warned of the incoming threat and traveled to meet the enemy in the woods. And the mayor stood strong in the face of danger. During the tense meeting he made the assembled chieftains understand the futility of attacking the Hold – it would in no way deter the Queen in her ambitions, but on the contrary lead to immediate retributions and that the colonization of Davokar would pick up speed. Additionally, he explained that the Queen would rather see the High Chieftain as an ally than an enemy, and that he and the witch Yagaba would gladly function as intermediaries in the negotiations between the peoples.

The chieftains were not convinced, but the witch Eferneya came with a proposal that finally made them bury their war axes. The suggestion was that the Ambrians would contribute to limiting the incursions into the forest; a proposal which one year later, after many twists and turns, led to the imposition of the Explorer's License.

The number of people who know just how close the town was to its doom is very limited. The only outsiders to bear witness were two Ambrian hunters, who watched the meeting while hiding in the undergrowth. Their tale was recorded and stored away in the archives of the Legation, but it was never taken seriously, not by the notaries, nor by the patrons of the dives where the hunters used to drink.

NIGHTHOME'S BLOODBATH

Year 17 the brother of Mayor Nightpitch, Herado, became the commandant of the Town Watch. He assumed the name Duskwatcher and has ever since handled his duties relatively well, despite the popular opinion that it was not merit but family relations which led to the appointment. In reality, the story is even more complicated than that.

The fifty-year-old Herado carries both visible and invisible scars from The Great War. For a long time he was a wreck, surviving on handouts from his brother and an unhealthy mixture of intoxicants. His misfortune seamed to end when he met the barbarian beauty Klarana – he cleaned up, reduced the consumption of drugs, and was even employed as a notary at the Town Seat. But it all came to naught during a bloody evening at Nighthome.

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FACTIONS AND LEADERS IN THISTLE HOLD

Faction	Leader	Notes
The Mayor	Lasifor Nightpitch	The uncrowned ruler of the Hold
	Yagaba	Witch and the Mayor's loyal friend
	Ader Gorinder	The Mayor's right-hand-man, runs the Town Seat
	Dario	Tax Commissioner
	Asmerda	Law Commissioner
	Kalio Galeia	Building Commissioner
	Agramai Kalfas	Sanitary Commissioner, secretly a cultist
House Kohinoor	Suria Argona	The Queen's zealous legate
	Asmerda	Secret Agent and informer
	Dekamedo	Akman Kohinoor, son of the Queen's cousin
The Noble Houses	Alkantor Argona	Power-hungry and increasingly desperate
	Lesena Vearra	Acts adventurous but seeks alliances
	Ana Herengol	Alesaro Kohinoor's agent in town
	Keroldo Erebus	A true lounger, Bailiff of Blackmoor
	Iasogoi Brigo	Former treasure hunter with ambitions
	Davidos Berakka	Duke Junio's envoy in the Hold
The Sun Church	Father Elfeno	Leader of the temple and a powerful theurg
	Deseba the Old	Living Lightbringer and secretly a reformist
	Prior Emundi	Leader of the town's monastery
	Father Sarvola	Heretic and openly a reformist
The Iron Pact	Lysindra Goldengrasp	Former fortune hunter, merciless fighter
	Mearoel	Autumn elf who hates humans
Ordo Magica	Cornelio	Chapter Master, loyal to the Grand Master
	Eufrynda	Ambitious Master, dislikes Cornelio
	Goncai	Tipsy Master, likes Eufrynda
	Kullinan Furia	Powerful wizard with his own agenda

Lasifor was throwing a party in celebration of the Queen's birthday. Herado and Klarana were there, as were Commandant Perla with her husband, and Tax Commissioner Dario with his old mother. During dessert Herado burst into tears and when Klarana leaned in to console him he went into a full-blown frenzy – the scarred veteran lunged and punched as if in a trance. As Perla stood up to stop the madness, the Mayor screamed at the top of his lungs, something Yagaba perceived as a signal and struck the Commandant with four *eldritch blasts*. The husband of the fallen barely had time to draw his sword before Lasifor slit his throat, to protect both his brother and his friend.

In order to save themselves, the Mayor and his witch came up with a plan. The dead were moved to their home, which then was staged to make it look like it had been subjected to an attack from rebellious barbarians. Herado was appointed to succeed Perla as Commandant and given charge of the investigation, in exchange for him promising never to touch any intoxicants again. Regarding the Tax Commissioner and his mother, the latter luckily slept all through the commotion. Dario was kindly threatened into silence and has so far refrained from speaking about what happened. But he knows what he knows, and the day may yet come when he decides to make use of his knowledge for personal gain...

THE SARVOLA CRISIS

Sarvola of House Bargomol is the lone survivor of a noble family whose other members refused to leave their residence in eastern Alberetor and in time met a particularly cruel fate. Sarvola followed his tutor Peonio to the Promised Land where he soon became known as Sarvola the Disbeliever. The quarrels between him and the soon-to-be First Theurg at the Cathedral of Martyrs in Yndaros escalated until Sarvola renounced the church to seek shelter behind Thistle Hold's palisade. Along on the journey he brought a small fortune, salvaged from the family residence in Alberetor.

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The move and establishment of the heretical Mission House sparked a diplomatic crisis that Sarvola himself was unaware of. Within the Sun Church there were (and are) two distinct factions – one dogmatic, hardened and strengthened by the war against the Dark Lords; one more tempered and forgiving rooted in the old faith. Representatives of the latter alignment were to a large part in agreement with the accused heretic and they also had the trust of the Queen, not least since she was uncomfortable with the sulfurous rhetoric of the theurgs and liturgs.

Mayor Nightpitch was close to handing Sarvola over to the wolves when Deseba the Old – the informal leader of the gentler faction – arrived in Thistle Hold with a message from Korinthia. The Queen promised that she and her confidants within the Sun Church would persuade the First Father to leave Sarvola alone, provided that the apostate remained inside the Hold. And since Nightpitch actually appreciated the Mission House's calming effect on certain segments of the populace, he gladly accepted the proposal.

First Father Jeseebegai was in turn allowed to send a troop of templars to the free settlement Earthmoor, in the eastern hills of New Beretor. The story of the massacre in that den of heretics never became publicly known.

THE TRUTH ABOUT HALOBAN

It was the barbarians who first started telling stories about the Beast Clan – blight marked, raving warriors that attacked humans and goblins in southern Davokar and that did not carry any defining characteristics of the established clans. And soon the first Ambrian witnesses emerged. Ten dead in a logging camp were blamed on the Beast Clan; then a butchered farmer's family and a burnt down croft. The speculations ran wild. Could it be disguised Ambrian patriots out to defame barbarians in general? Or was it Karits who masked themselves hoping to scare the Ambrians away?

In fact, the Sun Priests of Thistle Hold have heard the truth about the Beast Clan, spoken by one of their prisoners – the gravely stigmatized hunter Malrek who remains in a cell deep beneath the temple: when the Ambrians attacked the Jezites in year 10, a large part of the clan members fled down into the natural caves below the fortress, and the camouflaged passage down was never found by Korinthia's troops. The remaining Jezites have lived down there ever since, continuously affected by the nurturing but also corrupting power of the black bedrock . Natural cavities in the Underworld have also given them access to the surface, by way of gorges and small sinkholes inside Davokar.

Malrek was captured and told his tale in year 18. The hunter's testimony was regarded as improbable but so worrying that it must be examined. A group of Black Cloaks followed Malrek's directions, but even if they found several passages down into the Abyss they located no tunnels leading beneath the town. During the winter of year 19, Lasifor Nightpitch and the Queen's Legation was informed and it was decided that the search must continue, now supported by the Queen's Rangers and scouts from clan Odaiova. But soon the hunt was called off since natural caves below Thistle Hold had been found, though without any traces of living beings. The caves were never fully mapped; sensitive individuals warned about the thoroughly corrupt and corrupting nature of the deep.

THE ASPIRING EXECUTIONER

That the Iron Pact has agents in Thistle Hold is of course very true, even if they are guilty of far fewer acts of sabotage than believed. The main focus of the elves is to stop humans from stomping about in the most corrupted parts of Davokar, not to strike against targets outside the forest. But this does not stop individual Iron Pact members from taking initiatives that divert from that stance.

Two years ago, the vicious summer elf Dorael-Ri used the name of the Iron Pact to gain entrance to the Hold. One of the pact's allies back then was the town executioner, a barbarian woman who called herself Tyrana. The executioner slew two guards in one of the towers between the North and West Gates, and threw down a rope to the waiting warband. The attack was aimed at Nighthome, and at killing the Mayor and his treacherous witch.

Luckily, the elves were seen coming over the palisade by a reasonably sober treasure hunter named Sarfas. And luckily, he snuck off to the nearby monastery instead of making himself known to the intruders. The Black Cloaks were quick to act – to avoid panic they sent a runner to the Mayor's residence while shadowing the elves from some distance. Only once Dorael-Ri and his warriors had entered Nighthome did they make their move, supported by Lasifor's bodyguards and the witch Yagaba. The eight elves were killed and later buried in the dirt of the plant beds on the residence's roof.

In exchange for his silence, Sarfas was given information about a virgin forest ruin. And just as Nightpitch had counted on he met his death right there, in the claws of a newly awakened cryptwalker with a horrible morning temper.

MASTER OF MANIPULATIONS

Agramai Kalfas, Thistle Hold's immensely popular Sanitary Commissioner and cousin to the commander of the Queen's Rangers, is actually a prominent member of The Sacred of the Old Blood – a cult of Ambrian nobles claiming that the dark power of Davokar can be harnessed and used to ennoble both body and spirit. The cult's existence is not known by anyone but the initiated, although fanciful rumors have started spreading through the halls of power. In any case, that such a cult truly exists and that it might have an agent in Thistle Hold is nothing that Lasifor Nightpitch has even considered.

Agramai has orchestrated numerous incidents over the years, to advance the cause of the cult and invite Davokar's

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powers to town. As a cultist he calls himself the Prince, acts through manipulation and intricate lies, and is always careful to cover his tracks. Most often he uses drugged agents, or ones ensnared by sorcery, and kills them as soon as they have performed their tasks; preferably persons already involved in some lesser cult. That way, the Town Watch will not have to search for long before believing that they have found the root of evil.

Most of the missions are about removing persons who directly or indirectly are trying to hinder Ambrians from approaching Davokar. He has uncovered and had no less than four Iron Pact allies killed, including an elf who came over the palisade on an espionage mission. Adding to that, he has appropriated numerous powerful and dark artifacts from the town's auction houses and kidnapped untainted humans to use their blood in his sorcery rituals. Thus far he has refrained from trying to manipulate the Mayor and his colleagues at the Town Seat. But he is a frequent and welcomed guest at the Hall of Knights, where he, as gently as possible, is trying to find out if anyone else among the region's nobles has come to realize the truth about the power of the dark.

The only real indication of the existence of The Prince are a few similar witness statements. In a few cases they come from some of his agents who have been captured alive, in other cases from persons who have seen him meeting the agents prior to some attack. But since he never shows his face when dealing with the henchmen, the statements come off as ghost stories more than anything else – stories about a huge man with his face shaded by a deep hood, dressed in flowing black garments. The Town Watch assigns no credibility to the information and every time it recurs the guards jest between themselves, complaining that yet another witness has heard too many tall tales about the elusive, but oh-so-fictional, Shadow.

The buildings in town are often placed so close that you can jump between rooftops – which is perfect for reconnaissance, escapes and ranged attacks.

Thistle Hold Plot Hooks

THE SENSE OF security provided by the palisade is nothing to rely on – all who has lived in town for more than a few days know as much. Sure, the Hold is calmer than Yndaros, Agrella and the depraved Kastor, but if you think you can wander the streets at night without troubles you will soon find that you are mistaken.

The secrets covered here describe what is hidden below the surface of twelve establishments introduced in the first section of this book. Of course, the idea is that the Gamemaster can use the material to create intrigues and adventures, but sometimes the secrets can be revealed without the player characters' involvement – simply to make Thistle Hold appear as a living setting where the characters never can be really sure about what they will find behind the facades of the buildings.

RED EYE'S MISTRESS

The lame, hunch-backed and red-eyed Galamar has many reasons for being generous and loving. Not that his current life in Blackmoor is so fantastic, but because things would become even worse if he did not make an effort to make friends. Why? Well, simply because it is up to Red Eye to care for his blight born mother, Ragama.

The swelling abomination lies in a pit below Galamar's tent, imbued with an insatiable appetite for lukewarm, human flesh. The cavity is hidden by a wooden hatch, which in turn is covered by a sloppily crafted floor of planks, and every night Galamar has to convince some unfortunate inhabitant of the tent camp to embrace death by falling into the dark. If unsuccessful, some intoxicants and a discreet nudge usually do the trick.

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The real problem is that Ragama is no longer content to just survive – she desires to be worshipped. With the help of Galamar a new cult is growing, made up of blight marked humans and goblins that would do anything for the abomination. More and more of the camp's outcasts are joining, searching for a mission in life and a reassurance that their blighted souls still have some kind of value. If no one puts a stop to it all, it will not take long before the cult is strong enough to make a grab for power in Blackmoor.

THE BLOOD DAUGHTER

The embodied deity of Saar-Kahn, the Blood Daughter, was reborn thirteen years ago. Chief Razameaman's fourth child with the witch Saadar, was born feet first and arrived in the world drenched in the blood of her dying mother. The birth marked the start of a new era in the life of the clan, an era that, according to them, is predestined to end with the resurrection of the Symbarian Empire. They have already founded a pact with clan Gaoia, called the Sovereign's Oath, and initiated a war campaign against Clan Enoai aiming to overthrow its leadership.

Razameaman and Rábaiamon, chieftain of Gaoia, are far from crude ruffians. They realize that Ambria, sooner or later, will become involved, and also that a town like Thistle Hold is of strategic significance for the internal affairs of the forest clans. Since two years back, a handful of agents working for the Sovereign's Oath have been hiding among the staff of the tavern Odovakar – an arrangement made possible through the kidnapping of Verama and Malkor's baby sister, now held hostage in the fortress of the Saars. The agents are gathering information about various Ambrian factions and carry out raids against the representatives of hostile clans inside the palisade. The long-term goal of the Sovereign's Oath is to unite all clans under the Blood Daughter's banner, and achieving this will be much easier if the people of Davokar have a common and mighty enemy in sight!

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SEEDS OF EVIL

The Orv roosters fighting bloody battles in Benego's cellar vaults are not captured in the depths of Davokar. Instead, they arrive at the dive as normal birds and are then brought up on a diet of thoroughly corrupt damdra-seeds, harvested from the brink of a pitch black pond at the center of the Marshes. Aside from the fact that the birds become blight born they also grow stronger, faster, and indifferent to pain – something the rooster keeper Rend has noticed with delight.

Rend has started to pilfer seeds from his employer and share the miraculous grains with his friends. The three youngsters believe they can avoid being corrupted by the seeds if they are careful not to eat too many, but this is of course not even close to the reality of things. First, they have to consume more and more of the seeds for them to have any effect; secondly, they are all experiencing an ever-greater longing for the sense of power that comes from eating them. Lately, they have also suffered memory lapses and to their horror discovered that these remarkably often coincide with terrible acts of senseless violence in the northern district of town.

The question is how long it will take before someone finds them out and tries to stop them, because they are not able to resist the allure of the seeds on their own...

THE CALAMITY OF KLAVMAN

If you seem to notice that the widow Aragina at the Court and Harp has had the hint of a smile on her lips lately, you may very well be right. The thing is, she has met a new man – Klamandro Barke: handsome, mysterious, and much younger than her. What she does not know, is that Klamandro's real name is Klavman and that he is a really bad apple tangled up in the web of Sanitary Commissioner Agramai. He does not know who is giving him orders, since Agramai never shows himself, but he is convinced that his very survival hinges on his obedience.

Klavman's task is to spy on the noble guests at the inn. The upper floor is constructed so that one can move around inside the walls between the rooms, and both hear and see what the guests are up to – Aragina's late husband had plans on earning a little extra through blackmailing but never had the courage to follow through. Klavman is only supposed to observe and report, but lately he has had a hard time resisting the temptation to use what he learns in order to enrich himself.

Together with his young accomplice Sera, he has coerced the Yndaros-based merchant Lasunder out of more than a hundred thaler, after having witnessed him utilizing the services provided by the Lindworm's Nest at the inn. Now they have contacted him again with demands for additional payments and Lasunder is starting to search for someone who can help him track down and silence the extortionist.

ENTHRALLED POTIONS

The Thaler's Drugstore hides a secret that if revealed would have disastrous consequences for the siblings Ofera and Moira: all their most potent elixirs are crafted by a shackled and chained Liege Troll. The troll, called Onrax, was found by their father in an icy cave in the Titans. It was chained to the wall with sturdy iron links and wore a blackened silver band around its ankle – a band that the troll could not remove by himself and that made it weak and drowsy. Skanander and Onrax brokered a deal: The alchemist promised to free the troll and cut the silver chain before his death, provided that Onrax agreed to teach him everything he knew.

Skanander died without making good on his promise and the sisters have no intention of cutting the band. Onrax sits in his chamber, behind a hidden door in the drugstore's basement, again fettered by heavy chains and forced to produce master level elixirs on command. He obeys to survive, and he survives while waiting for a chance to seek vengeance.

So far his existence is known to none but the sisters, but that may soon change. His hatred and bitterness sometimes grow so intense that he literally corrupts everything he touches. Every time someone consumes a master elixir purchased at the Thaler's Drugstore, there is a 20% risk that he or she suffers 1d4 of temporary Corruption (player rolls the dice). One can only wonder how long it will take before someone starts asking questions about the quality of the Thaler's stock...

VICTIMS OF NECESSITY

The dwarves living outside Küam Zamok are not just anyone, but stem from the dozen families that after the fall of Symbaroum developed into the tyrannical aristocracy of their people. About five years after the Ambrians arrived in Lindaros, the dwarven populace had had enough and rose up in a bloody revolt. Most of the rulers were massacred but many saw what was coming and left the underground realm in time. Unable to do anything constructive, they kept hidden in the wilderness until Yndaros was ready to take them in. From year 13 and on, the families have one by one established themselves in the capital and (under threat) procured a long list of workshops and taverns that they are now in charge of.

The dwarven acrobats making the visitors at Spectacle laugh like crazy are in fact the family Merotzak, running and trying to hide from Artek Valotzar – the leader of the most powerful dwarven family in Yndaros. Mayor Nightpitch has allowed them to stay, as long as they do not meddle with the businesses in town and manage to support themselves. The latter is easier said than done, as the family members have no practical skills to speak of. Performing like clowns at Spectacle is of course far beneath their dignity and something that most of them have a hard time living with. But as the saying goes: necessity knows no law.

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The reason why they are hunted has to do with the order of succession. Traditionally, the Merotzak family has been closer to the High Seat than the Valotzars, but they were severely weakened by the revolt. Prince Artek and his allies still have not given up on trying to hunt down the nine surviving members of the Merotzak bloodline. His brother Kertel is on his way to Thistle Hold, where he will try to sneak into town and hire a group of henchmen to remove the competitors, one after the other.

FALSE FEATHERS

An auction house in Thistle Hold lives or dies depending on its credibility. Hence, Sefira, owner of the Treasury, plays at very high stakes when she both produces and sells falsified "artifacts" at her establishment. The production is run by three young but gifted and creative artisans who live in the village Glimmervann less than a day's ride from the Hold, in a house paid for by Sefira. They are tasked with manufacturing non-magical curiosities that can be passed off as Symbarian art objects, and which may be used to increase the selection at the auction house when necessary.

Should this secret be revealed, Sefira's career is over. Thus far, she has never come close to being exposed, but this has made her both greedy and sloppy. Normally, she always studies the objects arriving from Glimmervann with great care, before signing certificates of authenticity and putting them up for auction. But lately she has not been as meticulous with the control, and a couple of customers have actually returned to question the genuineness of the objects they have bought.

However, worst of all is that Count Alkantor Argona recently spent a small fortune on an antique locket to give to his spouse, and that a friend of the spouse reacted with suspicion when she saw the perfect surface of the item. The Count has asked Sefira for a comment on the matter and is not fully satisfied with her response; it is far from unlikely that he will fund a private investigation into the affairs of the Treasury.

SIGNS TO DECIPHER

The soothsayer Dodramos is indeed a Black Cloak, but the story about him fleeing from the monastery of the Twilight Friars is but part of his cover. In reality, he is still an active agent, tasked with the mission of gathering information from the sludge-covered bottom layers of the realm. That he lately has been asked to "foresee the future" also for nobles and prosperous merchants is a welcomed bonus. In their company Dodramos presents himself in a more sober light, without offering them any detailed predictions but giving them just enough for them to open up to him, talk about their dreams, ambitions and problems – a tactic which so far has led to two reports on nobles with "suspiciously unwholesome inclinations of a grisly kind."

The time spent in Blackmoor and the stories heard about Ambrian encounters with Davokar have made Dodramos deeply worried. As a devotee of Prios he has a hard time shaking off the conviction that humans must strive to cultivate and tame the wilds. But at the same time, a thought has been growing in his mind – what if the witches are right, what if the Iron Pact is right, what if human advancements are breeding evil? This is of course nothing he would ever verbalize, but he is more or less consciously searching for information pointing in that direction. And when he finds someone he can trust wholeheartedly – preferably someone who is not part of the Sun Church's organization – there are lots of questions that he would pay many thaler to have answered.

THE RENEGADE'S SANCTUARY

The reason why Agdala (see page 24) lives in Thistle Hold is that she has got a death sentence hanging over her head. Eight years ago, hunters of clan Zarek encountered an unwelcome intruder on their territory – a giant salamander-like creature, thoroughly corrupt, that came crawling out of Lake Volgoma. The clan prepared for combat but Agdala, then the clan's keeper, had other plans. She stressed that an attack would cost too many lives; that they instead should try to appease the creature and hope it would quickly return into the waters.

Revealing Forgery

Forgeries of Symbarian artifacts and curiosities can be found all over Ambria, not least in Yndaros where anything having to do with Davokar is in high demand. To reveal that an artifact is a fake, you perform a normal analysis with an **Intelligence (Investigation) check** using the rarity to determine the DC (see the table below). If you know the forger's skill with a forgery kit you can use an opposed check instead, the values below are reasonable defaults otherwise. If you do not have the Loremaster feature you make this check at disadvantage.

RARITY	DC
common	10
uncommon	13
rare	16
very rare	19
legendary	22

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Contrary to the orders of chieftain Monovar, the witch herded a flock of goats to the monster's turf where she received a dream sight – a vision of the creature being chased ashore by an even larger beast. Monovar's warriors attacked soon thereafter, and even though Agdala did her best to help them, her fears came true. Close to fifty women and men died that day and when the battle was over the witch was sentenced. That she had aided the clan members did not help her – the violation of the chieftain's command made her an outcast.

All Zareks arriving to the Hold are a potential threat, since they, according to the law of the clan, not only have the right but the obligation to kill her. However, her son Alomar has trustworthy connections in the Town Watch and is usually informed when some former clan brother or sister enters through the gates. Merchants and envoys are ignored, but all who can pose a threat are kept under close surveillance. At times, Agdala has to hide in her *gaseous form* until the danger has passed, but just as often they decide it is better to be safe than sorry: now and then the goblins keeping the streets of Thistle Hold clean have to wash Zarekian blood off the ground several mornings in a row.

THE MONSTER MAKERS

So, what happens with the leftovers from the Abomitorium? Well, most of it is burnt in the massive furnace of the arena, but a substantial part of the waste disappears elsewhere – namely to a warehouse at the intersection of The Long Way Round and Haloban's Ring.

There a group of wizards led by Magister Feona conducts its more shady research activities; activities kept secret from the leadership and all other members of the local chapter. They purchase all kinds of corpses from the Abomitorium, provided they are not too battered or broken. Aside from being used to study the fundamental building blocks of life, these carcasses are subjected to experiments that most people would regard as loathsome and absolutely terrifying. The isolated building has been equipped with a sound-proofed chamber, and in there the magisters are trying to repeat rituals believed to have been developed by the legendary Theourgs of Symbaroum. The rituals are described in cuneiform writings brought back from Odaban by Iasogoi Brigo – rituals for reawakening the dead and by extension also reconstructing living organisms.

So far, they have only succeeded with the first step, to breathe life into dead creatures like sorcerers do. But Magister Feona's dream may soon come true, with the strange creature coming together in the laboratory – a human head on the body of a huge ogre, with elven blood in its veins and the regeneration gland of a rage troll. What they have not considered, is how to keep the creature in check if they are able to make the ancient rituals work...

THE GUESTS OF THE PEN

The Captain of the penitentiary is indeed the son of the illustrious Katia, and she has taught him all there is to know about torture. That he should degrade himself by making use of his skills on the drunkards of the Hold is of course pure nonsense, but his more permanent inmates are another matter entirely. Two persons have been held in captivity for a very long time, both of them suspected of keeping secrets that the Queen wants revealed.

The more remarkable of the two is Kheltran, the Dark Lord. That all Dark Lords died in the war is not true, even if the few remaining are scattered and have lost much of

Aloéna's Amulet, ARTIFACT

A spirit with strong protective instincts is bound to the silver amulet that Mayor Nightpitch got from the eternity elf Aloéna. The fact that he was offered it makes Lasifor both honored and terrified – the latter since he cannot help but wonder what the elf has seen that makes her feel that he has to be protected.

Spirit Shield

Once per turn, the master of the amulet can ask the spirit to enclose them in an extra layer of protection. A character so protected has resistance to all damage types.

Requires: Reaction
Corruption: 1d4 temporary Corruption per use

Spirit Dance

The master of the amulet can ask of the spirit to dance around them like a whirling wind, averting any incoming attacks made with ranged weapons. The effect ends at the start of the master's next turn. Note that the wearer cannot fire or throw any ranged weapons while the power is active. Melee weapons are not affected by the dance.

Requires: Bonus Action
Corruption: 1d4 temporary Corruption per use

Sacrifice

The one who is bound to the amulet can demand the ultimate sacrifice of the spirit. It completely protects the wearer against all forms of attacks until the start of the master's next turn, while the wearer can act normally. At that time the amulet shatters and cannot be used again.

Requires: Bonus Action
Corruption: 1d8 temporary Corruption per use

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their former power. Kheltran was in Ambria searching for the lost leader of his order, the Dark Lord himself, but he became overconfident and was captured after a hard battle in the tower of Ordo Magica in Thistle Hold. He will never divulge who he is or whom he is searching for – the masterly performed torture of Pergalo grants him more pleasure than pain and is actually the only reason why he so far has not taken his own life. So even if his jailors suspect that he might be a remnant from the realm of the defeated enemy, they will never be able to know this for a fact.

The other inmate held in the basement is the aged thief-queen Voldara. She is the only one who has broken into Nighthome and made it back out alive and with the loot in her possession. What she stole was a bronze necklace, with heavy links and a medallion made from blackened silver and green sapphires. The pendant is a protective amulet, given to a surprised Nightpitch by the eternity elf Aloéna on Karvosti and which he very much would like to see returned (see the textbox *Aloéna's Amulet*). The problem is that when Voldara was captured, she had already hidden it away. It is up to Pergalo to find out where.

Only a handful of people know the story of Voldara and the amulet, but among these is the former companion of the thief-queen, the barbarian warrior Kuranred. He is prepared to pay a large sum to anyone who can free his beloved from the dark, maybe even reveal in which ruin he has hidden the artifact – namely in a lone, majestic bridge fundament that can be found about two days walk from Thistle Hold, on the south side of the River Eanor.

The Dark Lords

According to public knowledge, Prios' templars captured all members of the master cult that the Ambrians call the Dark Lords. Only a few know the truth: the Queen, the Field Marshal, and the members of the Curia among them. But not even they have any precise idea as to how many enemies survived, and they can only guess how powerful the remaining ones might be.

Identifying Dark Lords who have infiltrated Ambria is of the highest priority. Responsible for the operation is Brother Eumenos, and the hunt is carried out by a competent group of Black Cloaks: The Dusk Hunters.

THE APOSTATE'S BEST FRIEND

The assertion that the peddler Kodomar is willing to make money on just about anything is totally true. As an example, he has a deal with Belina at the *Lindworm's Nest*, by which he is allowed to buy unwanted children produced at her establishment and pass them on to childless Ambrian couples, for a profit of course. In fact, most of them are sold to cultists and sorcerers to be used in their heretical rituals. Another example is all the artifacts taken from Davokar which are too thoroughly corrupt to be marketed by serious antique dealers. And he is absolutely no stranger to peddling herbs and berries that can be used to prepare the most horrible poisons known to man.

However, there are other reasons besides greed making Kodomar act the way he does, something that should be evident to anyone familiar with the laws of the clans. If indeed an outcast, he would never have survived this long out in the open, not in a place where so many barbarians pass through. No, Kodomar left his clan quite willingly and he did so intent on waging a long-term war with Ambria. His goal is to destabilize and weaken the Ambrian intruders by nurturing the dark and questionable elements of the realm, thereby instigating internal quarrels and hostilities. And he is not alone.

Spread throughout the population of Blackmoor he has a dozen collaborators who take turns watching the *Huckery*, who act as go-betweens in sensitive deals, and who at times perform carefully planned strikes in order to expedite the collapse of the Ambrian realm. Paradoxically one can argue that Kodomar and his gang are functioning as the guardian spirits of the heretical cults of Narugor, and that many of the cults would have been exposed were it not for their efforts – for example the killing of Black Cloaks on the hunt and diversions making it possible for heretics to flee or prepare to defend themselves.

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Tharaban with his back resting against the stone tower of his predecessor, Serembar.

Embraced by Darkness

This chapter contains detailed information about Karvosti and its surroundings, regarding matters that were touched upon in the first section of this book – it reveals truth behind historical events, which obviously are much more complicated than they first appear, and presents a number of minor plots or conflicts for you to develop into adventures that fits the style and tastes of your gaming group.

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Garavarax's Mother

BEFORE THE FALL of Symbaroum, long before Davokar had taken root and captured the cliff in its green embrace, Karvosti towered over lush plains, very similar to today's Ambria. One might think that the cliff would have been much sought after by the rulers of the region, due to its easily defended plateau, the perfect location where River Malgomor flows into Lake Volgoma, and the authority that comes with literally looking down on one's enemies. But Karvosti was not possible to conquer; Karvosti belonged to Garavarax, the Giant.

Garavarax was the last of his kind, and had been lord of the region for as long as he could remember. He regarded Karvosti itself as his mother, and when humans arrived on the western slopes of the Ravens and began to spread across the plains, he reacted with fear and anger. Garavarax slaughtered hundreds of haggard refugees, thousands even, until they kneeled before him, begging for their lives.

More injured than he would admit, Garavarax decided to show mercy and incorporate the newcomers into his realm, and capitalize on their relative wisdom and subservient disposition. The leader of the humans, Cidriana, swore to respect the sanctity of the Mother Rock, to continuously provide the giant with offerings worthy of a god, and to never gather weapons or power for the purpose of challenging him. Cidriana welcomed this arrangement – better to have peace and a chance to thrive, than to fight further battles against a seemingly invulnerable foe. Not everyone agreed with her decision, but the water, winds, and animals of the world helped Garavarax keep an eye on the humans, and he struck with full force whenever he suspected someone of violating the agreement.

As the centuries passed, Garavarax became increasingly trustful of the humans, convinced that the petty kings constantly fighting each other (sometimes over wrongs or lies conceived by the giant himself) were not willing or able to oppose him. This, of course, was a mistake. While they continued to honor the agreement, the humans made great advancements in places hidden from the giant's gaze. They refined their arts and acquired a deeper and deeper understanding of the laws of reality – partly out of innate curiosity, partly to gain an advantage over local enemies, but also in the hope of freeing mankind from Garavarax's watchful gaze; a gaze that was no longer threatening, but restricting and oppressive.

Perhaps the latter was the main incentive for their combined efforts? Perhaps it was this deep longing for freedom that made it possible for people to unite under Symbaroum's banner; that inspired humanity to strengthen their bodies and minds by mystical means, beyond the limits of nature, and to ultimately seek power by pursuing alliances with the fell forces of the Yonderworld? Perhaps Garavarax was the root of it all?

From his towering plateau, Garavarax witnessed the fall of Symbaroum and watched the survivors scatter and flee. Some few were welcomed on his cliff, to toil and die defending it. With that exception, he would not interfere as the storm raged on – purging the lands of humanity and its remnants; restoring the natural purity of his domain. But then came the elves.

The western folk were intruders of a completely different kind. They would never bow down to him, never bend the knee; they could rob the giant of his lands and conquer his Mother. Garavarax entered the fray and fought alongside primal blight beasts and monstrosities, butchering elves as he had once butchered humans. But where the humans had been intimidated into submission by his terrible wrath, the elven commanders Eneáno and Aloéna found the courage to retaliate.

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It was Aloéna who, through great cunning, mighty hymns, and brute force, single-handedly brought Garavarax down. Thanks to her, the elves could begin to sing the darkness back to sleep; thanks to her, they could plant the forest of Davokar and make its seeds strong enough to take root in the malignant dark, to bind it and fetter it to the ground. Garavarax was never slain – perhaps because he is truly immortal, or because Aloéna, for some reason, decided to spare his life. He was, however, plunged into a deep sleep, his colossal body lowered deep within the Mother Rock, to rest in her bosom, in the nocturnal currents of the Underworld. Aloéna remained on the cliff to keep watch over the giant, ready to fight, should he ever break free from his slumber.

With the exception of Aloéna, Eneáno, a few leaders of the Iron Pact, and the residing Huldra, what is divulged in the above is completely unknown by today's cultural beings. There are legends of giants, and an arbitrary tale claiming that Karvosti was once home to a monstrous creature called Arvarax, but present-day clanfolk regard these as nothing more than stories with little basis in reality.

The same goes for many events that have befallen, or at least occurred on, Karvosti throughout the years. Most people have superficial knowledge of the following incidents, but very few know the whole truth of what actually caused them in the first place.

DAWN OF THE IRON PACT

It can hardly be true that time was suspended during Eneáno's visit on Karvosti, but he really did come alone to parley with the High Chieftain and the Huldra. Despite many violent encounters and countless ambushes, the elves' attempts to stop certain clans from entering the deep woods had failed. But while the clanfolk clearly could not be intimidated, perhaps they could be reasoned with.

The Huldra Bovosin and High Chieftain Agadan heeded the warnings, and after lengthy negotiations they convinced all clan chieftains to comply with the agreement – largely because Bovosin persuaded her Keepers, who in turn managed to sway the more hard-nosed chieftains. The details of the treaty were laid down shortly thereafter, during a meeting between ten clan chieftains and the Elven lords Eneáno, Lirealéa and Ka'eroan. The treaty, today known as the Iron Pact, stated that all barbarians must stay away from the ruins of Symbaroum, the Underworld, and the particularly dark parts of Davokar. In return, the lords swore that there would be peace and harmony between humans and elves.

It is important to note that the clanfolk, even their leaders on Karvosti, have now deliberately been violating this treaty for many years. Not only do they aid Ambrians in their expeditions into Davokar, by carrying luggage or acting as guides and bodyguards, but many of them have also done their fair share of pillaging and looting. This has not gone unnoticed by the elves' younger leaders, who have responded in different ways – some by putting pressure on their elders in the Halls of a Thousand Tears; others by going into exile to combat the Ambrians with violence and sabotage, even infiltrating the Queen's realm in order to influence those in power.

The elders, on the other hand, are less engaged in the matter. Most of them would avoid conflict at all cost, and some are too old to keep up with the rapid changes of the world. And nothing is made easier by the fact the Eneáno, their Prince and leader, seems to be losing his mind...

KARLABAN'S BANE

The reason for Karlaban's transformation into an abomination was his inability to curb his curiosity. At the top of the first High Chieftain's residence – the tower which was later built into the stronghold and now looms at the back of the Great Throne – is a chest, the content of which was lost in legend. Like his successors, all Karlaban knew was that the chest must never be opened; that it contained an artifact of immense power, which must be guarded and kept hidden at all costs. Karlaban, who was under constant attack by the Saars and the third incarnation of the Blood Daughter, concluded that the warnings surrounding the chest were false and that the artifact inside could be used to defend the cliff. He was mistaken...

Inside the chest lies one of the world's most powerful sources of Corruption: a seed capsule, dark as night, given to High Chieftain Agadan by Lord Eneáno during the meeting which would give birth to the Iron Pact – a symbol for humanity and elven-kind's shared responsibility in watching over Davokar. The chest was shielded by mystical runes and harmonies sung to repel Corruption, and luckily the lid quickly slammed shut; Karlaban had barely opened it before Wratha's fury swept over him. While this did not save him, the rest of Karvosti's residents were spared the capsule's darkness.

Another interesting detail is that Karvosti was saved, indirectly, by Aloéna's intervention. She granted the Huldra access to a spell known as *catching fire* (see textbox); the Huldra and her Keepers tracked down a young Karit woman who was prepared to give her life for the High Chieftain's people. The ritual was performed successfully, and raging flames flowed through the woman, giving her enough strength and protection to defeat the blight-born Karlaban. But in the end, she was doomed to die by her own flames. It took almost an entire day for the fire to consume her, and the woman spent much of it screaming in agony before she finally crumbled into ashes.

ALOÉNA'S SENSATIONS

The description of Aloéna as a passive observer is not entirely accurate. With time, and the relentless darkening of Davokar, she has instead become increasingly active.

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Catching Fire

Tradition: Witchcraft

CATCHING FIRE

3rd-level transmutation (ritual)

Casting Time: 1 minute
Range: Self
Components: V, S, M (a bonfire, consumed by the casting)
Duration: 1 minute

In the final days of Symbaroum, it was not uncommon for careless humans to summon and lose control of powerful daemons. These could threaten to destroy entire regions before they were banished or willingly returned to the dark abyss – eventually forcing the humans to develop extreme countermeasures.

One such measure is the *catching fire* spell. It is a suicidal ritual that makes it possible for an individual to sacrifice their own life to save hundreds or even thousands of others. Apply the template to the martyr for the duration of the spell, but afterwards they take 7 (2d6) fire damage each turn. The martyr then suffers a terrible death, as the protection from their own flames diminishes and the poor soul slowly burns to cinders in tremendous agony.

Catching Fire Template

Once the *catching fire* spell takes effect, apply the following changes to the caster.

- **Immunities.** The caster becomes immune to fire damage and nonmagical weapon damage for the duration of the spell.
- **Strength.** The caster's Strength score increases by 4, to a maximum of 24. Any derived values are improved as well.
- **Fire Breather.** The caster gains the following feature "***Firebreather (Recharge 5–6).*** You can use your bonus action to exhale a 15-foot cone of fire. Creatures take 2d10 fire damage on a failed Dexterity saving throw and half as much on a successful save." The DC for the saving throw is 8 + the caster's Constitution modifier + the caster's proficiency bonus.
- **Glowing Claws.** The caster's hands twist into claws that glow red-hot. They function as natural weapons that do 1d6 fire damage on an unarmed strike.

She does not behave in what humans would consider a rational manner, and strikes without regard for age, family situation, illnesses, or injuries. Instead, she is guided by her feelings, simply sensing who does and does not pose a threat to Garavarax's slumber. Those who do are shown no mercy.

The first time Aloéna experienced this sensation she could not restrain herself and killed three people in the full light of day, in front of hundreds of witnesses. Since that day, she has – as recommended by Helabag, the Huldra at the time – refrained from acting publicly. Instead she enters her victims' dreams and manipulates them into taking their own lives, either with weapons or by hurling themselves off the cliff. Sometimes, when her targets are protected by mystical means or have the spiritual strength to resist her, Aloéna resorts to physical violence. In such cases, she will wait until the victims have left Karvosti and hunt them down in the woods.

It should be noted that these impulses are quite random, probably linked to the increased tensions caused by the growing darkness – even though a creature such as Aloéna is above things like fear and anxiety, she is not completely unaffected. Many people who should be perceived as threats can visit the cliff without her reacting; conversely, she may kill individuals who have (so far) lived completely innocent lives. In any case, if the public ever found out that she acted this way, it would make her life, and the lives of many others, very complicated.

THARABAN'S SISTER

The attempt on Tharaban's life, a few hours after his coronation as High Chieftain, came as no surprise to the man himself. Nor did he ever believe the claims that the northern clans were behind it, even though he, for appearances' sake, pretended to do so. No, Tharaban knew exactly who the assailant was – his own older sister.

Tirba was born under an evil moon and raised by a family who, because of her "blight-marks," kept her hidden from public view and subjected her to all sorts of ordeals, hoping to purge the darkness from her body. No one was more zealous in this effort than her younger brother Tharaban, who as his parent's favorite child could do just about whatever he wanted. While the brother grew strong and gained renown for ferociously slaughtering abominations and blight-born beasts, Tirba lived her life as a public secret. The entire clan knew of her existence and how she was being treated, but no one – neither those who pitied her, nor those who would happily have participated in her cleansing – did anything about it.

Tirba escaped about ten years before Tharaban was chosen to succeed High Chieftain Ergmer. Officially she was assumed dead, but her family members were not alone

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The Guardians of the Wall

The statues of two wild boars perched on top of the wall, overlooking all who seek entry onto the plateau, are in fact possessed by fettered spirits. One of them has the Corruption Sense feature (*Bestiary*, page 215) and if anyone wishing to pass the wall is Blight-marked (*Player's Guide*, page 38), it warns the wrathguards by summoning a whirlwind which tugs at the person's hair and clothes. The other spirit makes sure that the area is shielded at all times by the *hallow* spell. Blight-stricken people must make a **DC 16 Constitution saving throw** to hide the fact that the place is making them feel sick. Thus, the wrathguards have two chances to detect possible threats.

in suspecting her involvement in the various "accidents" which sometimes befell her brother and parents. In any case, Tharaban expected her to attack him during the coronation. He had hunters surround the entire cliff, and as she tried to leave the scene of the crime, Tirba was captured. To this day, she has been locked away in the catacombs beneath the stronghold, always looking for a way out. Always plotting her revenge...

ORYELA'S COVENANT

Another person imprisoned on Karvosti against her will is the previous Huldra, Oryela. However, she is held captive by the witches, and it is unclear whether she is still herself. Thus, the story of the former Arch Witch is strictly fictional, and so is the one about Keeper Deadorna.

The truth is that Oryela at a young age entered a covenant with an elf calling himself Iel. She failed to recognize the ominous signs – the tightly wrapped garb and the heavy scent of perfume which hung over him – and never realized that the mad creature had chosen to become undead, so that he would be immune to corruption and have an advantage in the battle against Wratha's forces. The covenant made it possible for Iel to see and hear whatever Oryela was doing, and influence the witch's actions by speaking to her from afar. When he learned of the artifact Yeleta had brought to Karvosti, his profound fear made the Huldra strike out at the object with all her might. Alas, she also hit Deadorna, who was holding it close to her face.

In the months following the Keeper's death, it became clear to Yeleta that Oryela was losing herself. Finally, she felt compelled to act. She overthrew the Arch Witch and locked her in a cell from Symbarian times, shielded by powerful runes to ward off all mystical energies.

Yeleta has yet to figure out who it is that sometimes speaks through her prisoner's voice. She understands that the creature is an ally in the fight against corruption, but also that it possesses such a burning hatred that its actions, and the plans it whispers to her, would only make matters worse. Much worse. Yeleta has often considered granting Oryela the final rest, but has so far always changed her mind, hoping to learn what her predecessor did with the statue which caused Deadorna's death.

SUNFLOWER

The anonymous explorer calling herself Sunflower never existed. It was actually the Odav chieftain Embersind who provided the Sun Church with information about Karvosti and its temple ruin, as part of a secret treaty which also granted the Curia's troops safe conduct through Odaiova's territory. All the Curia had to offer in return were two promises: to withdraw the Templars and Black Cloaks who were attacking the clan's southern settlements in pursuit of heretics, and to never reveal where the information had come from. If word ever got out that Embersind had betrayed the people of the clans to save himself and his settlements, he would soon be branded a traitor and brought before the chieftains' council on Karvosti.

There is really nothing odd about why the first missionaries were welcomed on the cliff – they were unarmed, untainted by corruption, and expressed a sincere wish to honor their god by the old ruin. Perhaps Tharaban and Yeleta would have acted differently, had they known what was to come. On the other hand, turning these pious people away would probably just have precipitated the Sun Church's decision to attack.

Karvosti Plot Hooks

FOR MOST PEOPLE, being on Karvosti means anxiously holding your breath at all times – even if in good health and well fed; even if birds are soaring in a clear blue sky, the anxiety, it seems, is always present. It is as if their muscles and minds can sense the threats of the forest and the friction between the people on the plateau. And when relaxation is out of the question, why not take the opportunity to make some extra coin or satisfy your curiosity?

There are two often recurring topics of conversation at the pilgrim camp. A pious few have come to Karvosti to actually visit the temple, to discuss spiritual and theological matters, and worship Prios. The rest are fortune hunters or explorers, who barely speak of anything but treasures and where to find them.

Countless rumors of ancient ruins, sinkholes leading to the Underworld, and unscrupulous barbarians collecting

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artifacts circulate the camp from the break of dawn till late at night. But people rarely hand out directions without being paid, and those who do are best assumed to be liars. In order to avoid such charlatans, one should only purchase information from people who have proven themselves trustworthy in the past, or (and this might be the preferable option) only trust informers who wish to join the expedition in exchange for a fair share of the treasure (*Player's Guide*, page 161).

Below are a dozen or so ideas for Gamemasters to develop as they please.

DISAPPEARANCES

It is not at all uncommon for people to disappear from Karvosti – some simply leave without telling anyone, some end their suffering by throwing themselves off the cliff, and others are assassinated by competitors, duped business partners, or Aloéna. But when an entire group of three young Ambrian adventurers disappear overnight, along with their goblin guide, it causes many to react. Maybe the player characters were already acquainted with this group and decide to unravel the mystery themselves. But if they have a reputation for being competent, they might also be hired to do so, perhaps by the unofficial leader of the pilgrim camp, Edrafin (*Gamemaster's Guide*, page 45), or even by the High Chieftain himself.

The reason for these particular disappearances is that two wrathguards – both from clan Godinja and members of a faction with close ties to the Iron Pact – are in league with the murderous autumn elf Loerael. When people who are hunted by the elf's warband for having violated clan taboos seek refuge on the plateau, Loerael notifies the wrathguards Deneia and Nogiod, who hand the offenders over to the warband as quickly as possible. The player characters could uncover this collaboration.

Perhaps there was some commotion as the two wrathguards tried to pacify three people at once, making it hard for them to cover their tracks (a ripped-off belt buckle, an ornamented dagger, or something along those lines). Perhaps the characters hear of a merchant's cart having been loaded with several large bundles in the middle of the night, and later track the merchant down at Vearra's Outpost? Perhaps they eventually discover incriminating evidence at the wrathguards' barracks, in the form of messages brought to Deneia by Loerael's gyrfalcon (requires breaking in or persuading First Guard Farvan)?

RESCUE MISSION

A fortune hunter named Safeia arrives on Karvosti alone and empty-handed, with her clothes torn to shreds and blood gushing from deep lacerations. Two wrathguards bring her to the pilgrim camp, where she is left in Edrafin's care. As soon as she regains consciousness, she bursts into tears and begs for help – two of her friends are trapped in the ruin they were exploring, in a chamber Safeia could not open. She had to leave them behind as the ruin's inhabitants began to awaken. Player characters who have gained Edrafin's trust, through action or reputation, could be summoned to the pilgrim camp – to care for the wounded woman, or at a later time as potential saviors of her friends.

In return, Safeia can promise the characters half of the treasure which can be found in the chamber along with her friends. The Gamemaster could use the guidelines in the *Ruins of Symbaroum Gamemaster's Guide* as inspiration when creating the ruin – its layout, inhabitants, traps, and the mechanism which keeps the door locked – but may of course base it on their own ideas instead.

SHELTERED BY DARKNESS

Lenela Vearra is growing extremely irritated, if not downright desperate. Small groups of elves are attacking the outpost, as well as arriving and departing caravans – they are setting shipments ablaze and fire flame arrows at the outpost itself. Lenela's guards, led by the seasoned Captain Jeulio, are competent enough, but can hardly stand guard and hunt down elves at the same time. She needs reinforcements; preferably people who know the forest better than Jeulio does.

The player characters could be offered the job, or volunteer after having witnessed a shower of fire arrows during a visit at the *Victorious Hawk*. Lenela could also send her captain to Karvosti for help – the High Chieftain turns him down and the characters can meet him at the Longhouse or the pilgrim camp.

The "elves" can be found by tracking them from a burned down caravan (which, for example, could have attracted a pack of jakaars), or the characters can set a trap by disguising themselves as traveling merchants or caravan guards. In any case, the "elves" turn out to be a band of rangers acting under direct orders from the Queen, wearing elven garb and counterfeit elven weapons (can be revealed with a successful **DC 13 Intelligence [Investigation] check**).

If the group is slain, other members of the Queen's Rangers will claim they were deserters and deny all involvement. On the other hand, the characters may choose not to use violence; in fact, they could even offer to take part in some sabotage mission, hoping to gain the Queen's favor.

SAGNAXARGA'S CAULDRON

In a burrow beneath the Braddokkugru settlement, Sagnaxarga, arch troll and self-declared mother of the tribe, lies writhing in agony. For almost a century she has lived in symbiosis with the Braddokks, but not because of some soft-hearted or motherly nature – no, she needs them to stay alive. But now, it seems, not even the goblins can save her.

Freshly awakened from her third dormancy, Sagnaxarga nearly beat the ancient forest spirit Illelia to death in a

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spontaneous outburst of hunger and repressed anger. Illelia, who had watched over the troll as it rested in its cocoon, reacted first with amazement, and then with fury. She placed a curse on Sagnaxarga – every day the treacherous troll was not offered a meal from the spirit's cauldron, she would slowly waste away. At first, Sagnaxarga tried to enslave rage trolls and have them feed her, but it did not stop her decline – the meal had to be given freely, not served by someone who had been forced to do so. What finally saved her was the goblin tribe of Braddokkugru, and in exchange for keeping her alive, Sagnaxarga has protected and aided the goblins ever since.

The trickster Iarlos noticed the age-old cauldron as it simmered over the shaman Lerulg's fire. Believing it to be a mighty artifact, he stole the cauldron and fled to Karvosti, pursued by the goblins. And there he has remained, too afraid to leave the plateau. Meanwhile, Sagnaxarga has grown weaker and weaker, increasingly enraged by the tribe's apparent inability to bring back the cauldron.

The player characters can be drawn into this conflict if they visit the tribe to trade or spend the night. Perhaps it is Lerulg who requests their help, or maybe the arch troll contacts them in their dreams? Taking the cauldron from Iarlos by force might be difficult, as he will defend it with his life, and both wrathguards and others at the pilgrim camp are likely to support him – as far as they know, the cauldron belongs to Iarlos, and it is not at all corrupted. Even if the characters succeed they might regret their brashness. Sagnaxarga is thirsting for vengeance, and will order the Braddokks to attack Karvosti from the west, as a diversion, while she herself strikes from the east – ready to slay Iarlos and all who stand in her way!

THE ELVES DRAW NEAR

The High Chieftain has received credible reports of a large elven warband spotted north of Karvosti. The Guard of the Slumbering Wrath is unable to deal with the situation themselves, as many wrathguards are out on other assignments and the remaining ones are needed to guard the cliff. Hence, Tharaban and Farvan must seek help from other residents on the plateau. They go to the temple and the pilgrim camp, looking for brave volunteers.

Apparently, the elves have already massacred a group of rangers (only one survived to tell about it), and the area will not be safe for Ambrians or clanfolk until the warband has been scared off or annihilated. The characters are asked to join the effort, along with Farvan's lieutenant Danonya, a sun knight named Kaspar, and another group of fortune hunters. As payment they will receive the equivalent of 50 silver thaler and the High Chieftain's eternal gratitude.

The elven "warband" is indeed composed of members of the Iron Pact, but diplomats – it was the rangers who attacked them, not the other way around. With a successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check**, the characters can suspect that the surviving ranger is not being entirely truthful in his account of what happened, but there is no time for further questioning.

The people setting out on this quest have very different inclinations towards elves – Danonya can sense the ranger's deceit and wants to contact the elves before attacking, the sun knight thinks that all *"creatures of darkness"* must die, and the fortune hunters look forward to *"beating the crap out of the pointy-ears."*

Wrathbrew, ELIXIR

Every morning and evening, the wrathguards on Karvosti share a keg of wrathbrew. They drink in silence, with somber expressions on their faces. Then they all give the nearest person a firm nod – a ritual which reminds them of their shared burden and responsibility.

If one ingests it regularly, the elixir will take effect after a couple of months: advantage on any Strength saving throws or checks, in addition to Wisdom saving throws made when trying to resist mental influence, fear, or pressure but disadvantage on any Wisdom (Perception) checks and thus a –5 penalty to passive Perception.

Those who leave the guard before the elixir has taken effect will suffer no long-term damage. The rest are not so lucky. Nothing will happen as long as they keep drinking wrathbrew, but if they stop, they must make a **DC 13 Constitution saving throw** at the end of each year. Failing the saving throw means that the absence of the elixir has taken its toll on their bodies, and their Strength ability score is reduced by –1. When their Strength reaches 0, the person dies.

Pure wrathbrew is only made by the Huldra and her aides, and it is not for sale. However, since the recipe was first developed, a few people have managed to learn its secrets. In some corners of Thistle Hold and Yndaros, barbarian alchemists sometimes appear with small amounts of wrathbrew. One must have the Contacts feat with alchemists (or similar) and pass a **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check** in order to find a seller, who will only sell a month's consumption of the brew, at the staggering price of 1d6 + 5 thaler per daily dose. Furthermore, as this infusion is less pure than the Huldra's, those who drink it will suffer 1d4 temporary Corruption per dose.

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The player characters may choose to support the wrathguard's wishes, or side with the others. Regardless of how it ends, the truth is finally revealed – by talking to the leader of the elves, or listening to the final words of a dying elf warrior.

THE DEATH OF THE LITURG

When the aged sun priest Eraklon is found murdered in the shadow of the fault scarp, utter chaos erupts on Karvosti.

As the pious pilgrim who first discovers the body shrieks in horror, witches, wrathguards, and two templars accompanied by the liturg Aranitra, all come running. Those who go near Eraklon's corpse (and pass a successful **DC 15 Wisdom [Perception] check**) can see a spider the size of a fist lying dead on his chest – a throwing spider like the ones used by the warriors of clan Gaoia. Suspicion is immediately directed to Parax, the wrathguard who has become known for his great skill with the weapon in question.

The situation is very tense indeed. The Huldra is there, quietly watching as wrathguards and templars exchange hateful glares. Additional sun knights arrive at the scene, as do more wrathguards, led by the First Guard. Farvan orders everyone to leave, and assures them that the High Chieftain will get to the bottom of what happened; Aranitra refuses, implying that there would be a barbarian cover-up. Then the Huldra proposes that the investigation be conducted by a third, impartial party; if the characters are known to be competent and have not antagonized any of the groups, she points at them.

The truth is that the murder was committed by two agents of Clan Saar-Khan, in order to cause hostility between Ambrians and the clanfolk. Examining the dead body and the spider might reveal clues leading to the pilgrim camp, where further evidence points to the abandoned tent in which the agents spent a few nights. They left behind a small urn full of maggots (spider food), and a wooden bowl stained with dry blood (the agents bled into the bowl and used the blood to paint mystical runes on their bodies).

There might also be an indication of which way the agents fled, though it is more likely that the pursuit ends there, leaving the characters to try to convince the Sun Church of Parax's innocence. Any which way, they will never learn the true identities of the assailants – at best, they might identify them as barbarians from one of the northern clans.

THE PALE DEATH WREAKS HAVOC

Karvosti suffers an outbreak of the dreaded Pale Death (see below). The player characters may be infected as well, should they fail their Constitution saving throws. The Pale Death is a degenerative disease which strikes hard at the weak and can cause death in just a few days.

The witches are in possession of a cure. Unfortunately, there is barely enough for themselves and those at the High Chieftain's stronghold (including the Queen's Legation, for diplomatic reasons). Moreover, a **primal blight beast** (*Bestiary*, page 125) has been sighted in the area where one can find the cure's most important ingredient: the sap of a dwarven maple tree. And even though people at the sun temple are ravaged by the disease and cannot help their own visitors, Tharaban will not risk the lives of his bodyguards to save those at the pilgrim camp.

The witches' aide, old lady Okramal, is ready to die to help those in need, but she requires assistance – men and women brave enough to face a primal blight beast. The templar Degdo Loramon has volunteered, but more are needed – if the player characters wish to join him, they are more than welcome.

It will be a long and perilous journey through Davokar, but whether or not there really is a blight beast where the dwarven maple grows is for the Gamemaster to decide. There might be some other foul creature – a **blight-born aboar**, perhaps, or a giant spider similar to the **spider queen** (see the *Bestiary*, page 120 and 151).

The Pale Death, DISEASE

It is said that the disease known as the Pale Death was created by Symbarian lords as a means to eradicate all weakness from their realms and subjects. As horrible as it sounds, it may well be true: all who come in contact with, or even go near, an infected person must pass a **DC 15 Constitution saving throw** for every day they remain exposed to the illness. Failing this saving throw means that the person contracts the disease.

Infected player characters make a **DC 15 Constitution saving throw** per day, and every failure lowers their Strength ability score by –1. When their Strength value is less than 5, the characters have disadvantage on all Strength ability checks and saving throws; if their Strength reaches 0, they must make a death saving throw each day, expiring when they have accrued three failures (with a 20 as the result the illness naturally ends). The only thing that can cure the victim is a dose of the Elixir of Life mixed with the sap of the dwarven maple tree (costs 12 thaler, and works the same way as regular Elixir of Life, *Player's Guide*, page 181).

Infected people who have passed three of their Constitution saving throws (not necessarily in a row) begin to recover and regain their Strength score at a speed of 1 per day. Those who recover from the Pale Death can never be infected again.

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Lugander as a Quest Giver

Should the players hunger for more "dungeon crawling," they could be enlisted by the nobleman and cultist Lugander Galeia. He approaches one of them as they wander Karvosti unaccompanied; stopping at a distance and speaking from underneath a large hood, his face shrouded by darkness. The character receives directions to a ruin and information regarding a certain object for which Lugander is willing to pay a handsome sum. The object (powerful and/or teeming with corruption) is to be delivered to his intermediary, Orola's assistant Madar, who will see to it that the characters are paid. Whatever else they might find in the ruin is theirs to keep.

OROVANGAR

The main reason behind Crueljaw's gloom is *"the one that got away."* He speaks of her often, advising people never to hesitate when they have a chance at happiness, but he will not go into details. However, if one manages to gain his trust, and there is no one else around, he may be willing to share his oh so tragic story.

The lady in question is no she-ogre. No, what really pains Crueljaw is that, when the opportunity finally arose, he failed to slay his nemesis, the creature he had long lived to hunt – the blight-stricken elk who the barbarians call Orovangar. Worst of all is that he managed to track her down in the woods, but was utterly stunned by her bestial beauty, and did not trigger his trap until it was too late.

Now he is too weak and out of shape to resume the hunt. But if the player characters offer to do so in his stead, Crueljaw will weep with gratitude and promise them free access to all his merchandise for as long as they live. Rumors will lead the characters from Karvosti to barbarian settlements, past massacred camps deep within the forest, and eventually to the base of the Ravens, where Orovangar is waiting – a hunt which, if successful, will be sung of by barbarians and Ambrians alike!

THE ORB OF ARAKAN

Lately, an eerie wave of suicides has swept House Vearra's outpost. The visiting fortune hunter Kareon was the first to cut open his veins, followed by Vemela, who waited tables at the *Victorious Hawk*, then the caravan guard Ugero, and finally Slugger, an ogre gladiator turned merchant.

The player characters could be sought out on Karvosti as renowned problem-solvers, or be drawn into the story while visiting the outpost. Regardless, those who fail a **DC 15 Wisdom saving throw** while staying at the outpost will suffer terrible nightmares; the kind one would rather not talk about – dreams of committing lustful murders, betraying their queen or chieftain, stealing ortegs from wretched beggars, or sacrificing innocents to the dark forces of Davokar. Every morning, those afflicted by these nightmares must make a **DC 15 Charisma saving throw**; with every failure their minds grow darker and the DC increases by 1 for the save. When the DC reaches 20, they will attempt suicide on a failure. The effect remains active for as long as they are situated at (or anywhere near) the outpost; if they leave, the depression wears off after a good night's sleep.

The source of these horrific dreams is a corrupted artifact which Orola keeps hidden in the outpost's warehouse – a smoky crystal orb containing the spirit of the great spider creature Arakan. There are likely to be other suspicious people at the outpost as well (e.g. a fallen theurg beguiled by the dark powers, a shady Ambrian merchant, and a changeling on the run from Ambrian justice). There could also be rumors of an abomination or some primal creature roaming the nearby woods. In any case, the truth will probably not be uncovered for some time; maybe not until Orola's buyer, the cult leader Liena, arrives with her followers...

TAINTED

One of Salvia's former explorer associates arrives on the plateau (see page 40). Sevean, as he is called, manages to contain himself as the wrathguards greet him on the way up. But when he reaches the pilgrim camp, he starts running around like a madman, screaming for Salvia, frothing at the mouth, and sweating with fever. When he finally sees her, a group of Salvia's admirers jump at Sevean and beat him, over and over and over, until the timid Salvia makes herself heard and puts an end to their savage battery.

Salvia begs for someone to help the poor man and will gratefully accept the player characters' aid, provided that none of them participated in the beating. If Sevean does not receive urgent medical attention/healing, he will die, and those tending to him soon realize that the fortune hunter was struck by more than fists and feet – he has a high fever, bloodshot eyes, and large red and black rashes covering his chest. The only way to save him is to identify what caused the illness, and then, if possible, find a cure.

If the player characters offer their services, Salvia will tell them her story. The Gamemaster might find the guidelines in the *Gamemaster's Guide* useful in designing the ruin which she and her friends last explored, as well as the ruin to which Sevean fled, where he first contracted the horrid disease.

Our suggestion would be that Sevean was never infected to begin with, but cursed by the ghost of a long-dead witch;

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a curse the undead witch refuses to lift until the player characters have killed or driven out all members of the expedition currently digging their way to her crypt.

A LONG AND WINDING ROAD

For some months now, a band of Ambrian plunderers has terrorized the road between Thistle Hold and Karvosti. The Queen's Rangers have not been able to hunt them down, and their raids have been extremely costly in terms of both lives and property. However, all this might soon change.

A few days ago, a young pilgrim came to the Queen's Legation claiming to be absolutely certain that the notorious leader of the group, Ebelgoi Blackhand, could be found on Karvosti. Lothar brought the news to Tharaban, who had his wrathguards put the bandit in chains. The problem is that the Queen's Legate lacks the authority to pass judgement over such a major criminal; Ebelgoi must be brought to Thistle Hold right away!

The player characters could be offered the job of escorting Blackhand through Davokar because of their good relations with the Legate, or after having been recommended to Lothar by someone else (the High Chieftain, the Huldra, or Edrafin). On their way to the Hold, they are likely to encounter all sorts of dangers. Perhaps they run into some of the plunderer's former victims, who demand that he be handed over for swift justice? Perhaps the prisoner manages to escape, which leads to a nightly chase through Davokar, complicated by beasts or other foes? One thing is certain – Blackhand's henchmen will do whatever it takes to free their leader!

THE BLACK PLAGUE TERMITES

The Huldra is deeply troubled by the ravenous insects known as the Black Plague Termites. Gadramon and Eferneya have been visiting the part of clan Baiaga's territory which has suffered the most from these vermin, and Baiaga's Keeper, Makaba, has sent two groups of bear warriors to locate its source. At first, the warriors reported in on a regular basis, but now they have been silent for over a moon.

If they have proven themselves trustworthy to the Huldra, the High Chieftain, the Legate or the head of the Sun Temple, the player characters could be asked to take on the case. This could result in a long series of adventures in which the characters must search the border regions of Wild Davokar for the termite queen.

Eventually, they find her resting in a Symbarian burial cairn swarming with termites. The queen herself is actually a reclusive night elf calling herself Mother Merial, who has deliberately corrupted the insects and formed them into her own personal army. By her side she also keeps ten or so barbarian slaves, whom she has transformed using the *polymorph* spell giving them termite-like limbs and features.

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.

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An Aching Heart

Though the discrepancy between the idea of Yndaros and the reality of its nature can hardly be overstated, this contrast seems to go unnoticed by most of the city's residents and visitors. This chapter gets to the bottom of many matters addressed in the player-facing sections. First up are a number of important misconceptions or deliberate falsehoods regarding the history of the Yndaros region. Then we introduce a double handful of adventure seeds, based on (and meant to shed light on) the truths uncovered earlier. As Gamemaster you are more than welcome to develop these into full scenarios, or simply use them as inspiration for your own adventures and campaigns.

Kalthar and Korinthia

FOR THOSE WHO wish to understand the developments in today's Ambria, one historical period is of particular significance. It concerns the two years during which Korinthia was imprisoned at the fortress of the Dark Lord, helpless and alone, deep behind enemy lines. It is one of the most legendary periods in the history of Ambria, not only because it marks the beginning of the end of The Great War, but also because the people involved have never spoken publicly about what actually happened.

Korinthia was captured in an ambush while traveling between two frontline outposts; her entire escort was massacred, while she herself was brought to a freezing, underground cell, where she spent almost six months – cold, hungry, alone. But then, everything changed.

One day she was led out of the darkness and up to a tower with a view of the darkening lands surrounding Bright Haven, the capital city of Lyastra. With the help of an aged manservant she was able to bathe, eat and rest. A week later the servant introduced himself as Kalthar, Patriarch of the Order of Dakothnic. Slowly Korinthia began to realize that the somber, woeful old man who stood before her was none other than the Dark Lord himself.

Aside from a few periods of prolonged absence, Kalthar visited her almost every day. At first he simply asked questions, about her, her country, and her people. But when she finally started answering him, after a long and grim silence, Kalthar did more and more talking of his own – telling her about the ongoing war, individual battles, acts of heroism, and fallen commanders on both sides. The interrogation transitioned into a conversation, and a few months before she was rescued, the subject changed considerably. It was as if the Dark Lord could see that the end was nigh, as if he admitted defeat and wished to warn his subjugator so that she would not suffer the same fate.

Without getting into details, he described the reason why the magnificent Lyastra had slowly but inexorably become a realm of blight and death: the insight that Corruption does not affect the undead, and the subsequent exploration of a mystical ceremony with the power to reanimate humans while at the same time preserving their memories, senses, and mental faculties. The goal was, of course, to gain absolute power over Creation; to create a backdoor to pure magic in all its might. The goal was achieved, but the fury of Creation proved all-powerful.

Kalthar was already the symbol of the highest and purest; there was no reason for him to undergo the ceremony. Instead, all his closest subordinates – sixteen Apostles and twenty Judges – were exalted, in the hope of breaking through the barrier which prevented Lyastra from flourishing and growing even richer. But it did not take long before the black hunger of undeath began to cloud the minds of the exalted; they turned on each other, on the laws of their god Dakothnic, on the Patriarch himself. Hoping to buy enough time to devise a ceremony that could scatter the darkness, Kalthar did the only thing he could to prevent a full-scale civil war – he gave the people a common enemy: Alberetor.

The lesson which the Patriarch wanted to impart on the young queen was very simple: Creation cannot be cheated, nor deceived; it reacts to the violence itself, not to specific methods or strategies. Korinthia listened, but heard something else. What she heard was a loser's attempt to rationalize his failure; a brilliant man's desperate efforts to make sense of his defeat.

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The more she listened, the more she grew convinced that Kalthar had gone too far, made mistakes, entrusted vital tasks to the wrong subordinates. And so, when the Black Cloak Demeon Soleij was ready to finish off the Dark Lord once and for all, it was Korinthia who reacted – she grabbed what was available to her, a brazier of glowing coals, and flung it at the friar's face. Even though she herself was badly burned by the embers flying through the air, she leapt forward to protect the fallen one.

Kalthar was offered mercy in exchange for his services as the Queen's adviser. He accepted; not because his life was very dear to him, but because he genuinely wanted to do everything he could to make Korinthia Kohinoor understand the indomitable power of Creation. Five people were present when the agreement was made – aside from the Queen and Kalthar, there were also Demeon Soleij, Grand Master Seldonio, and General Beremo Herengol. Officially, the Dark Lord was killed there and then; in reality he was taken to Kandoria, disguised as the leader and choreographer of Bright Haven's dance academy.

Kalthar has been imprisoned ever since; first below the palace in Kandoria, then in a restored cell below the Cathedral of Martyrs in Yndaros. He sees the Queen of Ambria once a week, sometimes more – she in the hope of finding clues to his failure, to identify the line which must never be crossed; he in the hope of curbing her ambitions and making her see reason. It is like a respectful, dead-serious game, where both players maintain that the barely noticeable progress they seem to be making is enough to keep trying. To what extent Kalthar's call for caution and moderation has influenced Korinthia's strategies is difficult to say, but her ambition burns bright as ever. With unfaltering determination, she strives toward the same goal the Order of Dakothnic once did: to achieve absolute dominion over Creation – but, of course, without falling victim to its terrible wrath.

Aside from previously mentioned individuals, only three people now living know that the Dark Lord is still alive, imprisoned beneath the Cathedral of the Hallowed Martyrs. One of them is Jurlio Berakka, who was entrusted with the truth during the restoration of what would become the Cathedral of Martyrs; another is the true leader of the eastern dance troupe, Andark Masul. The third person is the aged mystic Kullinan Furia who helped create the magical shield surrounding the cell.

The story about Korinthia and the Dark Lord is one of the most dire and best kept secrets in the entire kingdom, but there are of course many other mysteries to discover or unravel in Yndaros. Described below are a number of situations which you, the Gamemaster, are free to expand upon or be inspired by as you create your own adventures in the city of Yndaros or its surrounding region.

THE SINS OF LINDAROS

The mass death of Lindaros struck like a bolt out of the blue, with little time to alert the authorities or the public, or for most to even realize that something was wrong. Having learned their lesson from the fall of Symbaroum, the Lindarians enacted strict laws regulating the use of mystical powers and rituals, but the perceived security this brought was merely an illusion.

In the absence of prominent mystics, the alchemists were Lindaros' learned elite, and the branch they cultivated the most was the refinement of crops and livestock. The Lindarians' fields produced amazing harvests, and in their cramped stables the pigs and the cattle were so huge that, before being slaughtered, they could not even carry their own body weight. The cultivation was governed by rigid safety regulations. However, the latent mutagenic properties of the buttery crop called King's Corn were not detected during the testing phase, which resulted in the legendary bleeder's disease breaking out and obliterating the entire population – except for a few members of the Priesthood of Dakothnic, preaching moderation and temperance, who later found their way south to settle down in Lyastra.

Most of the knowledge amassed by the Lindarian alchemists was lost forever, but about a year ago, a Master of the Order named Marbela made a tremendous discovery during her excavation beneath Old Kadizar. Along with her friend Tinedra, a master alchemist, she managed to decipher the old scroll, and now secret experiments are being conducted on a farm in the Veloma Valley. It concerns an elixir which can supposedly double the muscle growth of domestic pigs; and it works, very much so, but unfortunately at the cost of the animals being thoroughly corrupted when overdosed – something Tinedra did not live long enough to record.

There are several ways in which the player characters could become involved in the story. Perhaps Marbela hires them to hunt down the four monstrous hogs currently on the loose and then cover up the story? Or perhaps the rumor of these raging abominations reaches Yndaros, and some high-ranking member of the Sun Church, the Army or some other faction asks the characters to investigate what caused the outbreak? Either way, use the stats of a blight born aboar

Lindaros and Mystical Power

There was a general ban against performing mystical powers in Lindaros. The only exceptions were a few religious ceremonies, kept alive by the Order of the Guardian, also called the Priesthood of Dakothnic. To all others, the use of mystical powers was punishable by death or, in rare cases, exile.

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(*Bestiary*, page 120) for the blighted hogs, excluding the Aggressive and Multiattack features and with an armor class of 13. Each is considered challenge rating 6 (2,300 XP).

THE FALL OF KADIZAR

Many have asked why Kadizar's chieftain surrendered so quickly; why he went from hard-nosed opposition to total submission in less than a day. The answer is usually that he simply recognized the hopelessness of the situation, or was tempted by the enemy's promises of property and status. But others maintain that a clan chieftain descendant from Davokar would never surrender on such grounds.

The truth is that Manvar died the night before clan Kadiz's surrender, murdered by his children, who refused to see the entire clan annihilated because of their father's senseless resistance. The daughter, Maridja, did not flee up the Titans; instead she took her father's place, using the family heirloom called the Collar of Kadradan – a troll-crafted neck ring which lets its master assume the appearance, voice, scent, and shadow of another person. It was she who accepted the humiliating defeat, after forcing her brother to join in her scheme.

Ever since, Maridja has made her best efforts to wreak vengeance on the intruders. The Kadizans who were given safe passage from their conquered home have over time been interspersed with Alberian refugees and grown into multiple free settlements, located in the eastern valleys of the Titans. Sometimes the shapeshifter Maridja visits the village chieftains in her eagle form, to give orders or advice, or because she was summoned through the spell *faraway writing*. Otherwise they may govern themselves, while she does her best to maintain appearances and keep the barony of Grendel alive – both increasingly difficult tasks.

The fact that Baron Manvar Grendel's looks, clothes and scent have not changed in two decades cannot be concealed, only palliated with the help of a crooked posture and general eccentricity. But even worse, the accelerating insanity which according to legend became the downfall of Kadradan has also affected Maridja. With increasing frequency, and for longer periods of time, she loses herself and falls into the role she has been playing for so long. This is causing a long list of problems: the solidarity between the free settlements and their loyalty to the Ice Witch have started to erode; the Ambrians' view of, and confidence in, House Grendel is deteriorating; and the situation with the goblin despot Garulubbulug is getting completely out of hand.

The matters described above could give rise to a long series of adventures, either in the barony of Grendel or among the free settlements up in the Titans. The player characters could also be involved on a more personal level – perhaps hired by Lothar to assassinate his increasingly erratic father/sister, or paid by Maridja to dispose of some plunderers who have discovered her secret and begun blackmailing her.

The Collar of Kadradan

The slender copper neck ring, which according to legend belonged to a King Kadradan the Third, came into the possession of the Kadizian chieftain almost three centuries ago, after he had executed a grave-robbing clan member. But the neck ring was already known to the Kadizans through cautionary tales about its original owner.

The legend states that a young Kadradan received the artifact from the arch troll Oxuga, in exchange for half his heart. His goal was to remove and replace his father, Kadradan the Second – a tyrant who spread terror and death among the people, but was loved by the kingdom's warriors and aristocracy. The coup succeeded; the prince took his father's place without anyone realizing what had happened. Alas, the new king's shrunken heart only made the hardships worse, and as the difficulties spread to wider circles of the population, he could soon trust no one but the warriors. When the artifact started to affect the king's mind, he lost their support as well. It is said that he was placed alive inside the magnificent crypt he had already built for his final rest, left to die a lonesome death.

The tale of Kadradan is still being told around campfires in Davokar, often ending with the moral: *"do not strike pacts with the forces of the forest, for they can turn even the noblest intentions into the darkest of deeds."*

THE RESISTANCE GROWS

Anyone looking for a foreign power or dark lord to blame for the bloodbath in Yndaros (see page 59) will have done so in vain. It had simply gone too far; the number of frozen, starving and disgruntled war veterans was so large that, when the riot was sparked, their desperation could no longer be suppressed. And even though both the Realm of the Order and the City States have agents at the refugee camp, these can only be blamed for a handful of the twenty or so violent incidents which have shaken East Yndaros since year 14.

There is indeed a growing threat in the shadows of the refugee camp, but it has nothing to do with foreign powers or vengeful warlocks. Instead it is the fallen, and severely blight-marked, noble Kathia Melion who is slowly building a network of capable immigrants which, for various reasons, have not been able to secure a place in the Promised Land: outcast mystics, scholars, diplomats, priests and, of course, warriors. They all work in utmost secrecy, for the purpose of improving the living conditions of the many tortured souls situated in the capital – by threatening, blackmailing, and even murdering people in power, as well as their assistants.

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In the long term, the conspirators are determined to stage a coup d'état; to consign the ruthless, overly ambitious Korinthia (whom they call the Nightpain) to the streets. But until then, two things must be achieved: first, their militia must be in better shape, physically and mentally; secondly, they must decide what the future government of Ambria should look like. Some advocate a ruling council like the one in the City States, others a spiritual or enlightened leader like in the Realm of the Order, while the majority are content with the current system and have different ideas about which noble house should replace House Kohinoor.

The player characters can start finding out about the conspiracy, for example after being asked by the Sun Church, the Army, the City Watch or the victim's family to track down those responsible for the murder of a noble who was using refugees (and goblins) as slave labor. But no matter how successful their investigations are, the characters should never be allowed to reach the leader, other than in the form of rumors about and references to "Captain Kathia."

AWAKENINGS

It was not long ago that every single report of someone rising from the dead sent shivers through the entire population of Yndaros, since the city's dying feared being reanimated more than death itself. But in the past few months, their worst terror seems to have dissipated, perhaps because it has become such a common phenomenon, or because the First Father has come to the city and promised to protect the people from darkness. The fact that a new case is reported every ten days, at the very least, can, according to the Sun Church, be explained by Jeseebegai's arrival – the Eternal Night is sending its troops to put Prios' chosen people to the test. And this explanation is not entirely inaccurate...

The Darkborn

The creatures born in the chamber of Umbra are changed, and thoroughly corrupted. They are like the undead, but with a tremendous hunger and thirst; they must drink blood every day to stay alive (a number of quarts equal to their Constitution score). Use the stats of a **goblin warrior** (*Bestiary*, page 189), but they are thoroughly corrupt and have the Gravely Cold and Regeneration (stopped by radiant damage) features (see *Monster Features*, *Bestiary*, pages 215–221). They will avoid confrontations against equal or greater opposition, and run away as soon as their undead lives are threatened.

Yndaros is the place where the cultivation of Creation's awesome power is most palpable, without always being severe enough to spawn Corruption or be detected by mystically educated minds. But overall, the violence evokes a response which affects all residents and visitors to some extent – minds darken with angst, destructive feelings are intensified, and stomachs ache inexplicably. The First Father's presence puts even more pressure on the servants of Prios to cultivate and refine Creation to the extreme. They believe that their actions will suppress the darkness, when in fact they are fueling it.

The undead are the clearest sign of the growing darkness, but it can be seen in other ways as well: it has "inexplicably" turned two blight-marked individuals at the refugee camp into abominations; it caused the black dew which one morning covered the moss-laden roofs of Old Kadizar; it has brought about a handful of murders, by inspiring the perpetrators to excessive violence. And then there is the phenomenon which the goblin Ulfols discovered less than a month ago.

Ulfols worked as a digger at Master Marbela's excavation beneath Old Kadizar. One day, feeling tired and bored, he decided to do some exploring of his own. After having walked, crawled and squeezed his way through the underground cracks and tunnels, he ended up beneath the refugee camp, facing a chamber so dark it could not be illuminated by his lantern. He reached out and poked the impenetrable darkness with his fingertip, which promptly turned black, the color of freshly-made blackberry jelly. Ulfols licked his finger clean, and was thus chosen by Umbra.

Ever since, the fanatically servile goblin has spent every waking hour feeding his mistress; a mistress who is essentially nothing but a black, ravenous hunger. Ulfols lures other goblins to its chamber, pushes them into the darkness, and waits. After a great deal of screaming and gurgling, there is silence. And shortly thereafter the victim returns into the light – naked, pale, emaciated, with shiny black eyes, ready to serve Umbra's chosen one: Ulfols. Moreover, these creatures are as ravenous as their dark mother.

The player characters could be asked to investigate the reason behind the large number of missing goblin diggers, or to look into the rumors circulating in the city's eastern districts – rumors of small, pale, skeletal creatures who have made the nighttime streets their hunting grounds. Unless they investigate the rumors on their own initiative, they could be offered the job by Ordo Magica, the Sun Church, or the goblin activist Ulofin.

ARRIVAL OF THE DWARVES

In year 13 of the Ambrian era, the flame of rebellion was ignited in Küam Zamok.

After Symbaroum had fallen, and the dwarves were freed from their masters' yoke, a brutal hierarchy formed beneath

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the mountain. It is said that the mountain realm's original ruler, Valbazrusik, had to be persuaded into assuming the, for the dwarves, completely foreign role of leader. But his family, and hence the ruling elite, grew larger and more powerful with each generation, and its members gradually stepped into the shoes of their former masters.

Before the uprising, the ruling families enjoyed an almost godlike status – they produced nothing themselves, were carried on litters, wearing garbs so delicate that even the slightest touch or wind would ruin them; all they did was give orders. Perhaps this is why they stood no chance when their subjects finally revolted. Most of them failed to see what was coming and were trampled to death, crushed by the flood of rebellion. But some escaped, along with parts of their enormous wealth.

The marginalized families of Voyzek and Krazark traveled north, where each has taken control of their own goblin tribe, previously known as Harakkullu and Goddangaldru – the former on Vajvod territory, the latter far up in the Ravens. In addition, there is a handful of smaller families who, like the Merotzaks in Thistle Hold, are hiding in various places throughout Ambria, in fear of being slaughtered by the rebels' Lord Hunters or cut-throats sent by other families. But it is of course the dwarves in Yndaros who are making the most noise, no matter how withdrawn and self-reliant they try to be.

The three families of Valotzar, Alzerek, and Baldysik were the most prominent ones even before the rebellion, and they managed to escape with plenty of both workers and resources. Although Magnos Baldysik, family patriarch and lord of Küam Zamok, was killed by the rebel leader Ekaderoza, his son Morek got away with his crown and has proclaimed himself King of the Dwarves. He is challenged by Patriarch Artek Valotzar and Matriarch Izobel Alzerek, whose families claim to have historical support for the assertion that their respective leader is closest to the original ruler Valbazrusik, in both blood and esteem. Their younger members often assemble gangs of allies to challenge each other in bloody showdowns on the smaller squares west of the Harbor District, while the elders conduct unscrupulous business dealings to strengthen their family's position as much as possible. So far, the power balance has shifted back and forth with lesser families switching sides, but Artek Valotzar and his family are about to take an unassailable lead – something which could result in full-scale war in the middle of the Queen's capital.

The player characters could be contacted by the withdrawn Morek Baldysik, the King of the Dwarves, either directly or through a prominent member of some faction: the Valotzars' are practically beyond reach, but something must be done to end the family feud and stop Izobel Alzerek's advancement through the city's business sector. This could entail sabotage, espionage, or assassinations – something that would have to take place in absolute secrecy, as the city's human leaders seem to appreciate the order (and tax revenue) generated by the dwarves.

Current Alliances

Immediately after the escape, Artek Valotzar was supported by the families Statzak and Vanoviz; Izobel Alzerek by Obrutz and Kalatra; and Morek Baldysik by Maretko, Skruztsa, and Urbanik. However, the Maretkos and Urbaniks have since abandoned their "king" for the Valotzar family, while recent rumors claim that the Urbaniks are negotiating with Matriarch Izobel, and that the Valotzar family in turn is about to gain the support of Vikotzor Kalatra. Other whispers suggest that the once prominent Rokotzar family, which has so far been in hiding, has returned to Yndaros. If true, this could mean that another major faction is emerging, or that one of the existing ones will grow much more powerful.

Yndaros Plot Hooks

PEOPLE LOOKING FOR (more or less) well-paying missions in Yndaros will probably not be idle for long. The city's many conflicts and tensions manifest themselves in various forms of crime, and the City Watch has neither the time nor the inclination to hunt down every crook in the capital. In many cases, the victims of said crimes want nothing to do with the authorities – for one reason or another – and would rather hire freelance problem-solvers to retrieve stolen goods, avenge acts of violence, or eliminate extortionists. However, such problem-solvers must take great care in choosing their missions; if reckless, or simply unlucky, they could easily end up making enemies in very high places.

But the Queen's capital is more than just shady business deals and violent assaults. There are plenty of rich and prominent individuals in need of protection as well as assistance. They could be merchants, nobles, acclaimed artists and artisans or diplomats from foreign powers and cultures. The player characters could work directly for such a dignitary, or be hired to carry out individual missions through their contacts at the upper levels of the powerful factions. But in that case, too, they should expect that befriending the employer will make them much less popular with that person's enemies.

This section presents ten ideas which the Gamemaster may develop into his or her own adventures in Yndaros and

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its surrounding area. Most are linked to the people and locations introduced in the book's opening section or in the *Gamemaster's Guide*, while the rest elaborate on particularly important conflicts. It should also be said that many of them are based on the assumption that the characters have made a name for themselves as competent problem-solvers – in the realm in general, or within one or more factions. Should this not be the case, the characters could be given more personal incentives for getting involved in the stories.

MADELIA'S MADAMS

They say there is no smoke without fire, and this is certainly the case with Madelia – the owner of the Davokar Feastery who rose from the depths of refugee wretchedness to immense opulence in less than a decade. However, her way to the top did not go through noblemen, but through some of the city's richest women.

When the famously wealthy paper patron Obelia, joint owner of Yndaros' paper mill along with her husband Erfran, is found strangled in a New Town courtyard, the news spreads with the speed of lightning. At the same time, Baron Dogai Harl's mother disappears from her residence without a trace. The truth is that both women secretly left their homes to attend a nightly meeting with Madelia, to demand that she repay the large sum of thaler she had fleeced from them. Madelia (who suspected something was wrong and ordered two of her bouncers to hide nearby) could not risk being exposed, and had her former lovers strangled. They loaded the Dowager Baroness onto a carriage, but were forced to leave Obelia; someone lit an oil lamp, and suddenly light was streaming through a nearby window.

Baron Dogai could be the one who (personally or through some contact within the army or among the nobles) asks the player characters to investigate his mother's disappearance. Perhaps they will find evidence that she was completely penniless, and that she often socialized with the murdered paper patron? Perhaps talking to the City Watch (who have written it off as a robbery-homicide) or examining the scene of the murder can provide clues which eventually points to Madelia? Then it is all about securing evidence – possibly in the form of a ledger where Madelia records how much she has swindled and from whom, or by squeezing the truth out of one of her guilt-ridden, diary-writing bouncers?

ESCORTS AT THE CROFT

Some acquaintance/contact asks the characters to be their escort in a meeting at the Croft. Who this person is, who else will attend the meeting, and why it is held at the Croft of all places, the Gamemaster must decide based on who the characters are. But as a suggestion, it could be a noble, a City Watch investigator, a Master of the Order, or even a sun priest (perhaps a reformist who is meeting a fellow sympathizer and wants to do so in a place where other sun priests would not go).

Arriving at the Croft, there is a lot for the characters to take in. The vigilant observer will notice several individuals who stand out (sober, composed, attentive) and could well be undercover informants or other agents of the Queen. These people ignore everything happening around them: the young boy snatching purses/belt bags from those he bumps into; the furious, drunken fist-fight which breaks out between two young men who were cuddling just a moment earlier; the six thugs who appear to be part of Dastan's crew and drag three adventurous youngsters through the door to the backyard. But worst of all...

Nobleman Dastan sits perched on his dais all night long, watching the bustling tavern with a smug grin, quaffing red wine and chewing on what looks like dried mushrooms. Late at night he lets out a roar; in just a few seconds, the Croft goes completely silent. He stands by the edge of the dais, holding a haggard, middle-aged woman by the arm. As soon as he gets everyone's attention, Dastan raises his voice: *"This one says she's broke, says she can't pay."* A pause for emphasis, before he continues: *"And what do we do with those who cannot pay? We make an example of them."* Then he pushes the woman into the crowd below, screaming: *"Educate the cheapskates and the misers; teach them the cost of living!"*

How the characters will act in this environment is an interesting question. They certainly risk angering Dastan and his people, especially if they try to save the haggard woman from being severely beaten. The Thief King might even put his blade to the throat of the person they are there to protect, if they are left unguarded. This could all end very badly, and the characters will probably have to offer Dastan something of great value in order to stay alive.

GRUM'S GOONS

The three owners of the *Scratch & Rodent* know perfectly well who is behind the attacks on their establishment. But since many of the vandals have eaten their food and drunk their hubble since they were practically baby goblins, they are very reluctant to make a formal complaint.

The truth is that a playmate from their youngling days, the trouble-maker Grum, has come to Yndaros, expelled from his tribe after having accidentally bludgeoned his brother to death. With Nobleman Dastan and the dwarven families as his role models, Grum wants to establish a gang of goblin hooligans in the Ambrian capital, specializing in racketeering and extortion. He has attracted roughly a hundred young goblins, who see him as their way out of poverty and squalor. Unfortunately, business has not been so good, especially as the pigheaded tavern owners who were to be their main source of income refuse to pay for protection.

Perhaps one of said owners will be beaten within an inch of their life before someone reacts? The characters could get involved on their own volition, or on behalf of some eminent regular (for example a wizard or a sun priest). The problem

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is to get to the root of the problem (Grum); preferably without hurting the young goblins, who will go to great lengths to protect and shelter the scoundrel who may very well be their only chance at a comfortable life. Perhaps the leader of the hooligans is keeping large parts of their profit for himself? Perhaps proof of this, combined with offers of alternative employment, could make the rascals turn against Grum?

MAYHEM AT THE DOME

The aged bandit queen Merandra has gradually been outmaneuvered by Nobleman Dastan and the dwarven families. Her organization is now limited to pickpocketing, petty theft, and fraud (activities which the previously named competitors rarely concern themselves with), but at least in those fields she is still unrivaled. Or was, until the changeling guttermage Grimorio Abramelin decided to give it a serious go.

The player characters are at the Dome to watch a particularly interesting gladiatorial bout, invited by, or hired to escort, some prominent citizen. The arena is almost full; thousands of Yndarians are shouting and cheering, and the lower bleachers are crowded with families whose children have waited weeks to see their favorite gladiator fight. But halfway through the pre-fights, something happens – a pack of jakaars emerge unexpectedly on the arena floor. Sinking their fangs into the three goblin warriors who just managed to slay their opponent (a drugged beamon), they are joined by two crazed aboars who immediately storm toward the railing protecting the spectators from the fighters of the Dome. Breaking through, they charge – shrieking, frothing and stomping at everyone around.

The player characters are situated higher up on the bleachers, but may of course head down to intervene. Soon even more beasts appear, provoked to aggressive madness (the Gamemaster decides what kind of features best suits the gaming group). With a successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check** in the midst of the mayhem, the characters notice something higher up on the opposite bleacher. Almost everyone is desperately running toward the exits, yet a single man remains seated (Grimorio) between what looks like two bodyguards. Meanwhile, a dozen people dressed in black press their way toward the sitting man, who seems completely unaware that he is being surrounded.

And so, this becomes a chance for the characters to save (and at the same time get acquainted with) Grimorio Abramelin. Perhaps he even hires them to crush Merandra's crime syndicate once and for all, but in that case, he makes sure to portray himself as an innocent victim of extortion, not as a rival criminal.

THE TWIN FIGURINE

The owners of the antique shop the Chance have every reason to be desperate – they recently discovered that one of their figurines (three feet high, made from porous, black sandstone) is crawling with tiny parasites which surface whenever the object is in contact with moisture. Not only that: judging by their effects on the assistant who polished the figurine, the bugs are horribly corrupted. And even worse: the figurine's twin has already been sold!

Perhaps Davido and Lyssa turn to Ordo Magica or the nearest Sun Temple for help, who in turn contacts the player characters. The buyer must be tracked down – he did not state his name, but had a very distinct appearance (the Gamemaster decides) and claimed to have been selling antiques on the Monger's Square until six months ago. The characters will have to ask around for the right address, where they find the buyer blight-born, feasting on the last of his four domestic dogs.

An investigation of the home reveals that the buyer was named Mandaro and had started a career buying antiques on behalf of rich clients. One of his last orders came from Anogai Dresel (youngest son of Baroness Amelea), who needed a birthday present for his mother, preferably *"an antique statuette for the new steam bath at the family's pleasure palace."*

When the player characters arrive, the party is underway, and the steam room is of course being inaugurated to celebrate the Baroness' birthday. The Gamemaster decides whether any guests have already been blight-born, and, if so, how many. Alternatively, the characters could get there in time to stop the inauguration, and instead face the social challenge of convincing the partygoers that the steam bath is dangerous.

THE BREW VANDALS

Initially, the Brew Vandals (see the *Gamemaster's Guide*, page 37) were little more than a nuisance, though they occasionally caused some material damage. Since then, their leader (the dockworker Karo) and her gang have evolved in a way which makes people speak their name with genuine fear. Luckily for them, they operate exclusively in the city's eastern districts, where the City Watch is preoccupied with more serious criminals and disorder at the refugee camp, so they have not yet been the subject of a thorough investigation. But many of the districts' respectable residents have had enough.

The player characters could be hired, directly or through some contact, by a group of laborers and less prominent craftsmen who have pooled all their savings in the hope that it will make a decent reward. Alternatively, an officer of the City Watch could ask the characters for a favor, which, if granted, will one day be repaid in a similar manner, should they find themselves in need of help.

Either way, it soon becomes clear that the Brew Vandals are under Nobleman Dastan's protection. While Karo and her thugs are attracting attention on the Monger's Square, Dastan takes the opportunity to transport smuggled goods through Old Kadizar. The Vandals originally contacted him to

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request something stronger than ordinary blackbrew, and every month since, he has sold them three barrels of brutebrew seasoned with Krusean berries, more potent than the ordinary barbarian variety and with an added corrupting effect which makes the consumer utterly unafraid and extremely violent.

The Brew Vandals, in their hunt for increasingly extreme highs, are in fact headed toward their own destruction. A handful of them already show marks of Corruption, internally called "party blisters" in the belief that they are merely signs of too much partying. But for every week that passes, they must drink more and more to satiate their cravings. It will not be long before the drink causes some of them to become thoroughly corrupt...

HURIAN'S URN

About six months ago, the treasure hunter Ogdar returned to Yndaros beside a mule whose saddle bags were full of curiosities and mystical treasures from a ruin on the border between Bright and Dark Davokar. He was tainted by darkness, feverish and confused, but managed to follow the streets all the way to the man who funded his expedition: Hurian (see the *Gamemaster's Guide*, page 35). As soon as the treasures had been delivered and the additional payment collected, he could contain himself no longer; a can of fine Argona stut at the Victory Vault was all it took – he screamed like a madman, in terror and despair, until the owner knocked him unconscious with her rolling pin.

Ogdar is now locked up at the Anchorage Asylum, since Hurian heard what happened and saw fit to have an intermediary buy him a place there. For a long time he was completely unresponsive, but has recently begun to talk, about things he experienced and the treasures he brought with him from the depths of the forest. The stories were passed on by two caretakers/guards, and many rumors of the expedition now circulate the city's taverns. They tell of magnificent treasures, including an urn whose decor shows the way to Symbar if held in moonlight, and of an unidentified employer in Yndaros.

The player characters could hear the rumors firsthand or through some contact, for example a noble or a wizard of Ordo Magica. If they decide to investigate the matter further, they should first get into Anchorage Asylum for a conversation with Ogdar, either through forced entry or deception (perhaps one of the rumor-mongering caretakers/guards could be of use?). They find the treasure hunter in an unusually lucid, but also quite remorseful state, and learn that his plunder is in Hurian's possession. Should they wish to proceed, the characters must plan and execute a burglary at one of the city's most heavily guarded buildings.

What treasure they find is for the Gamemaster to decide, but we suggest that the famous urn does not show the way to Symbar, but to some other interesting ruin in the depths of Davokar.

Twilight Tincture, ELIXIR

Twilight Tincture is an extract of dried stems and leaves from the extremely rare Twilight Thistle. It temporarily makes an undead body appear alive: the skin regains its color, the body temperature rises, and the breath improves dramatically. For more information, see the *Player's Guide*, page 183.

THE CONVENT SCHOOL

A goblin girl is found dead amidst the shrubs enclosing the garden of the Last Light Convent School. The Abbess, Mother Abelena Loramon, believes the Sun Church cannot afford any serious scandals right now and covers up the incident, but the night watchman Berto cannot just stand by and do nothing. He is convinced that the girl was murdered, and wants the perpetrator hunted down and brought to justice.

Berto might approach the player characters personally at some appropriate tavern, but he will more likely have friends/relatives within the City Watch, Ordo Magica or the army, who in turn know the characters as capable problem-solvers. Berto was immediately ordered to burn the body, but he did not – a closer examination reveals a deep cut on the girl's throat, and her body almost completely drained of blood. In the shrubbery, trampled into the ground, is a cloak buckle shaped like the setting sun of Prios, clearly ripped from its bearer. Given that the Convent School is crammed between other buildings at the Temple District, the murderer is probably a member of the staff.

We suggest that the Gamemaster creates a handful of suitable suspects among the Convent School's teachers and staff. The perpetrator turns out to be Mother Abelena's grandchild, the seventeen-year-old teacher Evelena, who a few days ago returned from a visit to her parents. She returned undead, however, murdered by plunderers on her way back and spontaneously reanimated the following day. The Abbess was able to procure a small amount of Twilight Tincture from her Black Cloak contacts. If diluted it will last for two weeks, and is strong enough to conceal the girl's external symptoms, but not enough to quench her thirst for blood. Unless the characters find her, she will soon kill again.

ASBARAST'S CRAWLERS

A seemingly empty two-masted merchant vessel drifts down the river Doudram; the City Watch's boat patrol ties it to an anchor in the rapids east of the Islet and goes aboard. Frenzied screams are soon heard from the ship, and before long it is set ablaze. Two guards throw themselves over the railing, but only one makes it back to the wide-eyed witnesses at the eastern edge of the Islet. His face and hands display terrible

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acid burns; blind and wailing with agony, he utters a few words before the acid spreads to his tongue and vocal chords: *"The captain's log... Made a stop... Kadel, by the hills."* A witness touches the dead man and suffers the same "acidic" effect, starting on the hand which touched the guard.

What happened was that a group of agents from the clan Gaoia managed to fill three urns with the swarming, flesh-eating microorganism known as Asbarast's Crawlers, which more than a thousand years ago wiped out the entire population of Asbarast, a city east of the Ravens. The waist-high urns were brought by wagon across the mountains, where they were smuggled aboard a merchant ship for safer transport to the agents' hideout in Ambria, among the hills of the Kadel county. But when they were offloaded, one of the urns cracked, after which the agents simply pushed the vessel into the river – with a little luck, it would even reach the Queen's city and thus not be entirely wasted.

But the crawlers will not spread very far this time; the reckless witness is knocked unconscious, and no one else touches the corpses. What is left of the bodies after the bugs have devoured their soft tissue is examined on site, first by the City Watch, then by Ordo Magica. The characters could be contacted when it becomes clear that the remains are exuding Corruption. In any case, the agent cell can be tracked from the place where the merchant ship had to make a stop; the crew is found murdered and carelessly hidden in a crevice, some with wounds which suggest that they were killed by throwing spiders. The Gamemaster may decide the size of the cell, depending on what seems most appropriate for the gaming group – whether they are best suited for open combat or stealthy maneuvers. It will of course be most interesting if both options are left open.

Asbarast's Crawlers

A disharmonic, flowing wheezing

Asbarast's Crawlers are a strange form of primal blight beast that can lay dormant for hundreds of years, only to become active once warm-blooded prey comes close. They have never been closely studied by Ambrian loremasters, but according to myth they are somehow connected to the enormous stone ships stranded in the ashen deserts east of the Ravens.

Irrespective of their origins, they are fearsome foes, especially if let loose in densely populated areas, where the swarms can move from victim to victim with great speed and leave people and livestock dying from poison in their wake.

Tactics. The Crawlers have no tactics but sweep from one warm-blooded target to the next, once the first has been poisoned. When all enemies are dead, the feast begins.

Asbarast's Crawlers

Medium swarm of Tiny abominations

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)
Hit Points 52 (7d8 + 21)
Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
3 (-4)	13 (+1)	16 (+3)	5 (-3)	15 (+2)	6 (-2)

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, slashing
Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, prone, restrained, stunned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12
Languages —
Challenge 2 (450 XP, proficiency bonus +2)
Manner swirling mass
Shadow surging purple black (thoroughly corrupt)
Equipment —

Swarm. The swarm can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the swarm can move through any opening large enough for a Tiny insect. The swarm can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 0 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) poison damage or 1 poison damage if the swarm has half of its hit points or fewer. Each successful bite also causes the target to gain 1d4 temporary Corruption.

REACTIONS

Scatter. The swarm may separate after a successful attack to cause the damage to be halved, as few of the individual creatures are struck.

THE DEATH WAGON

The rumor that Armangai Brigo was involved with the Apostles of Supremacy is quite true, but that he was captured in the City Watch's raid is merely wishful thinking. The dark-minded noble was warned beforehand and has since kept a low profile as the manager of an estate on the south-western border of Galeia. There he has continued to cultivate his arts, along with his twenty followers who are all working on the estate. Baron Laguboi, who rarely leaves his townhouse, is not aware of the arrangement and has no reason to suspect anything, since the estate is being run just well enough not to attract attention.

What might be the cultists' demise is their leader's deepening pact with the daemon Rabarakro. The otherworldly creature speaks to Armangai through an ornamented fountain in the cult's underground ritual chamber. Made of limestone, the fountain is roughly the height of a man

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and about the same distance in diameter, with a top shaped like a gaping, horned wolf's head. To maintain the link to the Yonderworld, Rabarakro demands that the blood of a human is poured into the fountain once a day. To that end, the cult sends a wagon to the capital's refugee camp at least twice a month, where the driver lures people with promises of a good life as farmhands on some estate (always a different one).

The characters could be contacted by the City Watch, or some government contact, and asked to investigate the rumors currently circulating among the refugees – rumors of a "Death Wagon" abducting people to a cannibalistic sect, or to a mine where they must toil until they die. Alternatively, some refugees could pool what little money they have to hire a group of competent problem-solvers. Perhaps the wagon can be identified through the driver's tainted shadow, or through witnesses recognizing her as the driver of the wagon which picked up the witness' missing relatives. But it would of course be easiest to blend in among the refugees and become one of those chosen to board the wagon...

Noble Houses

The region south of the Titans has a long but also obscure history, at least the period before the founding of Alberetor, roughly three hundred and fifty years before year 0 in the Ambrian calendar. There are accounts from the petty kingdoms, people and city states which preceded the Alberians, but the further back in time one goes, the more sporadic and mythical they become. What is known for certain is that Alberetor was founded as a union between the kingdoms of DiVearra, Argonata and Alber, and that over time, more and more chose (or were forced) to join them. Alberetor reached its full size about two hundred years before the Victory.

THE FEUDAL SYSTEM was created as a response to the realm's expansion; the central authority needed vassals in order to develop and maintain control over the domain. At first there were great shifts in status and position among the prominent Houses, especially because of the struggle for the throne between Houses Vearra, Argona and Parfas (from Alber), which made monarchs come and go in rapid succession. The situation slowly stabilized after a popular uprising two hundred and seventy years ago, when House Kohinoor (formerly one of the lesser houses, despite its glorious military history) was installed as the Royal Family. The previous ruling families have staged or planned many coups through the years, but only Duchess Andarea Parfas came close to succeeding – which would cost her relatives dearly in terms of future status and influence.

But history cannot explain much about the Ambria which rose from the ashes of the war-torn Albeteror. Many noble houses were completely wiped out, while others distinguished themselves, positively or negatively, in the war against the Dark Lords. All this was taken into account when Queen Korinthia, along with her advisers and dukes, appointed vassals to help her govern the Promised Land. To clarify the new order even further, the Queen established a number of heraldic principles which all houses must follow when creating their emblems and coats of arms, based on the hierarchy which signifies the nation's distribution of power and responsibility.

As far as political alignments and alliances are concerned, the Queen's new realm is still in flux. The need to focus on (re)building the kingdom, combined with Korinthia's immense popularity, has prevented the representatives of the noble houses from interacting with each other, or even seeing the point in doing so. But the more time passes, the more conflicts have emerged between the vassals, as well as between them and the Crown. Perhaps the growing threat from the northern clans will mitigate this effect; perhaps it will reopen old wounds instead. Time will tell...

Philip Linden (Order #42324067)

Argona

Arobel

Attio

Brigo

Galaldo

Grendel

Herengol

Kaldel

Kalfas

Karella

Korinthia Kohinoor

Lethona

Melion

Soleij

Vearra

Heraldic Principles

The monarch's and dukes' coats of arms have a single field, with their personal version of their family crests on a golden background. Those of counts and barons have two fields, vertically divided, with their family crests on one side, on a background of their choosing, and their duke's crest on the other. For counts, the field behind the duke's crest is golden yellow; silver white for barons. Princes of the Realm and other free knights may choose whatever coat of arms they like, as long as they do not contain the monarch's or dukes' crests.

Philip Linden (Order #42324037)

The Noblest Blood

KOHINOOR

The Kohinoor family has ruled its people for almost three centuries. Aside from a few minor wars of conquest and some internal unrest caused by dearth, epidemics and rebellious vassals, their reign has been a peaceful time of collaboration, development and growing prosperity, which has given the fine arts room to flourish. This was all upended by the war with their eastern neighbor, but Queen Korinthia did actually emerge from the inferno stronger than ever. However, the question is how hard she can push her people (commoners as well as nobles) with high demands and controversial decisions before their love is muddled by objections; before the support she enjoys turns into open opposition.

Property

House Kohinoor is very wealthy indeed. Rebuilding the Promised Land has not been cheap, but from the dying Alberetor, Korinthia brought with her vast riches confiscated from the estates of extinct noble houses and the treasury of the vanquished enemy. Furthermore, the Crown obtains tax revenue from the other duchies (the only exemption being Prios Domain) in addition to the tithe collected from counts and barons in Yndarien. The Queen and her council still have more than enough money to fund expeditions, infrastructure, or wars of conquest.

Prominent Individuals

There is not much to be said about House Kohinoor's prominent members. Many died on the wartorn battlefields of Alberetor, and those who remain are gathered at the royal palace or the stately homes of the dukes. Two members one hears very little about are Korinthia's nearly hundred-year-old aunt Mesmerda, still clear-headed enough to be a cunning adviser, and the explorer calling himself Gorakai the Younger, who is known for having charted the sunken ruins of Clearwater. Gorakai is in fact Korinthia's cousin and son of Duke Alesaro, but has distanced himself from his family after a bloody argument with his father.

Relations

Korinthia has more enemies than she knows. She still has the populace on her side, and enjoys the full support of Counties Herengol, Kalfas, Kaldel, Arobel and Galaldo, as well as ten baronies. But she is unaware of the enemies she has within noble houses such as Brigo, Erebus and Gorinder; the same goes for the declining confidence which is felt within many of the other houses. Moreover, if one takes the Curia, parts of Ordo Magica, the High Chieftain's allies, and the influential trading houses into account, her list of loyal allies seems punier still.

Of course, Korinthia and her council are not completely oblivious to the faltering support, but they also believe that the love of the people is what matters most, and that it can only be maintained and regained through demonstrations of competence. They must win battles, help those in need, and nurture people's dreams of an even brighter future – only in that way can they achieve their goal of building a strong and prosperous Ambria!

VEARRA

The members of House Vearra will never forget their history; how they once took part in the founding of Alberetor, and how their ancestors fought, bled and led their young kingdom to dominance and prosperity. Though they cooperated faithfully in The Great War and during the establishment of the new homeland, none of them question their family's claim to the throne. Now, their prospects seem to be improving. They can see the Queen growing weaker, losing more support with each passing day – fewer and fewer defend her against criticism; more and more nod in agreement whenever her competence or friendship with the woodland folk is questioned. Perhaps the time for a new monarch is coming?

Property

As they left for the Promised Land, House Vearra brought with them most of the considerable wealth they had accumulated over the years. The cost of battling the Dark Lords was almost completely offset by the spoils of war, and their new county was mostly built with government funds. Instead, Vearra's coffers have been used to finance outposts and expeditions in the rich woods of Davokar, and establish good relations with the Sun Church and its followers – for example through monthly contributions to the Curia and the building of the new, mighty cathedral near the county's principal town. To sum up: as long as the Count's bookkeepers can successfully withhold large parts of the county's revenue from Korinthia's tax collectors, the members of House Vearra will continue to be very well off.

Prominent Individuals

Aside from Count Demetro, Commander Iakobo, and the latter's children, most members of the House are found either within Ordo Magica or the Sun Church. People still speak highly of the late Master of the Order and explorer Eulia Vearra, while the Count's sister, Diesla, joined a convent as a young girl and is now one of Brother Eumeno's most trusted advisers. Finally, his niece Lesena should be mentioned, as she is a well-known figure in Thistle Hold and plays a key role in forming alliances between the noble houses in the northern parts of the realm.

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Relations

The members of House Vearra consider themselves on equal footing with the Queen and her family; they do not join alliances, they form and lead them. Not that Count Demetro is openly hostile or overly critical towards the Kohinoors, but the unspoken truth – that the Count, like his predecessors, is after the crown – means that the two great houses will never be friends. Instead, House Vearra find their allies (or rather, supporters) within the Sun Church and in less prominent families such as Lethona, Gorinder and Melion. Whether or not Count Demetro has enough supporters to openly challenge the increasingly unpopular Queen is unclear, but who knows what the future will bring for "the Sun God's champion" ...

ARGONA

The pride and ambition which characterize House Vearra are also found among the representatives of Argona; perhaps even more so. The first ruler of Alberetor was Queen Almara, and before House Kohinoor's ascension to the throne another five members of House Argona had been crowned. The greatest of them was the warlord Oragan, under whose reign the kingdom doubled in size and population. The current head of the family, Count Alkantor, is far less impressive, as were many of his predecessors. In fact, House Argona has been in decline for decades, and things did not improve in the Promised Land when their house was allotted an estate in the shadow of Davokar.

Property

In public, the Count boasts far and wide of his enormous wealth, but in truth his family is practically living hand to mouth. Their estates in Alberetor were quickly invaded by dragouls and their masters, who shipped all riches back to Lyastra before a counteroffensive could be launched. Alkantor has now spent much of what remained on speeding up the construction of roads and fortifications, hoping that it would one day give his county an advantage over its neighbors. But this did not get him very far. Sure, his county's lands are good enough for growing crops and raising cattle, but in competition with Thistle Hold and Blackmoor, it will never be the commercial hub he once hoped.

Prominent Individuals

Aside from Count Alkantor, who is a respected, if not liked, person in Thistle Hold, very few members of his house have distinguished themselves in a positive sense. Of his four children, only Suria has attained an important position, as the Queen's Legate in Thistle Hold. But hopefully it is not too late, as his wife recently died in childbirth and her replacement (young Lisel Salamos) will probably give him more children to put his hope in. The Count's sister, Anabela, should also be mentioned, though he himself prefers not to. She has worked her way to a top position within the Sun Church, as the Priesthood's representative in the Curia. But they have long hated each other, and moreover, being at the helm of a sinking ship is hardly an impressive feat.

Relations

All living members of House Argona are very much aware of the cracks in their House's once noble foundations. For now, all they can do is prepare for the future by conducting themselves in as lordly a manner as possible. Houses Kohinoor and Vearra are, and will always be, their deadly enemies. But if Argona is ever to compete for real power, they must first win the people over to their side. In that respect, the prospect of a war against the barbarians in the north is a welcome one. Alkantor is doing his best to snap himself and his two sons into shape for the upcoming battle, as they must now live up to the legends of Oragan Argona. If fortune favors them, this could be a new dawn for their noble family, particularly if the other houses should happen to lose a few key members to the axes of the enemy.

PARFAS

The third of Alberetor's founding families now lives an unobtrusive life as House Kohinoor's loyal servants. In the opening phase of The Great War, Duchess Andarea was only inches away from killing King Ynedar and, with support from several other houses, winning the throne of Alberetor. But the tip of her knife never reached the monarch's heart; he survived, and took brutal revenge on the leading conspirator. This could have been the end of her entire house, especially as Andarea's family had no accomplices to share their blame. But in view of the surging war, King Ynedar chose to be merciful. House Parfas lived on, albeit far from the glamour and glitz of their past existence.

Property

The current head of the family, Egoi Parfas, saw most of his properties confiscated after the war, despite the fact that he and his daughters had won many significant victories for their Queen – "penalties for the sins of their parents," it was called. As if that was not enough, having come to the new realm, he was allotted a tiny barony in the barren outback in the east, as vassals of a boy duke named Ynedar. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that Baron Egoi – who was only a boy himself when his mother tried to assassinate King Ynedar – feels unjustly treated.

At the moment there is not much he can do about it, but his hatred for House Kohinoor grows stronger with each day he endures in the backwoods he feels banished to. There is almost nothing he would not do, no alliances or pacts he would not authorize, to see Korinthia Nightbane lying in the dirt, with her head at least a few feet from her shoulders.

Philip Linden (Order #6290457)

Prominent Individuals
For a house with such a long, glorious history of distinguished commanders and rulers, House Parfas has become rather insignificant. The oldest daughter, Elna, is a colonel in Duke Ynedar's private guard, while the younger, Arlea, is a lady-in-waiting at the royal palace in Yndaros. Both positions can be used to give Egoi the vengeance he so badly desires, but bring little glory to the family name.

Relations
There was a time when House Parfas had plenty of close friends and allies. Many were lost in The Great War, but some still remain – for example Houses Arobel, Galaldo, Salamos, Attio, and Karnak. These are now loyal to the Queen, but perhaps some of their members still remember their ancestors' oaths, and might be willing to aid Egoi in his quest for vengeance? That aside, the Baron has not made any great effort to make new friends, either among Ambrians or barbarians.

Other Houses

ASIDE FROM THE never-ending plotting and scheming, there are not many open conflicts between the noble houses or between the royal family and the others. Nor are the kingdom's nobles fragmented into rigid factions, as was the case before The Great War.

Everyone has been too busy developing their allotted region and trying to get along with their new dukes and neighbors, which is why almost all collaborations have concerned individual projects: a local goblin tribe bothering people in several baronies must be driven

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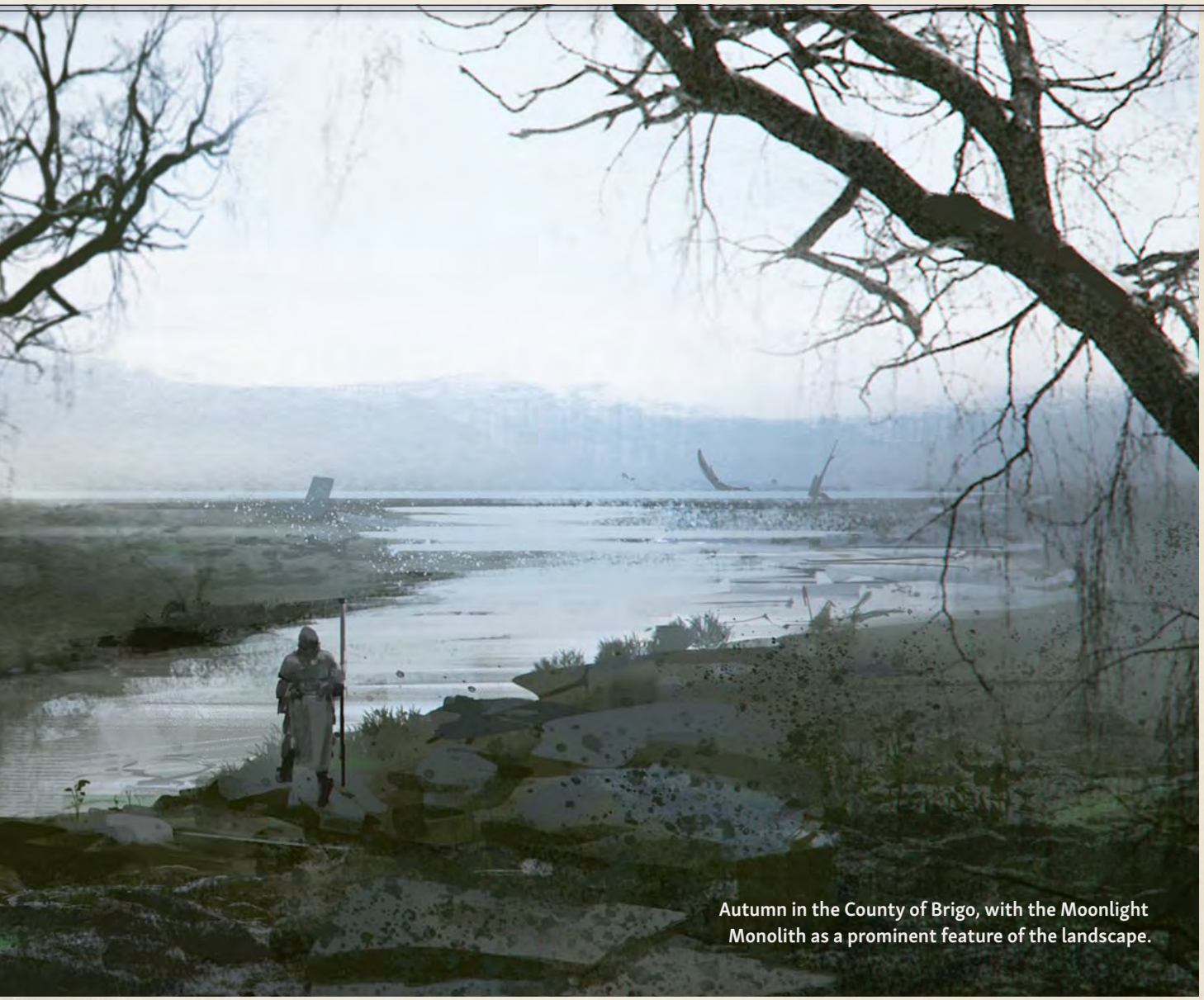

Autumn in the County of Brigo, with the Moonlight Monolith as a prominent feature of the landscape.

away; a bridge must be built across a border river; fishing rights in the same river or in a shared lake must be determined.

There are of course plenty of personal conflicts between individuals who, for one reason or another, hate other nobles – sometimes as a result of personal grievances, sometimes because the person they hate simply looks a lot like an ancestor who once wronged them. But these rarely reach the same proportions as they did in the relatively safe and stable Alberetor, and never come close to being a threat to the general stability of the realm. And with the possibility of a new major war on the horizon, most nobles will probably put aside their differences and defend their realm, shoulder to shoulder; maybe not out of love for their Queen and people, but to safeguard their own properties and privileges.

BRIGO

Baron Valtar Brigo fought side by side with King Ynedar during the first half of The Great War, and was later appointed commander of Korinthia's private guard. The bond that was forged between them made House Brigo rise in status and esteem, which became particularly evident when the King took Valtar's sister as his bride. Now they are one of the most powerful families in Ambria, and their representatives are found at the top levels of many Ambrian factions.

Property

The count of Brigo is slowly building his fortune, largely thanks to his county's fertile lands and close proximity to the capital. The famous Moonlight Monolith has not yet contributed to their flourishing fields, but one day it might, when Ordo Ambra has figured out how best to utilize its powers.

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Prominent Individuals
Count Edogai's secretive brother, Father Matheo, is without a doubt one of Yndaros' (and therefore Ambria's) most powerful figures; as a member of the Queen's, the city's, and the Cathedral of Martyrs' ruling bodies, Father Matheo knows everything that happens and has a finger in most of it. The Count's son, the explorer Iasogoi, is one of the realm's most popular celebrities, and his mother, the old Countess Alevia, is known for being the only highborn noble who has insisted on staying in Alberetor.

Relations
Since the outbreak of The Great War, House Brigo has drawn ever closer to the royal family and, consequently, other houses close to the Queen, such as Herengol and Kalfas. But Father Matheo's position as a centerpiece on the Yndarian scene of authority and influence, means that they have connections and friends virtually everywhere, even in houses and factions that would see House Kohinoor dethroned. One interpretation of this, is that House Brigo functions as a bridge between the realm's rivaling power centers; another could be that the family is in a perfect position to aim for the throne themselves.

SOLEIJ

Like House Brigo, Soleij can boast many prominent individuals, even though their house has never had particularly high status. This is of course due to Baroness Eudela's son, Demeon, renamed Jeseebegai after assuming the position of First Father of the Sun Church. Jeseebegai (and the secret he shares with the Queen) is why their house was allotted much more land than the other baronies, and it is thanks to his connections that the members of his family often reach positions of great power and influence.

Property
The barony of Soleij is larger than most counties. Sure, it is plagued by plunderers, refugees, and the predators of the Titans, but there are also lush croplands in the north. In addition, the snow-white marble being mined in the region's hills is in high demand among the kingdom's elite craftsmen and merchants.

Prominent Individuals
First Father Jeseebegai has already been mentioned, as has the capable Baroness Eudela. Jeseebegai's sister Levia and his cousin Mergoi were both taught by Ordo Magica; the former has remained there as Master of the Order, while the latter is now leader of the newly-formed Ordo Ambra, financed by the Count of Brigo.

Relations
House Soleij has always been closest to the Sun God. What most people do not know is that it was Eudela's father, Baron Edor, who founded the congregation known as the Vestals of Prios, and was also Father Abramar's patron while he was writing *The Lightbringer*. The House has always been a close ally of the Queen, but her ambiguous stance toward reformists and heretical sun knights could well be the end of that tradition. The same goes for House Vearra, as Jeseebegai suspects that Count Demetro, too, is straying from the path of the righteous.

HERENGOL

House Herengol has been closely tied to the royal family ever since the uprising which made Kathrona Kohinoor queen. When the old Count died, his daughter Alama became head of the family, while his oldest son, Field Marshal Beremo, assumed the position as supreme commander of the military. Countess Alama has never thought much of Korinthia, but has remained loyal, though not without poisoning her childrens' views on the Queen. What will happen with House Herengol after Alama and Beremo have died is thus highly uncertain.

Property
Herengol is the largest and richest county in Ambria. The fertile valleys of Veloma and Doudram, Lake Ebel, and the ore-filled mountains all help fill the coffers which by the end of the war had almost been emptied. Much of the county's riches has thus far been invested in roads, mines, and fortifications to protect against the beasts and robbers of the mountains, but most of it is now finished, and it is time to enjoy the abundance.

Prominent Individuals
Almost the entirety of House Herengol is involved with the nation's armed forces, in one way or another. But aside from the Field Marshal they mostly occupy less prominent positions. The Countess' son, Elberdo, is a colonel in the Ambrian sapper corps, while his son and daughter serve as field agents of the Royal Sekretorium – Captain Rabelia stationed east of the Ravens, and Captain Ferbian in charge of the recently established Domestic Security Division. Beremo's only son and the Countess' daughter are both situated in Thistle Hold; the former as an adventurous expedition leader, the latter as an agent of Korinthia's uncle, Alesaro (a well-kept family secret).

Relations
House Herengol is loyal to the royal family, though Countess Alama would rather have seen Alesaro Kohinoor on the throne. Because of her undisguised contempt for the current sovereign, her children have never gotten along with Korinthia and are both in collusive contact with Alesaro, ready to aid his rise to power. Until the mother and uncle are dead there is not much they can do, but once the power is theirs, the Queen would do well to watch her back...

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ATTIO

House Attio would probably never be mentioned in this context, were it not for a handful of colorful personalities. The heads of their house have always been loyal to House Kohinoor, and the other members seem generally determined to avoid positions of responsibility. Perhaps this is precisely why the outwardly affable and popular Herakleo is secretly drinking himself to death?

Property

The family's barony may be beautiful with its rolling green hills, but though the stretch of land along the Veloma Valley yields good harvests, their lands generate little income. In addition, most of House Attio's coffers were recently spent as the Baroness' payment to the sellswords (see page 80). No, House Attio cannot be considered one of Ambria's economic giants, especially after the loans which Baron Valero will have to take out in order to equip his troops for the likely upcoming war against the northern clans.

Prominent Individuals

Aside from the much-discussed Valero and Herela, the beloved drunkard of a Key Master, and the constantly intoxicated troublemaker and war hero Serex in Thistle Hold, there is really just one notable person in the family's history. But she is famous in a completely different, overwhelmingly positive way: the Lightbringer Ofelya, who was sainted for having died the moment she, filled by the holy light of Prios, burned the gates of the Dark Lords' stronghold to ashes.

Relations

The members of House Attio are so busy with their own problems that they never have time for plots or conspiracies. They are loyal to the Crown, and that is the only alliance they are interested in. The question is how long the Queen will put up with their internal squabbles – there are plenty of other prominent people in Ambria, many of whom deserve to be elevated to nobility...

BERAKKA

At the start of The Great War, Junio was a foot soldier like any other; when it ended, he had risen through the ranks and personally killed a handful of Dark Lords as well as a dozen of their commanders. The key to his success was neither size nor strength, but sheer cunning – something that impressed the Queen and her advisers to such an extent that he, in the absence of reliable relatives, was appointed Duke of Narugor. And he has not let them down; if Korinthia were to name the most dependable duke in Ambria, she would give him the honor.

Property

Except for the region surrounding Kurun, which is under his direct control, Duke Junio's lands are managed by eight barons and one count. And then there is Thistle Hold, crammed between the baronies of Erebus and Derego. The soil is far less fertile than in the southern valleys, and the threats from the forests are greater in numbers and severity than those from the Titans, but even so, the Duke does not complain. And why would he? He makes a good living from the trade in Kurun and tax revenue from his vassals, and besides, amassing wealth was never one of his primary goals in life.

Prominent Individuals

The Duke and his father are basically the only people who are well-known among the general population. The father, Jurlio, showed initiative during the restoration of Lindaros and was eventually given a position at the City Council, as Construction Commissioner. Junio's third son, Davido, is also somewhat distinguished as the Duke's representative in Thistle Hold. Too sickly to wield a weapon, he does his best to represent his father among the dignitaries gathered in the Hall of Knights.

Relations

It would be no exaggeration to say that Junio Beraka is "loved by the people, but hated by the nobles." No matter how justly and graciously he treats his vassals, the nobles will always look down on him and his family of social climbers. This is particularly true of Count Alkantor, who has publicly called him an *"unwashed pig farmer with more filth in his blood than he has on his grubby mitts."* But Duke Junio ignores their jealousy, secure in the knowledge that he has his Queen's love and respect.

MELION

House Melion has built its status and reputation primarily on trade, starting about a hundred years ago when a rich gold deposit was discovered on their lands in Alberetor. One might think that them being allotted a relatively small and vulnerable county in the north was a mark of the Queen's displeasure, but if so, this was rather misguided. In fact, it was precisely that kind of land Count Arnon had wanted. The idea is of course to use the river Doudram to transport the riches harvested from the woods of Davokar to trade centers such as Yndaros, Mergile, Agrella, Kurun, and nearby Ravenia.

Property

Count Arnon has money coming out of his ears, and he grows richer every day the waters of the Doudram carry his ships between the family's outposts in Davokar and the cities in the south. Most of his wealth is used to establish new businesses, but he is also one of Ambria's major moneylenders. Virtually all nobles in New Beretor owe him money, as do many families in the other duchies. Even the Curia borrowed thousands of thaler from the Count of Melion during the construction of Templewall. Rumor has it that

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the interest alone is enough to finance the county's core businesses, and if this is true, House Melion should soon be the wealthiest in the entire kingdom.

Prominent Individuals

Aside from Count Arnon and his younger brother, Colonel Ralgai of the Royal Sekretorium, the members of House Melion keep a low profile. The Count's daughter, Aelia, oversees the family's trading houses in Yndaros and is famous in certain circles, while the Count's older sister is known in a more specific crowd, namely by the inhabitants of the Refugee Camp – not as a member of House Melion, however, but as the secretive rebel queen Captain Kathia.

Relations

Thanks to their lending activities, the members of House Melion can expect a warm welcome more or less anywhere, and almost always with an exaggerated smile. Should they themselves be in need of information or more concrete assistance, it can usually be ensured with promises of small debts being canceled, interest-free periods, or new loans at favorable rates. Korinthia has recently displayed a certain coldness toward the Count, probably because she envies him or feels threatened by his growing fortune. But none of the house's members are particularly worried – should the Queen become a problem, there are several other candidates who would undoubtedly appreciate their financial aid in overthrowing the monarch...

Houses Melion and Meleon

After a long and painful conflict between the siblings Armendo and Sesaro, the then king of Alberetor, Koriano II, made a drastic decision: he divided the family's lands between the siblings and named Sesaro's new house Melion, which was really an older version of the same name. Sesaro sulked about being deprived of his father's name, but not for long, as a large gold deposit was found on his land. The members of the two houses loathe each other to this day, and their mutual contempt did not exactly mellow when Korinthia awarded Sesaro's descendants a county while House Meleon's proud General Karlogoi had to settle for a barony in the region surrounding the border checkpoint of Prios Pass.

Report 22:01:08

We have gotten hold of a document where Ralgai of the house Melion presents his views regarding the situation in the world outside Ambria. In truth, we are quite astonished by how bad it looks and cannot help but wonder if Queen Korinthia pays enough attention to the lands beyond Ambria and Davokar. The man behind the report also appears to be much more concerned than his cautious phrasings imply...

Suggestions on In-Game Use

How you choose to use this document is not for us to say. Maybe you are happy to keep Melion's highly subjective and biased report to yourself, as a backdrop when staging future adventures for your gaming group. Another option is to actually let the player characters acquire a copy of the report. It could be that the classified document has gotten lost and the characters are tasked with retrieving (but ABSOLUTELY not reading!) it. Or they may obtain the report by chance, finding it in the saddlebag of a dead courier or on the writing desk of some nobleman.

Philip Linden (Order #42324067)

Report 22:01:08

From the Royal Sekretorium to The Queen's Council

Philip Linden (Order #6324067)

Year 22 after the Victory, the Month of Ynedar
Report 22:01:08 from the Royal Sekretorium

Report to the Queen's Council regarding the state of the world; dictated by Ralgai Melion of the Royal Sekretorium, recorded by clerk under the supervision of Colonel Revina Kalfas.

The reports received from our agents during the past month do not offer any revelations; they only confirm that a number of weak but not insignificant threats to our great realm are growing stronger. No one shall claim that the situation in neighboring regions is of such a nature that it should steal focus and resources from the necessary operations being conducted inside the Ambrian domain (Davokar and the plains included). None the less, the Queen should be reminded that the Sekretorium, despite diligent and loyal work, is experiencing some difficulty in fulfilling its duties, given the assets currently at hand.

The First Realm and Landfall

As has been the case in preceding months, one of three expected reports from The First Realm is missing. Why Lea Garlaka and her agents have such a hard time communicating their findings we do not know, but it may be time to investigate the issue more closely (requires additional resources).

Previous information on life returning to the ash deserts has been reinforced. Near the only pure sweet water spring in The First Realm, the ground appears to absorb some of the moisture. The report is difficult to decipher, written as it is by a shaky hand and clouded mind (why is unknown), but can be interpreted as if healthy sprouts have been found near the spring and that specimens have been sent with a runner to Yndaros (should arrive in two to three months).

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Our efforts to reach Landfall are still fruitless. Nothing has been heard from the three agents who have gone out on the water. Most likely, they perished along the way, if earlier statements from Lea are to be trusted (as a reference: "Judging by how winds, waves and currents behave, it seems like Landfall is reluctant to receive visitors.").

The Queen is once again asked to consider allowing our agents to make contact with the people living along the mainland coast, close to the isle. It is a risk, for sure – clearly demonstrated by the incident with the giant mentioned in the previous report: the tall, pale-yellow, human-like creatures are apparently heavily armed and very skilled as both warriors and mystics. But if we want to learn more about Landfall, the Ice Pillars and the stranded stone ships, these folks may well be our only source of information.

The Dark Realm

Progress has also been slow within darkened Lyastra. Opal Storms are still raging black around many of its ruined towns and shrines, and the one covering old Black Haaras has even increased in both force and range.

However, we have finally received a message from our agent traveling in the far southeast; a win even if her report oozes darkness. She has come across life, or rather unlife – three villages whose undead populations appear to be trying to rebuild their shattered existence. They plow furrows in lifeless dirt, herd invisible livestock on fields full of withered cadavers, set traps and dig pitfalls that never capture anything besides lost, undead humans. In other words, the Queen can rest assured that the fallen folk of the once so radiant Lyastra, our enemies, are suffering as they so rightfully deserve!

According to a recent conversation with Sister Losadra of The Whip of Prios, the Black Cloaks have had some success in the hunt for the three Disciples who are assumed to linger on. She would not speak clearly. Our interpretation is that

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the Dusk Hunters searching for Disciple Joab have sighted their prey, but that it fled into the opal storm covering Black Haaras. The Queen is advised to task the Grand Master to double his efforts when it comes to finding a method to calm the storms, or at least make them passable. Maybe the Arch Witch can be of help in this context?

Alberetor

From the motherland there are reports of conflicts around Oracle's Rock. Almost all land on the estate of Grand Duchess Alevia Brigo has finally grown dark and her sons have ordered all followers of Oreago to leave. However, as has been mentioned before, the oracle cult continues to grow.

Despite ruthless initiation rites that kill at least four out of five hopefuls, Oreago is deemed to have a thousand, maybe as many as two thousand devotees – comprising the most capable of all who for some reason have opted to remain south of the Titans. If the Duchess persists in refusing to leave Castle Brigo, the Queen should consider appealing to her sons, or sending troops in defense of the noble blood.

The spread of The Grey Death shows no signs of slowing. In fact, quite the opposite. Aside from the example mentioned above, the disease has spread all the way to the eastern mountains where well-springs now flow with icy night-water and the ground is drained of nutrients. Many scholars have come to oppose the theories that associate the dissemination with the movements of the undead hordes; to be sure, there is a correlation between the two, but since The Grey Death also lays waste to areas which are totally free from roaming dragouls, it is becoming more and more likely that the hordes are moving in search of unaffected lands, where there is live prey to hunt and devour.

Finally it should be said that the inflow to the camp sites south of the mountains continues to decrease. The motherland is now all but emptied of living souls and only a

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fraction of those determined to stay will have time to change their minds before meeting their deaths. Those waiting for safe passage over the Titans can still be counted in tens of thousands, divided amongst a dozen camps, and their condition is declining – mentally as well as physically.

Freetown

The most alarming report of the month comes from our legate in Freetown. Master Deledo has not met with Prince Galarman II or any of his councilors since more than six months past, but Deledo's agents have blackmailed their way to a series of classified documents.

Provided that the documents are genuine, it appears as if Freetown is in a very bad situation. Despite generous promises of monetary compensation, not one single human woman has registered as being pregnant during the past quarter, and only two births have resulted in living offspring – in both cases gravely deformed baby boys.

Another document accounts for the movements and growth of the Mastodon. According to Freetown's ranger squads, the abomination is coming south, as slowly and relentlessly as it increases in size. The latest calculations indicate that it will become visible from the town wall towers within four years, maybe even sooner than that.

The third ring wall will be completed in a couple of months; from the already finished towers the life-preserving hymns of the Harmony Masters echo in a (probably futile) attempt to cleanse the west wind of contagions. But wall or no wall: the only analysis that should seem reasonable to the Queen is that Prince Galarman's city is in tremendous peril. All sources indicate that the isolationism and protectionism will worsen, and that our once so lustrous trade partner will wither as the fear continues to spread through the populace.

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The Realm of the Order

The rapid development seen in the Realm of the Order after the establishment of a Theologian Office continues. One can certainly say that these runaways and deserters, who once left the Queen's land in reaction to the righteous elevation of Prios, have achieved unjust success under the unifying rule of the Theologist. But there are several signs suggesting that this is a misconception; that they instead are digging their own graves.

According to our agents, The Grand Purification is now finished – all wild areas in the region have been cultivated and all lands blessed, cleansed from darkness in the name of the Young Gods. On the other hand, the same reports say that the realm is continuously plagued by emerging abominations that, according to the local priests, are made manifest by the evil expelled from earth and water. Regardless of how they try to explain the occurrences, these vile beasts are never allowed to wreak havoc for long before one of the squadrons of The Executioner slays them or, in most cases, drives them bleeding and scarred south into the wasteland of the Mastodon.

The Theologist and her Magistrates are yet to finish the law book *Dictations of the Young Gods*, but some of its content is already in force. The strong position of The Earthmother is evident – perversion and overindulgence are named as the most serious transgressions a human can be guilty of; that is, to willingly deviate from or to make exaggerated use of The Natural Order. In other words, from what we have been able to determine, the Theologist exalts nature above humankind and prevents all who have ambitions to fully utilize Prios' gifts. And then they are surprised by the emergence of abominations!?

We must follow the development carefully. Our hopes that the Realm of the Order can become an ally in the fight against the clans and the Iron Pact may prove misdirected.

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The City States

Since we have lost contact with our second established agent cell, and with the three new ones yet to develop their information networks, there is not much more than rumors to go on regarding the situation in the City States. There are no indications that the war front has moved, either north or south, but we have heard that the hunt for changelings has intensified in the border states Dern, Koral and Regol.

We are working to confirm that a method for revealing changelings already in the cradle has been discovered. A rumor, picked up in Freetown, says that yet another city state has left the Union of Cities and that it is likely the recently mentioned Koral – the state that up until now has been responsible for the Union's central line along the front. If this is true, and if Koral also has initiated contact with Princess Mon-Eo Ainon and a number of already independent city states (as indicated by earlier reports), the consequences could be devastating.

Remember that this information is uncorroborated and highly uncertain, but should the Union of Cities fall, it would likely mean an end to the war. A new treaty, championed by Koral's power hungry chancellor Aldamal, would turn the focus from west to east, and is one of the most threatening scenarios we can imagine at present. Plans for disposing of the Chancellor must be drawn up and executed forthwith.

Another report, the veracity of which is much debated among the priests in the Realm of the Order, could mean that The Eternal War will continue. It speaks of a newly founded academy in Rofeld, the city state south of Koral. This may of course be a lie fabricated by the Theologist for propaganda purposes, but the assertion that a new mystical tradition based on the field of alchemy has been developed must be taken seriously – not because (as the priests claim) it is dedicated to "the perversion of the Natural State," but because firetubes and missile batteries demonstrate what type of destructive powers the alchemists of the city states can unleash.

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Conclusion

We can conclude that the information gained over the last month is uncertain and to a large extent worrying, if not outright alarming. The Queen is and will forever be the light in this world, along with Prios who loves our Nightbane as highly as He Himself is loved.

Should the Sekretorium dare to articulate an assumption, it would say that the threats from outside our borders are modest but in many cases growing more severe. The Queen is advised to be on her guard against visitors from abroad, especially those encountered in Yndaros: those who move among the refugees, recruiting workers to Freetown; the emissaries of the Theologist who, invited or not, visit the Cathedral of Martyrs and the convent school; the ambassadors sent to the capital's court and trading houses from the city states. To be sure, there are dangers in Davokar and our neighboring lands, but the Queen is encouraged to direct some attention to what happens inside Ambria's borders and also set aside resources for the Royal Sekretorium to establish a new department dedicated to uncovering any and all threats from within. If the efforts of the Twilight Friars are not assumed to be enough on that front, that is.

Last but not least, we want to repeat the wish for increased funds in order to outfit an expedition to the Archipelago. It has become all the more evident that something has happened to the previously barren isles. The latest rumors say that the Theologist has arranged a near disastrous expedition there, and that the lone returnee confirmed the accuracy of some of the accounts previously left by seamen and explorers. Indeed, he was said to be "beside himself" or even "seriously disturbed," but he claimed to have walked through dense forests full of life; moreover, life of a kind never before seen – creatures he called "Bear Spiders," "Flying Mist-cats," "The She-worm" and "The Termite Youngsters."

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Also, according to the report, he stated, in one and the same sentence, that a) the archipelago is uninhabited, and b) there are Elven warbands on the isles. The returnee roared all this outside the chapel of The Executioner and behaved in a manner that corresponds with all others who have set foot on the isles in later years. However, again, the Sekretorium humbly asks if we can afford not to investigate this further. The question becomes even more serious if seen in the light of report 21:06:12, "The Fluctuating Stability of Existence in the Silt of The Black Pitch Mire."

Your Humble Servant

Rodgar Melion

Philip Linden (Order #46324087)

IT WAS NOT EASY for Arvano and his half-brother to get past the crowd gathered in a semicircle in front of the Cathedral of Martyrs, but with the slow movements of the masses they managed to squeeze forward, step by step. Just as the last rays of sunshine faded from the winter sky, they finally pushed their way to the front. They had waited a long time to witness the spectacle which their countrymen now associated with the Sun God – a god who once represented love and the spark of life, but had been distorted into something entirely different.

When the double doors of the cathedral slammed open, Arvano gave his brother a slight elbow in the side, followed by a meaningful look. Before them, the apostles of Prios filed out into the darkening evening, carrying golden lanterns on silver staffs, marching as one to the tune of a somber hymn, all dressed in cowls of yellow and red. The half-brother's cheeks were glowing, and it was easy to see why. What transpired before them was even worse than the rumors claimed; the so-called Sun Parade was like a military march, or rather a funeral procession for the supposedly dying Sun God.

Spitting on the ground, Arvano turned his back on the parade and pulled his brother along. They slipped back out and into a narrow alley, where they paused, backs resting against the wall. Before they had time to clear their heads, a shadow fell over the cobblestones – a cloaked figure, standing wide-legged in the alley entrance, soon joined by four similar individuals. A quick glance the other way revealed that they were surrounded. *"The Lawgiver sees you, heretics,"* hissed a menacing voice from deep within the hood.

How long he lay bleeding on the ground until he was finally wrapped in death's embrace, Arvano could not say...

Philip Linden (Order #42324037)

Adventuring

Philip Linden (Order #42324037)

Introduction

As an introduction to the wondrously dark wilderness of Symbaroum's game world, this section presents seven detailed adventure landscapes. It is our hope that this will serve you better than general descriptions of areas or phenomena, and inspire you to develop sites of your own, possibly with further guidance from relevant content in the *Gamemaster's Guide*.

The chapters that follow focus on one location each, providing information on the ruins' history, layout (with maps), main challenges, and loot; the texts also provide tips on how to get your player characters involved and motivated. Even if the building blocks are the same, the structure and presentation varies to some extent, to fit the content and style of each adventure landscape.

Gamemasters are encouraged to develop the sites with more details and to adjust them to the preferred play style of their gaming groups. Regarding balance and challenge rating, the opposition has been designed for **characters of 5th to 10th level**. Hence, it is presumed that your player characters have some experience from previous adventures, as for instance *Where Darkness Dwells* and *The Gathering Storm* from the *Ruins of Symbaroum Gamemaster's Screen*, or other various adventures found in the *Adventure Compendium*. Should this not be the case, the locations may need to be adjusted to lower or higher levels.

Green as Copper

At a location three to five days march beyond the southern border of Davokar is a field of ruins with only one relatively intact building. No trees are growing in the area, only single bushes and pale green grass, as if Davokar's greenery avoided or had a hard time taking root on the field. Judging by the layout of the moss-covered, crumbled ruins a great city must once have stood on the location.

Background

THE SORCERESS MENANDRA Na-Yah lived about a millennium ago, before the great empire of Symbaroum had started to crumble. She was one of the most accomplished Theourgs at the time, mystics that not only had deep insights into life and death but who also had the skills and understanding to manipulate them both. Like her colleagues, she saw herself as a creator of life; in reality she was a mutilator of the flesh, blood, glands, and shapes that life itself had created.

Her success was not only due to hard work, tenacious studies and an unnaturally long life. No, much of her strength she gathered from the Copper Cypress. The crooked evergreen, full of berries colored like tarnished copper, was found at the bottom of a sinkhole by two lowly hunters. As soon as the sorceress had examined the find she convinced her monarch to make her the steward of the surrounding region. The tree was enclosed by a roundel of stone and its cave was given a roof so that the sinkhole could be filled in. Finally she built her residence, complete with all the facilities needed in order to create the lifeform she had promised her monarch in return for the favor.

The player characters can learn about Menandra's residence in different ways. For instance, they can purchase the information from a treasure hunter who has been there but who did not believe it would be worth the trouble to dig down into the cellar. Another option may be that they or Ordo Magica happen upon cuneiform writings somewhere else, describing Menandra Na-Yah, the Copper Cypress and where she once ruled.

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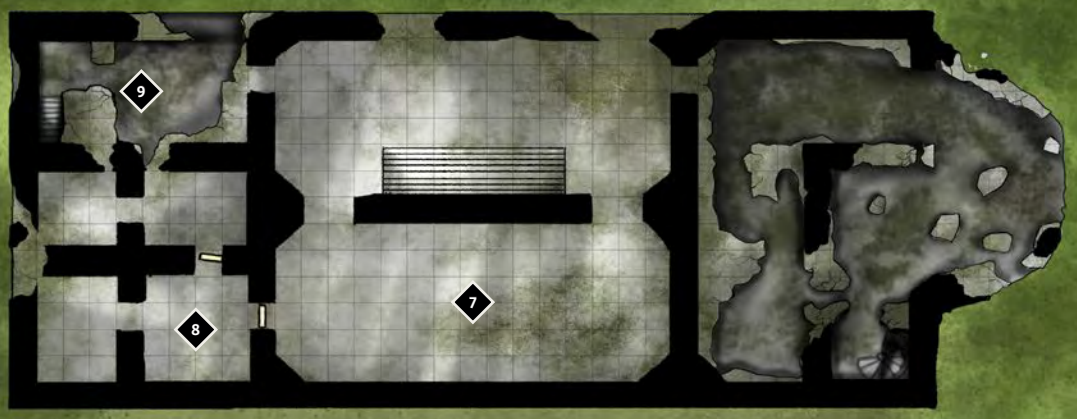
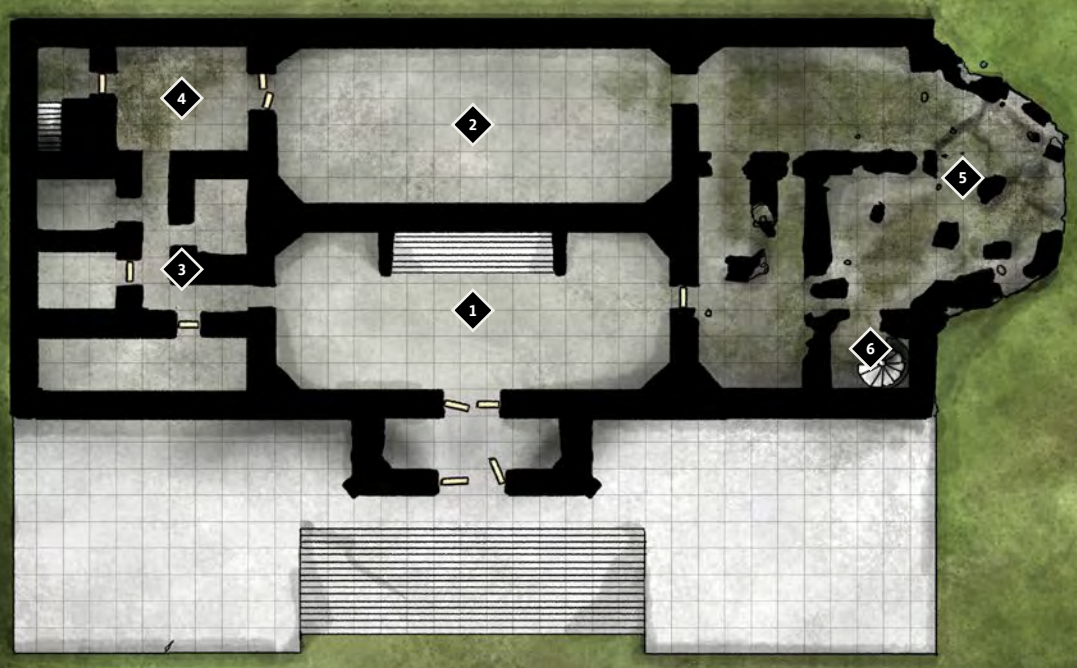
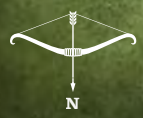
Upper Floor



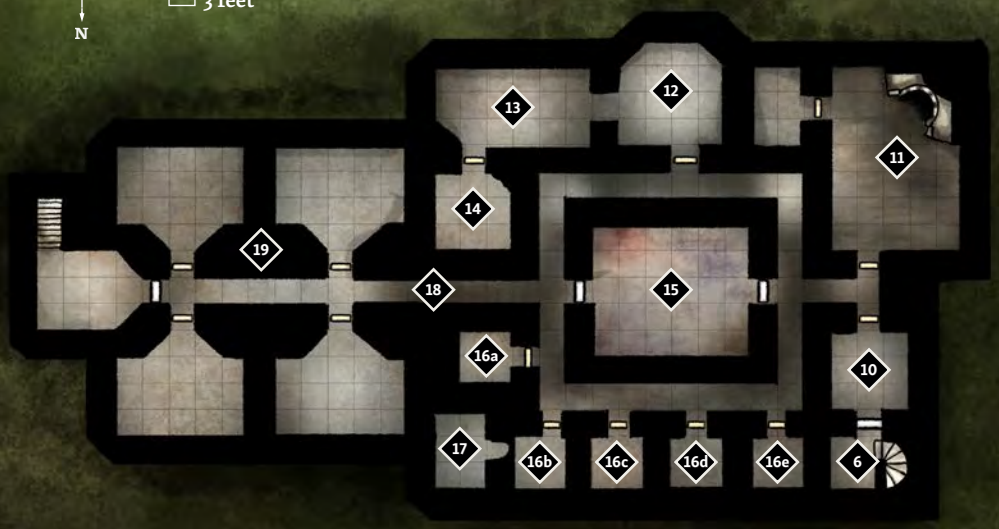
Ground Floor





1 m
3 feet

Cellar



GREEN AS COPPER

1. Entry Hall
2. Salon
3. Servants' Quarter
4. Kitchen
5. Rubble
6. Stairwell
7. Upper Floor
8. Bed Chamber
9. Razed Nursery Chamber
10. Storage
11. Furnace
12. Office
13. Library
14. Archive
15. Laboratory

16a–e. Cells

17. Hidden Chamber
18. Spirit Portal
19. Storerooms

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THE CAVE
A. Ladder up to #17
B. The Copper Cypress
C. Remains of an Abomination
D. Hidden Passage
E. Krazaragas, the Watcher
F. Treasure Chamber

Overview

IN ITS DAY, the residence was three stories high and had a tower to the west reaching three more stories toward the heavens. Now only the cellar, ground floor and parts of the second floor remain, along with the caves far beneath, containing the Copper Cypress and in which the priestess has settled in to spend eternity along with the sad remains of her family.

SECOND FLOOR

Aside from one room (#9), the middle and eastern parts of the upper level still have floors and walls. The razed room has neither, which is also the case for the western parts of the level. What remains of the floor is covered in rubble that has been overgrown with moss and plant life; walking around up there is almost like hiking through rugged forest terrain, were it not for the spots where it is evident that some treasure hunter or explorer has been digging or poking around.

GROUND FLOOR

The bottom floor is easier to move around in. What is left of the upper story's floors function as the ground level's ceiling; earth and debris have drifted in through the gaping windows and through the stairwell upstairs (#1), but in some places you can actually get a glimpse of the old stone floors.

The western parts that are without roofs are another story. The walls to the rooms are intact but the floors look very much like those on the upper level. The one exception is the stairwell to the cellar (#6) – when the player characters arrive it has already been cleared of debris so they can see parts of the metal door downstairs.

CELLAR

The cellar is divided into two sections. To the east was storage for food and household goods along with a laundry room (#19). Nothing of value remains on this side and all inventories have long since decomposed or turned to dust. In the western part, Menandra had her laboratory.

The test subjects were kept in the cells (#16a–e), before and after they had been injected with various drugs or been subjected to experiments. The bones of what appears to be a three-headed feline are in one of the cells; something looking like the remains of a winged human of ogre-size is in another. The chamber in the southwestern corner (#11) is dominated by a huge oven, presumably the place where the sorceress got rid of laboratory waste.

THE CAVE

Finally, there is a natural cave far beneath the residence. In the large chamber one first enters (#B) stands the Copper Cypress, surrounded by a low stone wall. The ceiling is chiefly made from massive blocks of stone, used to cover the bottom of the sinkhole when the rest of the hole was filled in.

In the southeastern chamber (#C), Menandra kept one of her most successful experiments, but the creature is long

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since dead – judging by the remains a small humanoid with abnormally long limbs, fingers like sharp bone claws, intergrown ribs and a skull crowned by a high cockscomb of bone. The sturdy stone door is ajar.

Lastly, the hidden passage (#D) leading to the treasure chamber (#F). Finding the way there requires that the characters expressly search along the walls and succeed at a **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check**.

The Rivals

AS THE PLAYER characters arrive at the ruin they will soon discover that they are not the first ones there. Another group of **fortune hunters** (*Bestiary*, page 185) has already set up camp in the residence, where they have been for ten days trying to clear all the debris and rubble from the spiral stair to the cellar. They are very close to finishing and will not leave without a fight.

Should the player characters approach the ruin without taking precautions, the lookout of the rivals will see them coming and gather his group for an ambush in the Entry Hall (#1). If they instead try to sneak up on the ruin, have the character with the lowest Stealth modifier make an opposed check against the lookout's Wisdom (Perception). If successful, a character with a **passive Perception of 14 or higher** will spot the lookout and approach the ruin undetected.

The leader of the rival gang is the former highway robber Lamando who has decided to try his luck as a treasure hunter. If the player characters decide to approach under a white flag, he will welcome them in to discuss the situation. Should the characters offer him valuables or coin to a value of 500 thaler he will claim to be willing to leave the ruin; the outcome is the same if he deems that the newcomers are evenly matched to or stronger than the members of his own gang. In reality, he only believes that he has found a great way for him and his friends to avoid the dangers of the ruin. They grab their equipment and say adieu, then search out a place nearby to lay in wait, hoping to be able to rob the weakened player characters of any treasure once they return to the surface.

For the stats of Lamando and his henchmen (as many as the PCs), use **fortune hunters** and a **robber chief** (for Lamando, *Bestiary*, page 187), adding any appropriate features to challenge the player characters.

Challenges on the Way

THERE ARE TWO main ways to access the old laboratory, from which a secret passage leads down to the caves and the ruin's treasure-trove. In the cave, the owners of the estate are waiting. They have been doing so for an eternity and are not prepared give up what sliver of life they still possess.

THE BRONZE GATE

When the stairwell has been cleared all the way to the bottom, a door of blackened metal is uncovered. The only ways to open it is to utter the name of Menandra's husband or to perform a very demanding feat of strength.

It is not easy to figure out that the magically sealed door opens to the name of the husband. The only clue is a symbol carved into the black metal – a horizontal sandglass within a circle, within a horizontal ellipse – and the partially destroyed cuneiform writings on the upper frame of the doorway which roughly translates to "Lover's Gate".

A character with Loremaster feature who succeeds **DC 15 Intelligence (History) check** remembers a long list of stories about ruins with doors that open to the utterance of a particular word or a phrase. The learned one also automatically knows that the symbol on the door is an ancient symbol for love or infatuation, with the approximate meaning "when I look at you, time stands still."

The name of Menandra's husband can be read in one single place. In the Bed Chamber (#8) are the broken remains of a red-stone tablet. The pieces are found with a **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check**, then pieced together with a **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check**: "Here Domo and Menandra dream shared dreams." If standing at the gate saying *"Domo"* you hear squeaks and rattles from a locking mechanism, after which the door can be opened.

Another option is to force the door open using raw strength. In the narrow space, only two people can work together, using sturdy bending tools trying to pry the door from its hinges. To get the door open both players must succeed at a **DC 17 Strength (Athletics) check** in the same round. They get three shots at it before they are forced to call it quits.

THE SPIRIT PORTAL

There is a second and for some individuals easier path into Menandra's laboratory. It was constructed as a quick escape route, to use if some of the sorceress' creations could not be controlled. At first glance, the portal separating the basement's store-rooms from the laboratory (#18) appears to be open, but in reality passage is hindered by an invisible mountain spirit – which will show as soon as someone tries to walk through the vault, instead coming to a halt as if hitting a glass wall.

To be able to pass through the portal you either have to carry one of the medallions that the spirit has learned to recognize, or drive the spirit away. There are two copies of the inconspicuous medallion still around – one carried by Menandra where she sits by the Copper Cypress; one that can be found by digging in the dirt in one of the slave chambers

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A Third Way Inside

If the characters fail to get either of the two paths open, the Gamemaster may offer them a third alternative. The stone wall between the stairwell and one of the cells (#16e) can be breached, if you but take the time. For two persons with pickaxes it will take three days to open up a hole big enough to pass through.

It is recommended that the characters are not left to work in peace. If they somehow made Lamando and his gang retreat, the rivals may lose their patience and attack. Otherwise, it is highly likely that those who stay in the same spot for several days, and who also make a lot of noise, will attract the attention of predatory beasts, hungry rage trolls, or even an elven warband.

(#3), where it sits around the skeletal neck of its wearer (requires a **DC 15 Wisdom [Perception] check** to notice it).

To banish the spirit you first have to realize that it is there, which is done by using Shadow-sight and succeeding at a **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check**. After that, there are two ways to handle the challenge. You can either cast *dispel magic* (automatically successful as it was summoned using a 3rd level spell) or you can pass a **DC 18 Wisdom (Perception) check** to notice a thin silver wire running along the frame and threshold of the portal. The spirit is bound to the silver and if you destroy the wire – for example using the sharp tip of a sword – the spirit is set free.

THE HIDDEN DOOR

Gaining entrance to the caves below the basement and the treasure waiting there is far from impossible, provided that the characters are observant. After having looked inside cell 16a and 16b they probably realize that there should be another room in the corner – if not, let the players make a **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check** to reach this conclusion.

In cell 16b there is a hidden door, difficult to discover and also armed with a still functioning trap. If you put pressure on the right brick, you can open the door without problems; put pressure anywhere else and the trap is sprung – four spears being launched out of the floor, aimed at where the one trying to open the door is standing.

The person who springs the trap must make a **DC 15 Dexterity saving throw**. Roll 1d4 to determine how many spears hit the character. Each spear does 1d6 piercing damage.

Finding the door requires a **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check**. A character who then expressly wants to examine the door more closely and who succeeds with a roll against **DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check** discovers the trap and which brick to put pressure on.

THE NECROMAGE

Down in the cave (#B) dwells Menandra Na-Yah, now a powerful necromage. With her are her family, husband Domo and their triplet daughters, reanimated as **dragouls** (*Bestiary*, page 156). They are spending eternity sitting on the stone wall surrounding the Copper Cypress, but arise in unison when the characters come close.

The necromage will not initiate combat. To talk to her (in the Symbarian tongue) you need the Loremaster feature. She is not interested in any long conversations but says that the characters may do anything they wish so long as they refrain from approaching her precious tree or trying to harm her family. And should talking be out of the question, she is content with just staring at them with her big, shiny black eyes.

Menandra Na-Yah, Necromage

"Life lasts a moment, eternity no one can steal from us."

In life Menandra was both feared and celebrated, with access to the halls of power and surrounded by a court of servile subjects. Also in death she expects to be treated with respect, but she has long since accepted the fate of her and her family and feels no need to defend anything but her husband and daughters and her fruit tree – all else is irreverent and easily forsaken in the aim to protect her family.

Tactics: If the player characters threaten Menandra and her family, she starts by trying to terrify them after which she tries to use *hypnotic pattern* to charm them and immobilize them..

The Watcher

A grim growl that sends smoke coiling from its nostrils

Between the player characters and Menandra's treasures (#E) stands the primal blight beast she has named Krazaragas, luckily weakened after having spent a millennium surviving on water and berries from the cypress. The shape-shifting creature feels most at home in the form of a

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Menandra Na-Yah

Medium undead

Armor Class 14
Hit Points 112 (15d8 + 45)
Speed 30 ft

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	19 (+4)	17 (+3)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	20 (+5)

Saving Throws Con +8, Wis +6
Skills Arcana +12, Intimidation +10, Perception +6
Damage Immunities necrotic, poison, bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 16
Languages Symbarian
Challenge 10 (2,300 XP, proficiency bonus +4)
Manner proud, protective
Shadow streaks of black and purple, like a lilac rain on a starless night (thoroughly corrupt)
Equipment —

Expertise. Menandra Na-Yah has expertise in Arcana.

Innate Spellcasting. Menandra Na-Yah's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (+10 to hit, spell save DC 17). She can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components.

At will: *accurate strike*, *light*, *message*, *shocking grasp*
5/day each: *black bolt*, *detect magic*, *mage armor*, *magic missile*, *shield*, *silent image*
3/day each: *blur*, *invisibility*, *web*
2/day each: *counterspell*, *hypnotic pattern*, *lightning bolt*
1/day each: *black tentacles*, *dimension door*, *greater invisibility*

Magic Resistance. Menandra Na-Yah has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Terrifying. Each creature that starts its turn within 120 feet of Menandra Na-Yah must pass a DC 17 Charisma saving throw or become frightened of her. A frightened creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of its turn, ending the effect on a success. Creatures that succeed are immune to this effect for 24 hours.

ACTIONS

Soul Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) slashing damage and 2 (1d4) temporary Corruption.

REACTIONS

Death Cry (Recharge 5–6). When struck, Menandra Na-Yah wails a keening cry that transcends the borders between life and death. Each creature that hears it must make a DC 17 Constitution saving throw, taking necrotic damage equal to their current Corruption total on a failure.

monstrous, horned wild boar, and it is like that she will greet the player characters once they enter her cave.

There are no alternatives to battle in this case – if the characters want to go further into the tunnels the creature must be bested. The abomination is restrained by a mystically strengthened chain, long enough for it to attack persons standing at the entrance of the cave (#E).

Tactics: As someone appears at the entrance Krazaragas breathes a cone of fire, after which she puts her trust in her tusks and her rage.

Krazaragas (in boar form)

Huge abomination

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)
Hit Points 81 (6d12 + 42)
Speed 50 ft

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	12 (+1)	25 (+7)	4 (–3)	14 (+2)	1 (–5)

Saving Throws Con +10, Wis +5
Damage Resistances cold, fire, psychic; bludgeoning, piercing and slashing from nonmagical weapons
Condition Immunities charmed, frightened
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12
Languages —
Challenge 7 (2,900 XP, proficiency bonus +3)
Manner raging
Shadow black with a barely visible undertone of flaming red (thoroughly corrupt)
Equipment —

Charge. If Krazaragas moves at least 20 ft. straight toward a target and then hits it with a tusk attack on the same turn, the target takes an extra 10 (3d6) slashing damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 18 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Corruptive Blood. A creature that attacks Krazaragas with a melee weapon takes 1d6 acid damage and 1 temporary Corruption from her blood spattering onto their body.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Krazaragas makes a tusks attack and a hoof attack.

Fire Breath (Recharge 6). Krazaragas exhales fire in a 30-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw, taking 31 (9d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Tusks. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (3d6 + 6) slashing damage and 2 (1d4) temporary Corruption.

Hoof. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (1d8 + 6) bludgeoning damage.

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The Copper Cypress

The Copper Cypress is the last remaining specimen of an extinct species that grew in the Davokar region before the forest started spreading. This particular seed was carried by the winds to land and take root at the bottom of a sinkhole. Under normal circumstances, it would not have been able to grow in the dark, but the place was blessed by mystical powers from which the seed could draw the energies it needed.

Aside from being nourishing enough to replace a day's ration of food, the fruits of the tree have a protective effect against Corruption. If you consume a fresh berry (this counts as an object interaction), you reduce the gain of temporary Corruption to half its usual amount for the next minute. For dried berries or those harvested more than 24 hours ago the effect is weaker – temporary Corruption is reduced by 1 for the same time period.

The tree carries fruit all year long but only produces one new berry per week. Any attempt to move the tree will lead to its death, which can be realized by someone with a **DC 13 Intelligence (Nature) check**.

Loot

THE UPPER LEVEL is wrecked and searched by other explorers, so there is nothing to be found. But if you dig in the dirt covering the floors at the ground level, you can find a six-branched golden candlestick (value: 17 thaler), a fist-sized toad figurine in green-speckled onyx (value: 13 thaler) and an abacus with pearls of gold, silver, copper, brimstone and rubies (value: 52 thaler).

The laboratory section also contains some respectable finds. In the chamber of the furnace (#11) is a simple bowl holding twelve golden teeth, two of which are long and pointy like fangs (value: 14 thaler). In the laboratory itself (#15) stands two urns that once contained the elixirs Shadow Tint and Spirit Friend. All liquid has evaporated but if water is added a character can attempt a **DC 17 Intelligence (Field Laboratory) check** to learn how to make the drugs (value: 55 thaler for a master alchemist, 35 thaler for other buyers).

An important find can also be made in the library (#13). Most of the books that stood on the shelves have been destroyed by mildew, but a successful **DC 17 Wisdom (Perception) check** allows you to find a hidden compartment in the north wall. In there is a volume containing Menandra's private contemplations on her work as a theourg – something which, for instance, Ordo Magica would love to read (value: 45 thaler, or twice as much for wizards or sorcerers able to read Symbarian writings).

Finally, the treasure chamber (#F). Two bronze chests stand on the ground, one filled with nothing but unreadable remains of books and scrolls. In the other are the artifacts Yarego's Iron Fist and Peatro's Flask along with the family savings: a jar of Symbarian gold coins (value: 150 thaler), another jar containing mixed gemstones (value: 220 thaler) and finally Adaman-Saar, in the legends spoken of as the blood-stained diamond (value: 300 thaler).

Peatro's Flask, ARTIFACT

This small and engraved tin flask may very well be the one that according to legends was carried by the priestess Peatro. She is mentioned in some songs, claimed to originate from the final days of Symbaroum, as a cautionary example that acts of kindness can have dire consequences if performed with the help of mystical powers.

The flask can contain two doses and has the ability to endow any liquid with healing properties. But at a cost: first, the mystic suffers Corruption when the liquid is transformed, then the elixir has a corrupting effect on anyone drinking it.

Dark Cure

The master of the flask can make the liquid inside it gain healing properties. The elixir is active for 1d4 rounds, and each a character can use their action to consume a dose of the concoction and heal 1d8 hit points, but also gains half of the amount healed in temporary Corruption.

Requires: object interaction
Corruption: 1 temporary Corruption when activated

Anti-Darkness

The master of the flask can make the liquid inside it counteract damage from poisons. A character that uses their action to drink from the flask gains resistance to poison damage for 1 minute, but the drinker also gains 1d4 temporary Corruption.

Requires: object interaction
Corruption: 1 temporary Corruption when activated

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Yarego's Iron Fist, ARTIFACT

The object called Yarego's Iron Fist is mentioned in dozens of legends from the early days of Symbaroum and its battles, as belonging to different owners in different locations. The artifact is truly a marvel of mystical crafting skills but also demands much from whomever wants to be its master – their arm must be cut off right below the elbow so that the item can merge with the stump. When in place, the awkward thing is just about flexible enough to perform daily activities like gripping a dining knife, but its grip will not allow the effective use of any kind of weapon.

As the name suggests, the foot-long Iron Fist is made from iron that in time has been marked with spots of rust and innumerous cuts from parried blades. In combat, long spikes extend from the knuckles and an iron collar unfolds to encircle the arm near the elbow, to be used as a quillion. In combination with its weight, this gives the Iron Fist a permanent +1 to armor class and damage. In battle, a strike from the Iron Fist does 1d12 bludgeoning damage, plus the user's Strength bonus. A user is proficient with the Iron Fist. Adding to that, the artifact has the following powers:

Stun
With a hit that deals damage, the Iron Fist can stun the enemy. When activated, the target must make a **Constitution saving throw** against the damage total. If failed, the target becomes stunned until then end of its next turn. This feature requires a short or longer rest to recharge.

Requires: Bonus Action
Corruption: 1d4 temporary Corruption when activated

Push
With a hit that deals damage, the fist can give the target an added push. When activated, the target must make a **Strength saving throw** (the DC is 8 + the master's proficiency bonus + their Strength modifier). On a failure they become prone.

Requires: Bonus Action
Corruption: 1d4 temporary Corruption when activated

Break
On their turn, a user of the Iron Fist may attack the enemy's weapon instead of the enemy itself. First, a successful attack roll must be made to get a grip on the weapon; then the wielder of the fist must succeed at a **Strength (Athletics) check** to break the weapon asunder. The DC is 15 for an ordinary 1-handed weapon and a weapon with the heavy or massive properties is DC 18 and one with the light property is DC 13. A magical weapon cannot be destroyed like this – if so, the target is disarmed.

Requires: Bonus Action
Corruption: 1d6 temporary Corruption when activated

A Blooming Vale

In a vale deep inside Davokar is the ruin of a Symbarian castle – a handful of well-preserved stone structures, framed by a towering wall, which long ago was the high seat of the family Ambreagos. The vale is still blooming but more wild than beautiful and also so densely vegetated that its floor can hardly be glimpsed during the summers. This is the reason why so few Ambrians have found the place – most expeditions, especially the larger ones, depart during summer when the sea of leaves makes it impossible to see even the high central tower of the main building from a distance.

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Background

ONE EARLY SUMMER'S day fourteen years ago, a trio of amateur explorers were traveling the region before the greenery had awoken. They spotted the tower, rappelled down the steep wall of the cliff and marched through the thicket all the way to the gates of the castle.

One of them died in combat with the pack of mare cats living in the overgrown courtyard, but the two survivors could then start exploring the ancient structure. Other fortune hunters had told them that the most remarkable finds were always made in tombs and mausoleums, so they decided to start at that end. This proved to be a bad idea. The intrusion woke the embalmed remains of Na-Ethikel Ambreagos to life and to a thirst for blood even grimmer than what he experienced before dying.

Filled with warm juices of life, the undead left the crypt and settled down in his old castle. He reanimated the three explorers and had them clean out the building – towing away dirt and debris, scrubbing, sweeping and polishing up the metal objects still remaining. As more and more expeditions departed from Thistle Hold, more humans found their way to the bottom of the ravine. Blood flowed and Na-Ethikel's horde of undead grew larger and larger. Still, the Lord of the castle was not satisfied.

Little more than four years ago, he decided to capture, rather than kill, the next group of humans to arrive at his doorstep. This proved to be Trobela, a Master of Ordo Magica, and her three novices, who had come to the vale intent on cataloging its plant life. Trobela was versed in Symbarian writings and with her enforced help Na-Ethikel started to rediscover the world. And when the wizard told him about Thistle Hold he had an idea.

He selected one of Trobela's novices who seemed to love his Master the most, and sent him to the Hold with a mind full of horrible visions of what would happen to his beloved if he did not obey. Since then, the novice Ranfalt has sold information about "The Blooming Vale" to parties of wannabe treasure hunters, and actually also to a group of templars out to search for ancient sun temple ruins. This way the loyal subjects of Na-Ethikel Ambreagos have continued to grow in numbers.

The colonnade up to Ambreago's high seat is magnificent in its overgrown splendor.

Overview

THE VALE WHERE the castle is situated appeared thousands of years ago after a subsidence in the ground. Elliptical in shape, it is at its widest a couple of thousand paces from long side to long side, but grows narrower in the northwest and southeast as a squinting eye. The cliff walls plunge steeply and are between fifty and a hundred paces high, but the narrower the vale is, the lower and less steep are the walls. To get down to those places is easy, but then you must be ready to fight your way through the dense and beast plagued forest for at least a whole day's walk.

Thanks to warm and nutritious water bubbling up from the Underworld, the vale is even more verdant than the surrounding forest. The trees are high and lush, the undergrowth is rich even though the foliage steals most of the sunlight, and among the many species of the vale there are some that are literally unique. At its northwestern end lives the cannibalistic goblin tribe Arekkegald as obedient followers of the **liege troll** Galde, and in the southeast a family of **aboars** have their territory. However, close to the castle, there is no wildlife except for birds and insects.

The castle is covered in vines, moss, and lichens. The blue-glazed stone wall is at least the height of three men but is no obstacle – both because the gates (#1) are wide

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open, and because virtually all trees near the wall are even higher and have branches reaching out over the courtyard. Trees also cover everything inside the wall, except for where they have been cut down on the order of the undead Lord, leaving nothing but stubs, moss, and wild berry bushes on the ground. Trodden paths lead to the four central buildings and the mausoleum.

Described below are a number of challenges that the player characters must face to make it in and out of the castle alive. The Gamemaster is of course welcome to add to or modify these challenges. But more importantly, they should take the time to figure out what hides inside the buildings that are not described below and add some more details to the landscape. As a point of departure it can be said that the Symbarian family Ambreagos worshiped the Bull God Eox and that they were fierce warriors, rather than a family consisting of bookworms and mystics.

The Buildings in the Courtyard

One of the buildings on the south side (#4) is full of explorer's equipment in varying degrees of decay, while the other (#3) functions as provisions storage, containing about two dozen carcasses of goblins and smaller beasts, and a stupidly staring aboar whose skull is untouched but who is otherwise eaten to the bone.

In the northern building (#2) lives Na-Ethikel's horde of undead – roughly two hundred women and men, so jam-packed that they can hardly sit on the dirt floor. Player characters who lean their head against the door can easily determine that a huge crowd of people is inside the building. They may also remove the bolt from one of the doors and have a quick peak without the undead having time to react. Oh, and should they be stupid enough to leave the door open they have themselves to blame...

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Challenges on the Way

EVEN IF IT is fully possible that the player characters happen upon the vale by chance, it is more likely that they purchase the information from Ranfalt. If so, he will warn them of the northwestern and southeastern ends and suggest that they climb down the cliff somewhere along the sides.

Centuries of erosion have made the rock easier to climb than it once was, but it is still a very difficult climb (provided that they do not bring along lots and lots of rope on the journey). The one who makes a successful **DC 10 Wisdom (Survival) check** can, after a bit of searching, find a place that looks passable. If choosing that way, all player characters that are not proficient in Acrobatics must make two **DC 15 Dexterity saving throws** during the descent. A failure means a fall of 3d6 feet down the cliff-side.

Should they instead keep searching for an even simpler path, one can be found if someone succeeds with a **DC 13 Wisdom (Survival) check**. In that case the descent is handled as above, with the exception that the descent requires two **DC 13 Dexterity saving throws** and that the fall is never more than 2d6 feet.

THE TEMPLARS

Just like the gates in the wall, the twin-doors of the main building (#6) stand wide open. The great entry hall is totally bare and clean, and the walls are free from greenery. Should the player characters arrive at night, they will find the hall illuminated by oil burning along the rim of a great iron chandelier.

Four living persons are awaiting the characters in the hall – two templars in shining plate mail and their two squires. One of the sun knights introduces himself as Eran Kalfas and orders the characters to lay down their arms. They are now the guests of Na-Ethikel Ambreagos and if they appear capable and compliant, he suggests that they will obtain prominent positions in the army of their Lord. Should they for some reason decline the offer, they will die and be forced to join the army's vanguard.

A successful use of the Shadow-sight feature reveals that all four of them are under the influence of *dominate person* (see *The Ring of Dominion*, page 152) – they will die fighting if their master orders them to do so.

A character with a **passive Perception of 15 or higher** notices some strange distortions in the stone floor, suggesting that it hides a pitfall. If this is not discovered and the characters charge at the templars, everyone moving forward must succeed at a **DC 13 Dexterity saving throw** or trample through the floor. The fall is 20 feet and once down, there is no way of getting back up without help from others.

Removing the influence of the magic requires the use of *dispel magic*. Hence, combat against the templars is more or

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less unavoidable. But if any of them are captured alive and freed from the spell they will undoubtedly become valuable companions during what remains of the scenario.

Templars

"Apologies, but you have to die ..."

Two once upon a time proud sun knights who have been caught by Na-Ethikel's magic. They perform their duties fanatically but are tormented by every move, so much in fact that they are longing for death. Every wound they receive is greeted with a smile, the more severe the better.

For stats, see *Bestiary*, page 170.

Squires

"Resistance is futile..."

A boy and girl of noble blood that both hoped to grow into fully-fledged knights of Prios. Now, they are controlled by Na-Ethikel and are fighting sword and shield for their undead master, instead of spreading the light of the Lawgiver.

For stats, see *Bestiary*, page 177.

THE COURT

The court of Ambreagos is assembled on the third floor of the central tower (#6) – undead women and men dressed up in whatever they could find. Their faces are painted white with chalk, their lips red with rust-colored oil; they wear mismatching, dirty and often ill-fitting clothes selected from what the "guests" of the castle had in their backpacks upon arrival; the hair of the women is set in sloppy styles, decorated with drooping flowers or withered leaf laurels.

The robust door between the stairwell and the floor is closed. A successful **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check** reveals that a large crowd of people shuffles about on the other side.

By smearing oil on the hinges and passing a **DC 15 Dexterity (Stealth) check**, the door can be pushed ajar without attracting attention. Then, if someone succeeds with a **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check**, they discover a winch contraption right outside the door; releasing the sprint will make a massive chandelier fall to the floor.

Fifteen undead members of the court are in the room, but if the characters start their attack by releasing the chandelier 2d4 of these will **a)** take 2d8 bludgeoning damage, and **b)** become restrained by the heavy iron piece. At the end of their turn, the ones caught may try to break free by succeeding at a **DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check**.

Ladys/Lords in Waiting

Hisses hospitably with dry throats.

Tactics: The court aborts its stumbling parody of dancing when the characters make themselves known and attack at random with long claw-like nails.

THE STAIR TRAP

The throne room of Na-Ethikel Ambreagos is on the fifth floor. Long ago it was furnished as the bedchamber of the gentry, and the ancient traps that once were designed to stop wrongdoers from reaching the chamber have been restored.

There are three traps in the stair leading up to level five, which are sprung if you put your weight on the wrong step. The first two fire four poison-tipped arrows each; four separate **DC 10 Dexterity saving throws** must be made. A failure means that the arrow deals 3d6 poison damage, and the target must make a **DC 10 Constitution saving throw** or take 1d6 poison damage at the end of their turn. The victim can repeat the saving throw at the end of their turn, ending the effect on a success.

Discovering the first poison trap requires a character with a **passive Perception of 17 or higher**. When that one has been exposed, a [**passive Perception of 13 or higher** is all it takes to find the one ten steps further up the stair.

Lady/Lord in Waiting

Medium undead

Armor Class 13
Hit Points 26 (4d8 + 8)
Speed 30 ft

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

Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, poisoned
Senses darkvision 60 feet, passive Perception 10
Languages those it knew in life
Challenge 1 (200 XP, proficiency bonus +2)
Manner overly genteel
Shadow bluish-black like boils of the plague (thoroughly corrupt)
Equipment —

Corruption Sense. If a creature has one or more points of permanent Corruption, the lady/lord has advantage on Perception checks to find or notice it.

ACTIONS

Bone Nails. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

REACTIONS

Sudden Lunge (Recharge 5–6). If a creature moves within 5 feet of the lady/lord it can make a Bone Nails attack.

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Finally, close to the top there is a pitfall – if someone takes a wrong step, a 3 feet × 3 feet hole opens in the stair, to a fall of 15 feet towards the iron spikes waiting at the bottom (3d6 piercing damage). Anyone with a **passive Perception of 15 or higher** will notice the suspicious notches in the design of the steps and realize exactly which step will spring the trap.

If the trap is sprung, the one stepping on it may make a **DC 13 Dexterity saving throw**, trying to catch hold of the edge and stop the fall. If that fails, the character suffers damage from a 15-foot fall and also takes damage from the spikes.

NA-ETHIKEL AMBREAGOS

When the characters finally enter the throne room of the crypt lord, they find him standing on the balcony with two servants. He taps them on the shoulder, after which they let themselves fall over the rail. Then he walks to the throne with a sly smile on his chapped lips.

Na-Ethikel has forced his subjects to teach him the Ambrian tongue. With a harsh voice he asks the characters to put their weapons away. Should they refuse, he says that he only wants to talk and that they should have a look from the balcony. If they do, the sky-diving servants are either seen running towards or arriving at the building where Na-Ethikel's horde is imprisoned. Before long, the courtyard will swarm with thirsty troopers and should anything happen to their lord and commander they will storm the central tower.

If the characters let the undead lord continue to speak, he will offer them the chance to join his army and help him rise as the sovereign ruler of Symbaroum reborn. They will not even have to become his slaves, nor undead. Instead they are welcome to join of their own free will – all they need to do is bend their heads and to fall to their knees at his feet.

The Drone Spores

If, and in that case when, it becomes apparent that the characters cannot be convinced, Na-Ethikel engineers his escape. High up under the dark ceiling hang three small urns containing a soporific powder (see textbox). A thread runs down the wall, over the floor and to the throne of the Lord – a slight tug is all it takes for the content of the urns to fall on those standing beneath.

Noticing the contraption without any indication of its existence is hard; it requires a **DC 18 Wisdom (Perception) check**. However, anyone with a **passive Perception of 13 or higher** detects when Na-Ethikel grabs the end of the thread, allowing them to make a **DC 13 Dexterity saving throw** to avoid the effect of the spores.

Whatever else happens, Lord Ambreagos will try to flee once the spores fall through the air – he activates the artifact Eamon's Bell (see page 154) and uses his movement to run past the characters towards the stairs.

Drone Spores, ELIXIR

Drone spores are naturally occurring, encased in a puffball mushroom called Kabamon by the clanfolk. The mushroom is edible for most of its life cycle, but near the end it transforms into a veritable spore bomb.

The spores can be harvested (requires a successful **DC 15 Dexterity [Sleight of Hand] check**), and may then be used just like the Choking Spores (*Player's Guide*, page 181).

The victim of the cloud becomes stunned. Should the victim also fail a **DC 15 Constitution saving throw**, they will fall into a deep sleep for 10 minutes or until a creature uses an action to wake them or they suffer damage.

Player characters who are not prepared have disadvantage on the saving throw in order to avoid the soporific cloud; for those who noticed when Na-Ethikel grabbed the thread, a saving throw without modifications will suffice. The ones who are affected by the cloud become stunned (see below). And should they also fail the Constitution saving throw they become unconscious until a creature uses their action to wake them up or they take damage (see below).

Na-Ethikel Ambreagos

"Fall to your knees, insect!"

Na-Ethikel has decided to rebuild Symbaroum and refuses to accept that it cannot be done. But then again, he has all the time in the world to gather his forces, and truth be told: the dream is more important than making an actual attempt – he is basically happy just to rule once more, even if over a very tiny realm.

Na-Ethikel Ambreagos has the stats of a **crypt lord** (*Bestiary*, page 154), but can cast *dominate person* as an action by using the Ring of Dominion (see below).

The Ring of Dominion, ARTIFACT

This ring allows its master to cast *dominate person* as an 8th level spell up to three times a day. A creature that makes use of the ring to its maximum must take a long or extended rest before using the artifact again.

Requires: Action

Corruption: 1d8 temporary Corruption when the spell is cast

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SURROUNDED BY DEATH

Whether or not the characters manage to slay Na-Ethikel, they are at risk of becoming stuck in a tower invaded by dozens of **dragouls** executing the (possibly last) command of their Lord. They have no other option besides trying to punch through and escape.

Running down the stairs is possible but hardly recommended. About four dozen undead warriors will try to stop them – two dozen while descending the stairwell and two dozen awaiting them in the entry hall at the ground level. If the player characters choose that strategy, the Gamemaster should reward all good ideas but also punish them harshly for bad ones. Sure, they can throw or roll heavy objects ahead of them down the stairs and maybe make it to the ground floor. But there they will be greeted by three rows of eight enemy warriors, weapons drawn.

A more reasonable strategy is to use the vines on the façade and climb down to the roof of the main building, about 50 feet down. The climb will take three turns to complete and to get down safely each player must make two checks each turn. The first is a **DC 13 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check** and determines if the character grips the right vines – a failure means that the character falls onto the stone roof below (the height is reduced by 15 feet each turn). The other check requires **DC 10 Dexterity (Stealth)**.

Should any character fail, they make a sound or cause a small rock slide which is noted by the enemies roaming around in the courtyard. If so, the dragouls will start making their way to the roof in order to greet them – 1d4 undead reach the roof each turn, starting the turn after the player characters were exposed. You can also expect that the two dozen dragouls standing in the entry hall will understand what is happening and that they soon will start pouring out into the courtyard.

Making it down from the roof is not very hard, since the height is not more than fifteen feet. But they have to make a choice: either they run for the back wall, or they try to push their way to the gates. Should they go for the first option, they must strike down two enemies in their path and then start climbing with the horde closing in from behind.

They have five turns to work with before the enemies arrive, numbering 1d8 per turn. This time it is enough to roll against **DC 10 Wisdom (Survival)** in order to avoid treacherous branches, and two successful checks take them to the top. An alternative for some characters may be to wait on the ground and then be hoisted to the battlements, but that requires that two friends have made it up there.

The Lord's Prisoners

Should all player characters fall asleep in the throne room, Na-Ethikel will of course stop his escape. When they awake, they will find themselves locked inside one underground prison cell each, with the corroded iron bars replaced by sturdy wooden doors. And in the corridor outside are six armed dragouls.

The lord of the manor will try to control them with the *dominate person* spell from his Ring of Dominion. But if the players are smart, it should not have to come to that. Let the players be creative and be sure to reward any good ideas. Maybe the not very cunning and oh so narcissistic ruler can be convinced to actually set them free, if they promise to spread word about his greatness to Ambrians and barbarians in Thistle Hold? Maybe they can find parts of the old iron bars trampled into the dirt floor of the cells and use them to remove the cross-beams or get the doors open some other way? Or maybe one of the cells has a hidden door, making it possible for one of the characters to save themselves and then try to get the others out?

Loot

THE CHARACTERS HAVE most likely been lured to the site, which is far from unheard of when following directions purchased in Thistle Hold. It is also something that should be taken into account when deciding how much loot they will find.

If they in some mysterious way manage to slay the entire horde, they will of course be able to make some serious money off the weapons and armor of the dragouls, but that outcome is not very likely. Instead, the main question is what they can grab before they reach the throne room and if they have time to find the treasures resting in the chamber at the top of the tower.

Among the explorer's equipment collected in a building on the courtyard (#4) there are several copies of all items that usually accompany expeditions into the woods. Only two of these are of special interest. If the player characters take some time to search the storage, a character that makes a successful **DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check** finds a small shoulder bag, containing 1d6 Herbal Cures and 2 doses Elixir of Life. A character with a **passive Perception of 15 or higher** manages to find something of even greater value – a mystical and clearly useful artifact, in the shape of an engraved signet ring (see *Okran's Ring*, page 154).

At the northern corner of the courtyard was once an herbal garden (#7). The plants cultivated there have over the centuries run wild and spread across the area. Unfortunately, this means that the garden is full of soporific bombs that erupt if

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you step on them, releasing the same type of particles found in the throne room (see *Drone Spores*, page 152). A character who enters the garden looking for usable herbs must make three **DC 10 Dexterity saving throws**; a failure means that a cloud of Drone Spores is released; a success gives the character a chance to harvest the spore capsule – a procedure requiring a **DC 15 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check**, or else the capsule will erupt in a cloud of spores. Moreover, a character who succeeds at a **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check** will be able to collect a small bouquet of the so far undiscovered herb Malvom. To an alchemist or botanically versed wizard the bouquet is worth about 20 thaler.

Na-Ethikel keeps his treasure at the back of the throne room. There are two urns full of gold objects collected from the mausoleum (value: 84 thaler) and a stone coffin filled with coin assembled from the members of his hoard (156 ortegs, 201 shillings and 400+2d12 thaler). Finally, the crypt lord himself is carrying Eamon's Bell and the Ring of Dominion, taken from one of the wilderness guides now fighting in his army.

Eamon's Bell, ARTIFACT

The comical stories about the master thief Eamon who always went after Symbaroum's rich and powerful have survived in a series of barbarian tall tales. Especially popular is the tale of when he stole the festive attire of the matriarch Clorandia, complete with gemstone adorned petticoats and gaudy jewelry – accomplished by using his legendary bell to keep her immobilized, while using his free hand to remove her clothes down to her bare skin.

Bewilder

The master of the bell can use it to put his victim in a state of utter bewilderment, making them paralyzed until they succeed at a **DC 15 Wisdom saving throw** or suffer any damage. The affected creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns.

Requires: Bonus Action
Corruption: 1d4 Corruption when activated

Annoy

When in close combat, the master can choose to fight with the bell in one hand (making it impossible to use a shield, heavy weapons and two weapons). As long as the bell tingles, any attacks against the wielder are at disadvantage. The effect lasts until the combat ends or the bell goes silent.

Requires: Bonus Action
Corruption: 1 Corruption each turn

Okran's Ring, ARTIFACT

It is not often that elves are portrayed as anything other than frightening and hostile in barbarian tales. One of few exceptions is the abomination hunter called Okran, who according to the legends saved the lives of innumerable clanfolk over the years.

He was finally slain by a woman whose husband professed his love for the elf again and again while dreaming. What happened to his legendary signet ring, no stories can tell.

Guided by Light

The master of the ring can let the light of the artifact reveal the weak spots of any abomination. The master gains a +1 bonus to damage against the creature.

Requires: Bonus Action
Corruption: 1 Corruption each turn

Rays of Light

On the master's command, the ring can emit a ray of holy light that damages a single abomination. The ring does 2d8 radiant damage to the creature.

Requires: Bonus Action
Corruption: 1d4 Corruption each use

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Prisoners of the Death Crater

About seven centuries ago, the ethnic group calling themselves the People of Kavaler heard rumors that humans were starting to return to the once fertile lands of ancient Symbaroum. Stemming from a rebellious clan that refused to bow to the central authority, they escaped the fall of the empire by fleeing to a remote valley in the southern part of the Ravens. Life there was hard, marked by scarcity and constant attacks from predators and monsters, so when the opportunity arose for them to go back, there were few who hesitated.

Background

DECIMATED BY STARVATION, disease, and the hardships of travel, only three hundred individuals, led by the Matriarch Vilmela, reached their old territory. They found the lands fertile and the water fresh, just as the rumors promised, and immediately started building the fortified heart of their new settlement. The surrounding area was mapped, a local goblin tribe subdued, and some packs of predators driven away – largely thanks to the artifact that had previously allowed the clan to survive as rebels under Symbaroum's oppression. Vilmela was hailed as a hero; the People of Kavaler thrived and looked to the future with confidence. But in Davokar, all good things must come to an end...

When a murderous blight mist swept over the settlement, reeking of Corruption and hiding a horde of raging blight beasts in its midst, the unsuspecting inhabitants did not stand a chance. Those within the wooden palisade of the fortress sought refuge in the residence's basement, thinking they would be safe behind its blessed gates. But the mist seeped down through gaps and cracks, quickly turning them all into walking dead. Having wiped out the People of Kavaler, the mist moved on, leaving behind dead lands and an echo of Corruption which persists to this day. The place was declared taboo when other returnees came across it many years later. It has remained undisturbed ever since, until recently...

Little more than a month ago, a young goblin named Uldo came to Thistle Hold determined to climb out of his brother's shadow. He comes from a tribe engaged in close cooperation with a barbarian settlement, and while his brother has won the humans' respect as a scout and warrior, Uldo has been treated like a simple servant (or a slave, according to himself). At Thistle Hold he started offering his services as a guide, promising to lead the highest bidding fortune hunter to several unexplored ruins, including the place which the clanfolk call the Death Crater.

The highest bidder turned out to be Dindra Starak, whom he led into Davokar shortly thereafter, with her companions Lagorn and Valmer at her side and the high-spirited mule Korinthia in tow. But with a guide who did not know the hubris and frailty of privileged nobles, it could only end in disaster. They did in fact make it to the Death Crater, but once they arrived, everything went wrong: now Dindra and Uldo are locked up in separate tower rooms, Valmer is dead, and the blight-born Lagorn wanders around inside the earthen rampart, howling with hunger.

How and why the player characters become involved in the story is for the Gamemaster to decide. They could be contacted by a worried relative of Dindra who was given fairly accurate directions to the place she intended to visit, or learn about the ruin in some completely different way, perhaps while investigating a ruin containing the written legend of Kavaler. And of course, the player characters may just stumble upon the Death Crater during their travels through the dark halls of Davokar.

Overview

ALL THAT IS left of the Kavaler settlement is the fortress ruin, with razed towers and a surprisingly intact main building on barren ground inside an oval earthen rampart. The area is between 90 and 120 paces in diameter, and its soil is practically dead – apart from a few hardy little trees that have managed to take root, the ground is parched and dusty, unless a recent rain has turned it into mud.

The buildings are 30 feet high at the most, and as such cannot be seen until one reaches the vast field of bushes and small, crooked trees surrounding the rampart. Those with exceptional eyesight can peer over the rampart from the tall pines growing about 700 feet away, while the rest will have to climb the rampart – preferably without alerting the ferocious abomination currently ruling the ruin.

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Player characters that have Shadow-sight who approach the crater and pass a **DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check** can sense the corrupt energies still trembling in the air within the rampart. The effect has faded with time, but everyone inside must pass a **DC 13 Constitution saving throw** each day or suffer 1d6 points of temporary Corruption.

1. EARTHEN RAMPART

The earthen rampart, on which there used to be a massive palisade, rises between fifteen and twenty feet above ground level. Except for some larger boulders, the soil is bare, porous, and mixed with pebbles. Since it is virtually free of vegetation, there is a great risk that whoever tries to reach the top will cause a minor, or even major, landslide (see *Arrival* below).

2. NORTH TOWER

The north tower has lost its roof and top floor, so that only the ground floor and second level remain. Dindra Starak stays on the latter, alone and afraid, and blight-marked to boot, with only her group's equipment and a gagged prisoner to keep her company. There are three ways in – the open doorway at the foot of the tower, the second story window which can be reached from the rampart, and a stone hatch in the floor of what was once the top level of the tower.

Simple mechanical leg traps (1d8 bludgeoning damage and make a loud clattering noise) have been placed just inside the doorway and window. A character with **passive Perception of 15 or higher** will spot them, and a **DC 10 Dexterity saving throw** is required to proceed without triggering them. A character proficient with thieves' tools can make a **DC 13 Dexterity (Thieves' Tools) check** to disarm a trap.

A person who enters through the doorway will see a stone staircase leading up to a closed trapdoor in the ceiling. The second floor is split into two rooms of equal size, one of them accessible through the stone hatch and the other through the window. Dindra is in the room with the hatch; she has rolled out her sleeping pelt and sometimes lights a small fire. In the room with the window lies a sleeping body, with its arms tied behind its back and a jute sack over its head (see *The Iron Pact Agent*, page 160). There is also a stone hatch to what is now the tower's roof; it has not been used in decades (especially as the staircase below has collapsed) and cannot be opened without a loud scrunch and thud.

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3. CENTRAL TOWER

The tower in the middle of the courtyard is mostly intact, with the two upper floors and the roof still in place. The tower used to serve as the archive of the People of Kavaler, where they would store scriptures, etchings, and items of historical significance. All three floors contain remains of what must have been shelves and cabinets, and though most of what was stored there has been destroyed, player characters with enough time for a thorough search can try to find two items hidden among the debris (see the *Gamemaster's Guide*, page 73).

They can enter the tower either through the doorway or its gaping windows. There are stairs running along the inside walls, with no hatches preventing passage between levels. The top floor is reached through the stairs or the window facing the wall segment to the east. Uldo is up there, starving, dehydrated, and scared to death of the abomination prowling by the foot of the tower.

If the player characters manage to get inside, it turns out that Uldo has little to offer, not even any intelligible information. Weak and delirious, he raves exclusively in the troll tongue. Whatever the player characters say or do, he keeps repeating the same thing over and over:

"Swarming darkness. Biting, clawing, whirling darkness. Smothering, murderous darkness."

Uldo will die if he does not receive immediate medical attention in the form of mystical healing or a Medicus using an Herbal Cure. Should the player characters provide such assistance, the goblin will fall asleep, physically and mentally exhausted.

4. BARRACKS

The citadel that used to be the Matriarch's residence has collapsed, but the shell of the building where her elite warriors and servants lived is still mostly intact. The ceiling is cracked and much of it has caved in, and the wooden floor that once separated the building's stories has (just like the supporting joists) moldered away. So, behind the walls of stone is a single, echoing hall, roughly seventy feet wide and thirty feet deep, with a stairwell full of debris leading to the basement. At almost exactly the center of the room lie the remains of poor Valmer, beaten to death by his blight-born companion, his bones stripped bare by night swarmers (see below).

At the foot of the stairwell is a miraculously well-preserved door of iron-fitted oak, coated with mystical energies to ward off the region's darkness (the *hallow* spell). The door could not stop the blight mist from seeping through the cracks in the ground level floor, but its energies have at least prevented the undead in the basement from reaching the surface.

The basement was built as a safe place for the People of Kavaler's ruler and most prominent members, but was also used to store supplies – enough to keep the fort's inhabitants fed during a long siege. In addition to the door leading up to the barracks, there is a smaller one on the west wall, protected and preserved by the same magic. Behind it is a tunnel leading to a hidden stone hatch in the floor on the ground level of the West Tower.

While both doors are protected against the ravages of time, and bolted from the inside, they can of course be broken down by force – chopped up with an axe or equivalent, wedged open with robust breaking tools, or battered open with a ram. The Gamemaster decides what kind of checks, if any, are required.

5. WEST TOWER

What was once the western outpost of the fortress appears to be standing strong, but those who enter will see that the middle floors have collapsed and filled the ground with rubble.

A character with a **passive Perception of 15 or higher** realizes the pattern of rubble is a bit strange, tilted toward the center of the room as if there was a sinkhole. If the player characters start digging, they will soon find centuries-old bone fragments, teeth, and accessories from what must have been a large number of individuals – people who tried to reach the shielded basement but fell victim to the abominations. Here, too, the player characters have a chance to find a valuable item, according to the guidelines for finding treasure in the *Gamemaster's Guide* (page 73).

It takes roughly half an hour for two people to uncover the hatch in the floor. It is half-open, but the opening is blocked by large stones so that only pebbles and mud can filter through. As a result, the tunnel below is still fully passable.

Events in the Crater

THE PLAYERS AND their characters are free to decide how to tackle the crater and its challenges, but here is a description of a handful of challenges they will likely encounter.

ARRIVAL

If the player characters arrive in the area while it is still light outside, they can glimpse the courtyard from the edge of the forest, several hundred feet from the embankment. It is difficult to discern any details from that distance, but a large human figure is clearly moving around outside the Central Tower. A successful **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check** also reveals that the figure's aimless, jerky movements do not seem normal.

After dark, the abomination cannot be seen from the woods, but a successful **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check** reveals a faint light coming from the North Tower window.

To climb the rampart without being heard, the characters must put their feet in the right places. Those who fail a **DC 13 Wisdom (Survival) check** cause a minor landslide which attracts the attention of the blight-born Lagorn. In that case the abomination moves closer, growling ravenously, but will not attack until it is certain there is something for it to hunt.

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Lagorn, Abomination

Swordmaster Lagorn was loyal to House Starak throughout The Great War and later followed the family across the Ravens. As the war had cost him some mobility in his left leg, he was given a new post as young Dindra Starak's personal bodyguard. He loved her as if she was his own daughter, and did not hesitate to join her as she went off into Davokar, even though her father had expressly forbidden it. Lagorn remained unswervingly loyal, right up until the moment when the **night swarmers** descended on him with their corrupting effect.

Lagorn

Medium abomination

Armor Class 15 (bear skin)
Hit Points 120 (16d8 + 48)
Speed 30 ft

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	16 (+3)	17 (+3)	11 (+0)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws, Constitution +6, Wisdom +4
Skills Perception +4, Stealth +6, Deception +5
Condition Immunities charmed, frightened
Senses passive Perception 14
Languages —
Challenge 7 (2,900 XP, proficiency bonus +3)
Manner moaning hungrily
Shadow brindled darkness, like that of a bushy, black beard (thoroughly corrupt)
Equipment belt bag with 2 doses of herbal cure, 2 thaler and 14 shillings; four gold rings that have melted together with the claws (value: 40 thaler if they can be chipped off)

Berserker. Lagorn can use his bonus action to enter a rage. While in a rage, he is resistant to bludgeoning, piercing and slashing damage. He has advantage on attack rolls and attacks against him also have advantage. His attacks do an extra +3 damage. He loses his rage if he ends his turn without having attacked a creature since his last turn or taken damage since his last turn.

Acid Spew. Lagorn can use his bonus action to spray acid on a creature within 5 feet of him. The target must make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw, taking 14 (4d6) acid damage on a failed save or half as much on a successful one.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Lagorn makes two claw attacks.

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

The abomination is still wearing Lagorn's bear skin cloak, along with parts of his leather armor, but other than that, the once tubby, cautiously smiling warrior is almost unrecognizable. His body is emaciated, with dark gray skin underneath a layer of coarse bristles; his forearms end in hooks of bone, while the legs have gained another segment, like those of a goat. The creature's face has retained most of its human features, apart from the iris-less eyes, the abnormally marked cheekbones, and the hanging jaw that makes its mouth as large as an open palm.

THE EXPEDITION LEADER

Cooped up in the North Tower is Dindra Starak. Exactly how long she has been there is for the Gamemaster to decide, but in any case, she is running low on supplies. Korinthia the mule broke away shortly after reaching the ruin, frightened by the area's dark aura, but luckily they had already brought the essentials to their camp on the second floor of the tower.

In Davokar, the change from loyal companion to ravenous enemy can be both swift and... palpable...

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Dindra has always been arrogant and condescending toward *"common folk,"* and that aspect of her personality has been amplified by the suppressed panic she is feeling – not least because of the blight marks growing under her clothes; violet calluses which are starting to develop a scaly surface. She demands that the player characters take up employment as members of her expedition, clear the area of all threats, and assist in gathering anything of value. The best way of loosening her tongue is to agree to her demands (honestly or not); otherwise it takes a successful **DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) check** for her to answer any questions.

She can tell them the following:

- They arrived X number of days ago (the Gamemaster decides) and chose the North Tower as their base. She was accompanied by the soldier Lagorn, the hunter Valmer and *"a goblin named... Well, not important. Something beginning with U."*
- There was no abomination present at the time; they could neither see nor hear any evident threats. And so, after a night's sleep, the other members of her expedition started investigating the ruin.
- After a couple of hours, she suddenly heard wild screams. It sounded as if both Valmer and Lagorn were in violent agony. At that point they had gone beyond the Central Tower, to the larger building that is still intact.
- Shortly thereafter, everything went silent again. And then she saw it, the abomination, by the foot of the Central Tower, wearing Lagorn's bear skin cloak.
- She knows the goblin is also alive, sitting on the top floor of the Central Tower. He waved to her. Perhaps he is injured, or just too cowardly to leave his hideout.

Dindra Starak will not leave the ruin under any circumstances until it has been cleared of treasure, nor will she leave the tower until the abomination has been slain. Player characters who have come to "save" her will have to do as she asks, or possibly knock her out or drag her away screaming (which would make Lagorn violently curious).

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THE IRON PACT AGENT

In the room next to Dindra's lies an Iron Pact scout named Lin-Elil. She is one of about twenty elves who have accepted the task of regularly monitoring ruins that harbor Corruption and are situated close enough to human settlements to attract taboo breakers.

She arrived at the Death Crater at dawn, just as the expedition members were preparing to investigate the ruin. With no time to send for reinforcements, she called out to them and was allowed to approach. Her attempt to explain why the area must not be disturbed did not only fall on deaf ears – the human leader she spoke with gave her a fierce scolding, red-faced and hissing through gritted teeth. Then she was hit in the back of the head and everything went dark.

From the moment she woke up – bound and gagged, with a bag over her head – her captor has provided her with a minimal amount of food and drink, but refused to answer when spoken to. Lin-Elil realizes that something has gone terribly wrong, but there is not much she can do, other than talk some sense into the woman.

When the player characters find the elf, Dindra will try to intimidate them into leaving her be, claiming that the elf tried to assassinate them and threatened that her warrior friends are just a whistle away. Should the player characters defy the noble, she will be furious, call them traitors, and portray herself as a prisoner among *"enemies of the realm."*

Lin-Elil is weak with malnutrition and dehydration, but if the player characters help her reach the roof of the North Tower, she can use the elevated position to back them up with her bow. She can also help them understand that the abomination is not only wearing Lagorn's cloak: it is Lagorn, blight-born from something he encountered inside the ruin.

Finally, in the elf's backpack (which Dindra has hidden away) there are two doses of Purple Sap, one dose of Wraith Dust and a Ghost Candle (*Player's Guide*, pages 182–183). If stats are needed for Lin-Elil, use **late summer elf** (*Bestiary*, page 175).

NIGHT SWARMERS

What caused Lagorn's blight-birth and made a wounded Uldo flee up the Central Tower were **night swarmers**. This creature is described in detail in the *Ruins of Symbaroum Bestiary* (page 84) and is a particularly unpleasant adversary, even for experienced adventurers.

The swarm (possibly swarms or a murder cloud, if the Gamemaster wishes to increase the difficulty) was created by the blight mist and left behind as it drifted on. Its numerous individuals are sleeping in cracks and crannies and under the layer of debris that covers the floor of the barracks (#4), but will eagerly crawl out whenever potential victims come walking through the doorway. However, for the sake of the adventure, the player characters should get a chance to make some observations before the swarm wakes up:

- Without a check, what remains of Valmer can be discovered roughly fifteen feet into the hall. In addition to a random curiosity (*Gamemaster's Guide*, pages 73–75), a coin purse with 3 thaler and 8 shillings and a dose each of moderate poison and antidote can be found on the corpse.
- There is a downward staircase, to the left, just inside the doorway, ending at a gate that seems remarkably well-preserved.
- Those whose passive Perception is 15 or higher can hear a gloomy murmur coming from the cracks in the stone floor (the undead, still excited by the blood that came dripping down as the swarmers feasted on Valmer).
- Player characters with the Shadow-sight feature are immediately struck by the suspicion that there is something in the basement: the air in this place is trembling with corrupt energies that (among other things) seem to be rising from cracks in the ground level's floor.

Defeating the night swarmers in combat should not be an easy feat; there is nothing wrong with the player characters having to give up and run – the world of Symbaroum is a dangerous one, and violence is rarely the only or the smartest way to tackle its challenges. They can come back when they know what stands in their way, or seek out the secret passage from the West Tower.

THE UNDEAD

The basement is crammed with undead – twenty or so humans who were reanimated after their death almost six hundred years ago. Among them are the People of Kavaler's former Matriarch Abaela, the war hero Ereld, and the master symbolist Irma.

Their clothes have long since disintegrated and all the basement's furniture has been torn apart by the dragouls, frustrated from being trapped between two doors blessed with holy powers. But not everything is gone. The creature that was Abaela is still carrying the artifact known as the Banner of Kavaler in her dried-up shoulder bag; the head of Ereld's weapon, called Ramara's Fiend Axe, has been kicked into a corner; and Irma's parchment-like skin is covered with tattoos which have lost their power, but can still be studied and lead to the rediscovery of the spells *mark of torment* and *battle symbol* (see page 162).

Stats for the Undead

Their long stay in the basement has likely robbed the undead of their knowledge and skills – if so, use the stats of a **dragoul** (*Bestiary*, page 156) but without their features and some or all of their weapons. That way they will not be much of a threat in combat, but rather a sad remnant of a once proud and able people. Gamemasters who would prefer a more challenging fight are of course free to come up with their own stats for Abaela, Ereld, Irma and their followers.

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As for the undead themselves, there are few alternatives to violence; they are starving and infinitely frustrated after their long captivity. Perhaps they can be lured into some kind of trap? One example could be to fill the tunnel to the West Tower with oil-soaked wood, then open the door, run to the tower, and set the wood on fire before closing the stone hatch.

An even more nerve-wracking option is to try to appease them – after all, they are not abominations, and though their dusty brains have lost most of their senses, there are still a few glimmers of humanity in there. People who let them out of the basement and welcome them with a substantial meal (a large animal for instance, tied-up or half-dead) can prevent the dragouls from attacking. They cannot communicate in any way, although the matriarch might give the characters a slight nod before she and what remains of her people walk off into Davokar.

The Banner of Kavaler, ARTIFACT

Had it not been for this powerful artifact, which has been with the People of Kavaler since they first came to the plains west of the Ravens, they would hardly have survived the many Symbarian attempts to annex their territory.

The flag is made of a glossy, silk-like fabric, imbued with mystical energies that prevent wear and tear as well as bleaching. The motif is an oak and two crossed swords, dark blue against a golden background.

Inspire Courage

All allies who see the banner are filled with unwavering courage in the face of danger. For the duration of one minute they will not flee under any circumstances (unless ordered to), and gain advantage on saving throws against frightening or banishing effects, whether natural or mystical (such as the Terrifying feature).

Requires: Reaction

Corruption: 1d4 temporary Corruption when activated

Muster Strength

Once per combat, the master can use their bonus action to let the banner's power flow through all allies in sight. Each creature may, on their turn, use their action to regain 1d8 hit points. The power has no effect on poisons or ongoing mystical effects, other than the healing it provides.

Requires: see above

Corruption: 1d4 temporary Corruption when activated

Final Push

In a battle where the master's side outnumbers their enemies by at least 50%, the master can rally his/her allies for a final, forceful offensive. Each ally in sight is affected, reducing any damage taken by 1d4 until the end of the combat, while their own attacks each deal 1d6 bonus damage. The effect lasts 1d4, 1d6, or 1d8 rounds (the master decides).

Requires: Bonus Action

Corruption: The master takes temporary Corruption equal to the number of rounds the effect lasts.

Aftermath

HOW THE PLAYER characters' visit to the Death Crater turns out, and what happens next, must be decided based on what has happened around your particular gaming table. Killing the dragouls leaves a number of items for the taking; in addition to the ones mentioned above, the players get 1d4+2 rolls on the curiosities table (*Gamemaster's Guide*, pages 73–75) to determine what the undead carried with them into the basement. On the other hand, if the Matriarch and her followers were allowed to wander off into the woods, the only remaining item is Ramara's Fiend Axe.

Other important issues are how the player characters chose to handle Lin-Elil and what their relations are with Dindra Starak. The latter is particularly relevant if the player characters came to the ruin on someone else's orders – either someone who wanted Dindra brought back safely or a patron who expects his or her share of the Death Crater's treasures.

Ramara's Fiend Axe, ARTIFACT

The legend of the hunter Ramara has been largely forgotten, and the fragments that remain are usually attributed to the more widely recognized big-game hunter Umuma. But Ramara was held in high esteem by the People of Kavaler, due to her unfailing courage and many heroic feats in battle against the abominations awakened by the theourgical ceremonies of Symbaroum.

If the axe head is fitted with a suitable handle, it can be used as a one-handed axe or a halberd/pike axe, in both cases with the property Deep Impact (*Player's Guide*, page 167).

Wild Blow

When fighting creatures from the Beast or Abomination categories, the person bound to the axe can forsake their reaction and instead deliver a massive blow to all enemies within 5 feet. The attack rolls are made as usual, but each successful hit deals +1d8 bonus damage.

Requires: reaction

Corruption: 1d4 temporary Corruption per use

Slaughtering Strike

If the master of the axe is proficient in Animal Handling, they can activate this power to deal +1d4 bonus damage to Beasts and Abominations. When a character reaches a proficiency bonus of +4 or higher, the damage bonus increases to +1d8.

Requires: Bonus Action

Corruption: 1d4 temporary Corruption

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MARK OF TORMENT*

2nd-level enchantment

Casting Time: 1 action
Range: 60 feet
Components: V, S
Duration: 1 round

Cryptic patterns cause severe stomach pain that reduces the victim's mobility and concentration, and can even inflict physical damage. Choose up to six creatures in a 30-foot radius sphere centered on a point of your choice within range. Each target must make a **Constitution saving throw** or take 2d8 necrotic damage and be incapacitated until the end of their next turn.

At Higher Levels. If you cast this spell at 3rd level or higher, the damage increases by 1d8 for each level above 2nd.

BATTLE SYMBOL

3rd-level enchantment

Casting Time: 1 action
Range: 60 feet
Components: V, S
Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

A symbol appears above you, made out of glowing, mystical light. Anyone who sees the rousing motif of the symbol feels a burning urge to fight which, unless they can resist the effect, drives them into a ruthless and possibly even suicidal berserker rage. Choose up to six creatures in a 30-foot radius sphere centered on a point of your choice within range. Each target must make a **Wisdom saving throw** or be driven by an uncontrollable urge to fight. On their turn an affected creature must move closer to an enemy if they can do so, and must use their action to make an attack. Attacks against the affected creature are at advantage. At the end of their turn, an affected creature can repeat the saving throw, ending the effect on a success.

Dawn of the Black Sun

About a millennia ago, at the time of Symbaroum's demise, there were many who revered daemons and primal blight beasts as gods, and who themselves sought exaltation. One of the unworldly creatures that tricked many people into submission, hoping that the worshippers' rituals would grant him unrestricted access to their world, was the daemon prince Jeberaja. From his place in the Yonderworld he manipulated princes and whole congregations into exploring ceremonies that could potentially open a rift large enough for him to pass through.

Background

ONE OF JEBERAJA'S most devoted worshippers was Prince Regal-Ang Fark – a warrior despot who had won many wars of conquest for the Symbarian Empire and therefore earned the trust of the central authorities. Despite Emperor Symbar's prohibition against the use of mystical powers, the people in the Prince's province were able to continue their religious practices until the elves finally arrived. The rituals were led by High Priestess Cidrial-Ero Alea, a fanatic who allowed herself to become undead, hoping it would free her from the shackles of Corruption.

But she never got to refine the ritual through which the body of Prince Regal-Ang would become Jeberaja's gateway into the world; her last desperate attempt, with the elven warriors no more than a day's march from her temple, all

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but killed the Prince. Cidrial-Ero had the grotesque, unconscious body carried into a chamber deep beneath the temple, concealed with mystical veils and sealed with powerful incantations. She shut herself in with him and swore not to return until she had completed the ceremony. But instead, she would resurface earlier than that, thanks to the mystical veils slowly losing their power, and the humans that tunneled down to her chamber about a millennium after she went into hiding.

Another effect of the dwindling powers was that the consciousness of Regal-Ang Fark was able to escape the hideout. The abomination's body remains down there, in perpetual slumber, but its spirit moves freely throughout the temple area – without the High Priestess knowing anything about it. It cannot manifest physically, but may reveal itself in any reflective surface, as a mirror image of the beholder. Its primary objective is of course to be freed from its prison, but also from its captor. For centuries he has listened to her cursing him, calling him a freak and a failure, threatening to destroy his very being and leave the body as a portal for her daemonic god.

THE EXCAVATION

Three years ago, a group of Ambrian explorers came to the overgrown temple of Jeberaja. The leader of the holy expedition was a theurg named Malgar, whose self-assumed task was to seek out ruins that showed signs of Sun God worship, preferably older than the one dug up by the templars east of Karvosti.

On the first night in the temple, Malgar heard a whispering voice calling to him; he turned his head and saw his own reflection in the silver cup next to his bed – it beamed at him and spoke in some ancient Symbarian dialect, bidding him welcome and asking why he had come. The blight-born prince used the theurg's answers to manipulate him into believing that the ruin was a temple to the Sun God; a place blessed by the presence of the Lawgiver, where *"a piece from the living bones of the One lay buried."*

Malgar decided to stay, to establish a congregation and a place of pilgrimage in the depths of the forest, and – guided by his whispering reflection – unearth the holy relic. For the latter purpose he enlisted the people of Alimaar, an isolated barbarian village founded by individuals who had been cast out from their clans for violating taboos and engaging with the darkness of Davokar. Subsidence and landslides made the excavation grueling work, that was only finished roughly two weeks before the player characters arrive.

The Location of Alimaar

The Gamemaster must decide which clan the barbarians of Alimaar originally came from, based on where they want the scenario to take place.

THE RETURN OF THE HIGH PRIESTESS

Cidrial-Ero Alea was of course aware that people were tunneling their way towards the chamber, and that the mystical protection was no longer strong enough to stop them. She spent several days preparing for her encounter with the intruders – she wove an illusion over the chamber, concealing the abomination and making the room itself appear as the hall of a great palace, full of gold and valuables. Through another illusion she regained the body, clothes, and voice of her youth. So, when the barbarian diggers finally broke through, they were dazzled by her splendor and immediately enticed by her promises.

In that moment Malgar lost control of his discovery, and not long afterwards, when he appeared before the High Priestess in the throne room of the temple, he began to realize his grave mistake. The extent of that mistake became clear when his reflection suddenly took on a different expression and voice, swearing that the High Priestess was evil incarnate, that she must be maimed, crushed, slain. Though the mirror quickly resumed its smiling, amiable face, the theurg knew that he had not been approached by an avatar of the sun, but manipulated by something far worse.

Malgar and his followers were too few to challenge the cult which was established around Cidrial-Ero, but the realization that they had awoken an ancient evil compelled them to act. They played along with the cult's activities and pretended to be tempted by the promises of wealth, power, and exaltation, but also requested another audience with the High Priestess – claiming they needed convincing. The day before the player characters' arrival at the scene, their wish was granted, and Malgar tried to atone for his mistake by killing the cult leader. He did not succeed. Instead it was Malgar who died, while his eight followers had to choose between pledging their lifelong fealty to Jeberaja or joining Malgar in the grave. Four of them chose death, the other four chose to bide their time in the hope of one day getting revenge.

THE CURRENT SITUATION

If the Gamemaster does not want to use the Temple of Jeberaja as a more or less random encounter on the player characters' travels through Davokar, there are several ways to make it an interesting destination in its own right. Perhaps a representative of the Sun Church is worried about Malgar's *"unhealthy fascination"* with the ruin he has found and wants someone to investigate it? Another idea is to adjust the timeline a bit and let one of Malgar's followers flee back to civilization with the story of what happened. Last but not least,

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it could of course be an ordinary treasure hunt – the player characters or their employer learn about an *"untouched ruin"* and where to find it, only discovering later that it is far from deserted like they were expecting.

Whatever their reason for going there, the characters will actually be well received by the cultists, provided they approach them openly and without weapons drawn. The cult needs slaves and potential sacrifices, so its members are happy to welcome the "guests" and make them feel at ease. Once the newcomers are relaxed enough to drop their guard, the trap is sprung, for example in the way described under the *Audience* heading (see page 167).

Overview

THE TEMPLE OF Jeberaja is perched on a stone fundament, over six hundred feet on each side, surrounded by a weathered, cracked wall. The wall has eight towers; most of them are partially collapsed, but the old gate towers at the center of each wall segment are standing steady with newly built gates. On the upper plateau of the fundament are eight buildings along with the sanctum itself – a six-story structure rising nearly two hundred feet over the mossy floor of the forest.

Trees are growing just outside the wall, in some cases even over it, which has made it easy for predators and other threats to attack the temple's inhabitants. Now that the digging is over, the cult members have begun to repair the cracks and cavities, with plans to also clear the trees closest to the walls. But for now, as long as they watch out for the armed guard patrols, it should not be a problem for the player characters to sneak inside. The same goes for the group of Ironsworn who have monitored the ruin for the past five days...

1. GATE TOWERS

The towers in all four directions have been fitted with heavy doors of oak that can be bolted from the inside. Each gate is guarded at all times by four cultists – two in the doorway and two in the tower, the latter armed with bows and spears. The bolted doors are almost impossible to open from the outside, but from the inside it is of course quite simple, as long as someone finds another way past the wall and removes the bolt.

2. THE THRALL HOUSE

Malgar's former assistant, the liturg Genni, has rapidly emerged as something of a leader among the inhabitants who are not members of the cult. In addition to the four Ambrians, there are eight goblins and a handful of barbarians, all of them forbidden to bear arms and forced to perform most of the hard, dirty, and otherwise unpleasant tasks the High Priestess demands from her devoted flock. They are not shackled or forbidden to leave, because they do not need to be – without weapons and equipment they would not survive long in this part of Davokar.

3. THE CULTISTS' RESIDENCES

We suggest that the cult has thirty members when the player characters arrive, but that number can be adjusted depending on the competence and play style of the gaming group. The cultists are divided between three of the corner buildings on the upper plateau, while the north-western one is used for storage and cooking.

Regardless of how many people occupy each building, they are always divided evenly between the two open floors. The stairs that once connected the floors have collapsed and been replaced with sturdy ladders; if necessary, the residents can escape to the top floor, pull up the ladder, and place a wooden trapdoor over the opening.

4. THE SANCTUM

The ground floor of the temple consists of a single vast hall, over a hundred feet on each side and with a two-story ceiling height, as the second floor consists solely of a seven-foot-wide balcony that runs along the walls to the south, east and west. The balcony can be reached from steep sets of stairs immediately to the right and left inside the main gate, but also via the stairwell past the door at the center of the north wall, just behind the great statue of Jeberaja. The stairwell continues up to the prayer alcoves and the ritual chambers on the third floor, and finally to the High Priestess' quarters on floors four to six.

Cidrial-Ero's Quarters

The lowest level of the High Priestess' quarters is largely made up of open space, with floor, ceiling, and interior walls made of weathered, but well-polished, black basalt. A man-high triptych, its center tile adorned with the silhouette of Jeberaja, is placed along the wall opposite the entrance. The triptych is also made from black basalt, as is the throne-like seat where Cidrial-Ero sits when receiving guests or summoning servants.

The Statue of Jeberaja

The statue depicts a monstrous crouching figure, equipped with half-formed bat wings; a long, snake-like tongue slithering out of its gaping, fanged jaws; and four extended arms, two of them with massive pincers, the others with sharp claws the length of a man's forearm.

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THE TEMPLE OF JEBERAJA

1. Gate Towers
2. The Thrall House
3. The Cultists' Residences
4. The Sanctum
5. Guest House
6. The Excavation

The stairwell leads to the High Priestess' bed chamber that, for (un)natural reasons, contains no bed or other furnishings. There are two doorways leading into smaller rooms – the meditation alcove where she spends most of her time, dreaming of bringing Jeberaja to life, and a closet for clothes and storage (now empty). When she is not meditating, preaching, or holding meetings, Cidrial-Ero can be found in her private ceremony chamber at the very top of the sanctum.

5. GUEST HOUSE

Should the player characters come in peace and be invited to stay the night (see Peaceful Contact, below), they will be given a place to sleep in the south-east corner building on the lower plateau. Its two floors are connected by a newly built ladder and are completely empty, except for the debris that has blown in from outside. Where the player characters roll out their sleeping pelts is up to them, although their hosts expressly state that the bottom floor is at their disposal.

6. THE EXCAVATION

In the dilapidated north-east corner tower, there is the way down to the chamber where the grotesque creature that was Prince Regal-Ang Fark is resting, waiting to become Jeberaja's vessel in this world. His hideout was placed there in the belief that any intruders would search for secret chambers beneath the Sanctum; this choice may actually play into the player characters' hands, should they decide to seek out the sleeping abomination.

THE IRON PACT

The group of Ironsworn that has arrived in the area is composed of both humans and elves, all of them disillusioned with mankind's ability to redeem itself. Their leader is the autumn elf Aran-Elaral, to whom humanity (with few exceptions) is the equivalent of a disease rotting the flesh of Creation, whose individual existence is only justified if the person helps combat the affliction and its spread. The humans under his command share this view; they are ashamed of their people and fanatically devoted to doing everything they can to atone for the sins of their forefathers.

The group should be quite small, comprised of the leader and a handful of companions. The Gamemaster decides whether, and if so how, to involve them in the scenario. They may be willing to cooperate with like-minded individuals, especially in bringing an end to the grave violations against nature. Perhaps they decide to contact the player characters? Perhaps one of the temple's inhabitants has made observations which the characters can look into, and thus make contact with Aran-Elaral? Or maybe they will serve as a complicating factor by launching an attack just as the player characters are getting ready to act?

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Events at the Temple

ONCE INSIDE THE walls, the player characters will almost certainly become entangled in the location's intrigues. They can try to flee, and maybe they should, but here are a number of challenges that they will likely run into if they choose not to.

ARRIVAL

Whatever their reason for approaching the temple of Jeberaja, the player characters are bound to hear noise coming from it before they can see it. The High Priestess calls mass by sounding a huge, ancient gong just before sunrise and after sunset. Screams of agony can also be heard through the forest, as disobedient thralls are whipped for their transgressions.

Reaching the walls undetected is quite easy and requires no check. The characters can get a view of the courtyard by searching the wall for large cracks – again, without a check – while those trying to peer over the wall must pass a **DC 10 Dexterity (Stealth) check** to avoid detection.

The people inside show no obvious signs of belonging to a daemonic cult. They are clearly clanfolk, dressed in functional clothes, and apart from the lack of smiles they seem to be acting as one would expect. That they are keeping thralls is nothing out of the ordinary, though the player characters may notice – with a **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check** – that some of them are distinctly Ambrian in feature and manner.

The High Priestess never leaves the Sanctum, but if the characters should somehow catch sight of her, the Shadowsight feature will reveal that she is thoroughly corrupted. Furthermore, if they listen to the sound coming from the temple during mass, a successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check** identifies the repeated use of the word "Jeberaja." A Sorcerer, or someone with the Loremaster feature, recognizes the word and its association with the Yonderworld; a successful **DC 15 Intelligence (History) check** reveals that it is the name of a Daemon Prince worshipped in the days of Symbaroum.

PEACEFUL CONTACT

It is possible to approach the temple area and be well-received by the cultists; the player characters can go straight to one of the gate towers, make their presence known, and soon be welcomed inside by spear-wielding guards in studded leather armor. One of the tower guards will then take care of them, give them a brief tour of the area and introduce them to the locals, before showing them to the building where they are welcome to spend the night. There they are also informed that meals are served on the top plateau, at dawn, noon, and dusk. Otherwise the rules are simple: do not disturb mass, and do not enter the Sanctum or any other building inside the wall!

STEALTHY MANEUVERS

Depending on why the player characters have come to the ruin, they may want to enter unnoticed. Spells can be helpful in that regard, but otherwise the usual rules for moving undetected apply – that is, Stealth checks against the Perception of the guards, possibly with additional modifications based on feats, equipment, or strategic choices. If the player characters are smart and lucky, they can actually go through a fissure in one of the wall sections, sneak up to unoccupied buildings, and continue all the way to (and maybe even to the top of) the Sanctum.

If the attempt is made during one of the daily masses, all cultists will be gathered inside the temple, except the sixteen guards posted at the gate towers. Failure would then result in combat with four cultists, who after 1d4+1 rounds are reinforced by four of their brethren. If there is no ongoing mass, reinforcements will arrive after two turns, and before long the enemies will be numerous enough to surround the player characters.

If the player characters are knocked down or captured, the cultists will try to keep them alive, albeit bound and confined in a dungeon beneath the Thrall House. Their lives and vital fluids will be a welcome ingredient in future rituals.

PRINCE REGAL-ANG REACHES OUT

With the death of Malgar, the abomination that was once Prince Regal-Ang Fark lost his one and only ally. He has tried to communicate with a few cultists, but could not make himself understood. When one of them later told the High Priestess about his "vision," she warned her followers of the *"unholy spirit trying to prevent the rebirth of its mortal foe, Jeberaja."*

He sees in the player characters a last chance to avoid certain death. Thanks to Malgar, he speaks Ambrian well enough to make his warning and proposition clear. He reveals himself as soon as the characters are alone inside the temple area (regardless of whether they have been welcomed or snuck in), in the form of a whispering voice coming from a reflecting surface, such as a polished copper vessel, a metal shield or, ideally, a mirror. He has the following to say, and note that everyone watching the shiny surface sees their own reflection speaking back to them:

- *You are in danger. Under threat. The folks are blood cult, you are sacrifice.*
- *I, too, shall be sacrificed. Murdered.*
- *The cult is preparing, will awake the evil, Jeberaja, the prince.*
- *Must be stopped, by you and I. Maybe the slaves.*
- *Find me! Wake me! Beneath the tower of wall, north, east.*
- *Some blood, pure blood, on my lips. Then back and hide – I am furious. Run. I stop the evil.*
- *You understand? Sure?*

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Prince Regal-Ang is in desperate need of help.

The spirit knows that he will not be able to control the hatred and hunger burning in his physical body; that he will attack any living creature he sets his eyes on. For that reason, he wants to be perfectly sure that the player characters understand his instructions: after applying a bit of pure blood (untainted by Corruption) to his lips, they are to retreat and stay out of his way.

Once the player characters have confirmed that they understand, the mirror image blinks and the reflection returns to normal.

AUDIENCE

If the player characters have been welcomed as guests, this is of course because the cultists are in need of new blood, literally and figuratively. Cidrial-Ero Alea is far from impressed with her current subjects and would love to have a group of capable mystics and warriors join her ranks. And if they refuse, their flesh and blood can always be used to boost the power of her mystical ceremonies.

On the characters' first night at the temple, almost the entire cult (except those on watch) will gather around the guest house with torches and weapons at the ready. Unless one of them is keeping watch, the characters will get a rude awakening as they are jumped by cultists and have their hands tied behind their backs. Should they be more careful, a dark figure will appear in the doorway, telling them to wake up and come out without weapons or other equipment. One in four cultists have the stats of a **village warrior**, while the rest are equivalent to **village guards** (*Bestiary*, page 192) but with spears instead of axes.

Assuming that they do not choose combat, the characters are soon taken – hands tied – in a torchlit procession to the Sanctum. The cultists follow them through the hall, past the statue of Jeberaja, and up the stairs where they spread out along the walls after pushing the player characters to their knees before the black throne. After a considerable wait they hear footsteps coming from the stairwell behind them, and into the hall strides a middle-aged woman with flowing blonde hair, dressed in a beautifully embroidered off-white dress, with the posture of someone utterly convinced that she owns the world.

Sitting on the throne, she takes a good look at them before she finally speaks. A Loremaster understands her ancient barbarian dialect; if there is no such player character, the liturg Genni will translate for them. Her message is simple: they must swear a blood oath to be her and Jeberaja's obedient servants, or be considered enemies and treated as such.

If they refuse, their hands remain tied and they are taken to a dungeon beneath the Thrall House, where they are held until the High Priestess requires a blood sacrifice. How they get out of such a predicament is for the Gamemaster to decide, but perhaps the thralls eventually muster enough courage to help them?

The player characters can buy some time by swearing the oath imposed on them. They will then be freed, though forbidden to carry weapons for a month, and assigned to different residences and work teams. But perhaps they can still find a way to coordinate themselves, for example to wake the slumbering abomination. Another option is to involve the Ironsworn in some way or another.

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Cidrial-Ero Alea

Medium undead

Armor Class 17 (ancient armor)
Hit Points 110 (13d8 + 52)
Speed 30 ft

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
24 (+7)	19 (+4)	18 (+4)	25 (+7)	17 (+3)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Con +8, Wis +7
Skills Arcana +11, History +15, Nature +11, Religion +15, Perception +7
Damage Resistances necrotic, poison, bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 17
Languages Barbarian (ancient), Symbarian
Challenge 9 (5,000 xp, proficiency bonus +4)
Manner contemptuous
Shadow glossy black, like velvet (thoroughly corrupt)
Equipment ceremony tome (see textbox)

Gravely Cold. Each creature that starts its turn within 120 feet of Cidrial-Ero Alea must pass a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or take 7 (1d6 + 4) cold damage and lose 10 feet of its movement speed until the end of its turn.

Magic Resistance. Cidrial-Ero Alea has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Innate Spellcasting. Cidrial-Ero Alea's innate spellcasting ability is Intelligence (+11 to hit, spell save DC 19). She can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components.

At will: *accurate strike, chill touch, dancing lights, ray of frost*
5/day each: *black bolt, disguise self, sleep*
3/day each: *darkness, misty step, summon daemon*
1/day each: *counterspell, hallucinatory terrain, major image*

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Cidrial-Ero Alea makes two attacks, one with her Dreadful Glare and one with her Soul Touch.

Soul Touch. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d4) temporary Corruption and 17 (3d6 + 7) necrotic damage and Cidrial-Ero Alea regains hit points equal to half of the necrotic damage (rounded down).

Dreadful Glare. Cidrial-Ero Alea stares at a single creature within 60 ft., which must make a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw. If the creature fails, it is frightened of her and takes 13 (2d12) psychic damage. If it fails the saving throw by 5 or more, it is also paralyzed. The creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of its turn to end the effect. If it fails, it takes 3 (1d6) psychic damage. A creature that succeeds or ends the effect on itself is immune to this effect for 24 hours.

REACTIONS

Sudden Touch. If a creature moves within reach, Cidrial-Ero Alea makes a Soul Touch attack.

Bug

Cidrial-Ero has recently summoned a **servant daemon**, after having accidentally killed her former companion during the time in the chamber. She calls the new one Bug, and it is firmly ordered to keep to the shadows, often hiding behind the triptych in the Crown Room. Should the mistress be threatened, it reluctantly rushes to her defense, with stats as described in the *Player's Guide* (page 206).

WAKING THE PRINCE

Regardless of when or under what circumstances the player characters decide to follow up on the strange reflection's offer, they will not face much opposition along the way. A massive slab of stone has been placed over the opening in the floor of the north-east tower, but there are no guards around.

The steep, spiral tunnel below runs thirty or so feet downwards, toward the south-west. Eventually it levels out and continues straight ahead; with its gritty walls and supporting structures the tunnel would resemble a mine shaft, were it not for the smooth marble floor half-hidden under a layer of dust and pebbles. Perhaps it was originally a massive cavern, later collapsed and now partially excavated?

The tunnel leads through an open archway into a chamber roughly thirty feet on a side. At first it seems furnished like a royal bed chamber, with a great canopy bed, three divans around a low table, carpets on the floor and patterned tapestries on the walls. But something feels wrong...

Those who pass **DC 18 Intelligence (Investigation) check** can see through the fading illusion and discern a cold, empty, inhospitable hall of stone, with no furniture of any kind. Further in, resting against the far wall, is a sleeping body that would otherwise be concealed by the illusion: a huge, immensely muscular, naked human body.

The player characters must dribble a few drops of untainted blood onto the creature's toad-like lips, then quickly get out of its way, back to the surface. From the moment the blood touches its lips, it takes two turns before the abomination is ready to act – to rush to the surface, into the Sanctum, and do battle with the High Priestess. But if the player characters ignore or fail to understand the warning given to them, the abomination will target them instead. They would then have a tough fight ahead, and would also have lost a golden opportunity to get help in the fight against the cultists.

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The Ceremony Tome

The mystically preserved ceremony tome of the High Priestess, with yellowing pages bound in black leather, covers a handful of ceremonies. The Gamemaster decides which, but Insect Swarm and Mass Resurrection from the *Gamemaster's Guide* (pages 155–156) may be two of them. Additionally, it describes the latest version of her Ceremony of Exaltation, along with numerous margin notes, scratched out sentences and cryptic symbols. The Gamemaster is trusted to construct this ceremony in accordance with what suits the gaming group, but at full effect the creature at the focus of it should turn into something similar to the blight-born form of Prince Regal-Ang Fark.

The tome is written in Symbarian and challenging to interpret. It requires the Loremaster feature to try to follow the instructions on how to perform the ceremony, and even then the Officiant must succeed at three **DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) checks**. Should a check fail, the ceremony will come to nothing.

The Blight-Born Prince

As a result of the failed ceremony that would grant the daemon prince Jeberaja entry to the world, Prince Regal-Ang Fark was deformed beyond recognition. His body grew to nearly ten feet tall and his muscle mass increased many times over, as the skin thickened into jointed, grayish-beige flaps. His cranium was reshaped as well. The eyes are still human, but the jaw is reminiscent of a fanged reptile, with a long, cleft tongue.

The prince did not become a god, but a monster, with all the hunger and blind lust for destruction that such a creature possesses.

FINAL BATTLE

As usual when it comes to adventure landscapes, it is difficult to predict how it is going to end; it depends entirely on what the player characters decide to do, or not do.

In this case, many gaming groups may choose to ignore the reflection's offer and try to handle the cultists themselves, possibly with the help of thralls and Ironsworn. It may then be appropriate to have the player characters fight the High Priestess and her two (or more) bodyguards (stats like **village warriors**, *Bestiary*, page 192), while their allies take on the rest of the cultists. Perhaps the Iron Pact will attack just as the player characters are about to execute their plan; perhaps they initially mistake them for members of the cult? That could make the first two or three turns of combat really confusing, and interesting!

On the other hand, if the player characters decide to wake the abomination, it will most likely have a hard time reaching its true target; on the top plateau he will get caught up in the fight against the cultists, who after 1d4+2 turns are joined by the High Priestess herself (standing on the platform outside the audience chamber). The player characters can help the abomination push through its enemies and hurl itself up the exterior wall of the Sanctum, but they will hardly be repaid for their troubles – abominations are what they are; they keep fighting until there are no more lives left to extinguish!

Regal-Ang Fark

Medium abomination

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)
Hit Points 76 (9d8 + 36)
Speed 30 ft

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	17 (+3)	18 (+4)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)

Saving Throws, Constitution +7, Wisdom +5
Skills Perception +5
Condition Immunities charmed, frightened
Senses passive Perception 15
Languages Ambrian, Symbarian
Challenge 6 (2,300 XP, proficiency bonus +3)
Manner hisses menacingly, flicking his serpent's tongue
Shadow yellowish black, like blackened gold (thoroughly corrupt)
Equipment —

Berserker. Regal-Ang Fark can use his bonus action to enter a rage. While in a rage, he is resistant to bludgeoning, piercing and slashing damage. He has advantage on attack rolls and attacks against him also have advantage. His attacks do an extra +3 damage. He loses his rage if he ends his turn without having attacked a creature since his last turn or taken damage since his last turn.

Acid Spew. Regal-Ang Fark can use his bonus action to spray acid on a creature within 15 feet of him. The target must make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw, taking 17 (5d6) acid damage on a failed save or half as much on a successful one.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d8 + 3) piercing damage and 2 (1d4) temporary Corruption.

REACTIONS

Sudden Spit. When a creature comes within 15 feet of Regal-Ang Fark, he can use his Acid Spew feature against it.

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Aftermath

ONE POSSIBLE OUTCOME of this scenario is that the player character's fail to sever the head of the cult, or that they decide to flee from the scene. If so, the cult of Cidrial-Ero Alea will continue to grow in both size and influence. The cult may very well start to influence clanfolk settlements, in the hope of assuming control of people and resources. Indeed, it is not impossible that the power-crazy leader eventually tries to infiltrate Ambrian outposts and villages, possibly with a successfully awakened and loyal Regal-Ang Fark by her side.

If, on the other hand, the characters manage to defeat Cidrial-Ero and her cultists, the Temple of the Black Sun is theirs for the taking. Even if they are not interested in the temple itself, they will probably consider remaining long enough to search it for treasure and artifacts. As a suggestion, 1d10 curiosities and 1d4 mystical treasures have already been unearthed and can be found in various buildings on the temple grounds (*Gamemaster's Guide*, pages 73–77). Adding to that, the site can be treated as a grand, dilapidated ruin on the *Ruins in Davokar* table on page 70 in the *Gamemaster's Guide*. Follow the guidelines for excavations if the player characters decide to do a thorough search of the area.

Lord of the Bog

Lord of the Bog is an adventure location mainly designed to introduce the lindworms' ability to evolve into drakworms and, eventually, full-fledged dragons. In its original form, the story takes place at the Black Pitch Mire with the legendary Skaramagos as the main character. But both the setting and the central characters can easily be replaced, if the Gamemaster so desires. Either way, the player characters are invited to a place where the main conflict is between the Iron Pact and representatives of Queen Korinthia, and where they – like everyone else on site – are forced to choose sides.

Background

UNDERSTANDING WHAT IS really afoot at the Black Pitch Mire requires in-depth knowledge of the history of the Davokar region, and particularly about the Iron Pact's efforts to combat the effects of Symbaroum's collapse. Of course, one also needs some insight into more current power relations and conflicts.

This section recounts the relevant parts of the eras in question, before concluding with suggestions on how the characters can be drawn into the plot. However, depending on who the characters are and what goals they pursue, individually and as a group, the Gamemaster must be ready to adjust the information below – and also to improvise, should the players suddenly take unexpected, or even unwise, actions.

THE FATE OF THE LINDWORMS

After the fall of Symbaroum, Prince Eneáno and his army of warriors and mystics were forced to battle many powerful monstrosities wreaking havoc among the ruins of the empire. But the ones that proved most difficult to defeat, and claimed more elven lives than any other, were the beasts known as Fofar the Destroyer and Sakofal the Slaughterer.

In their unquenchable thirst for power, these dragons had made pacts with Symbarian priesthoods and willingly been exalted into gods – or, in other words: let themselves be killed and resurrected as thoroughly corrupted abominations. Moreover, they surrounded themselves with hordes of drakworms and other beasts they had enslaved

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and corrupted, which is why the leaders of the elves soon reached a drastic decision: the dragon life-cycle had to be truncated!

Naturally, this was highly controversial and led to heated arguments between the Prince and his commanders; as a matter of principle, the elves in general are firmly opposed to all attempts to cultivate and violate the natural order. But exceptions have been made, and will be made, in situations where the end seems to justify the means. In this case, the combination of humans and dragons was considered dangerous in itself; two destructive forces which together threatened to destroy all of creation. By curtailing the dragon life-cycle, the threat could be handled without either race being completely annihilated, and furthermore, the decision could be repealed if it was later deemed unjustified or turned out to have undesirable consequences – a compromise on which the leaders could finally agree.

From that day forward, additional melodies were weaved into the hymns sung by those who wandered the ravaged land, lulling the darkness to rest and planting what is now the forest of Davokar. And ever since, all dragons in the region have been trapped in their larval stage, known to humans as Lindworms, which is also their reproductive phase. But roughly two decades ago, shortly after the Ambrians' arrival to the Promised Land, Prince Eneáno had a dream vision that fueled the Iron Pact's already considerable concern about the decreasing number of Ironsworn and the already discernible darkening of the forest.

Whether it was an act of genius or lunacy remains to be seen, but the Prince had his singers compose new hymns that would restore the dragons' natural rhythm of life. The Iron Pact had already forged successful alliances with many of the older creatures of Davokar, including ten or so lindworms, and Eneáno was convinced that similar agreements could be reached with older serpents as well – serpents that could actually play a decisive role in the struggle to halt the human onslaught. But this could only be achieved if the Ironsworn were there to watch over and safeguard the serpents during their transitional hibernation and, soon after the awakening, start fueling their mistrust of humans and gratitude toward the Iron Pact.

As a side-effect of the old truncation, the life-cycle of today's lindworms have accelerated. Over the last twenty years, more than a hundred individuals have fallen into their first hibernation, and about thirty of them have survived the transitional phase – less than six months long, possibly as a result of the influence of the Ironsworn on the process. Eight individuals have also entered their second hibernation – two of these have died, another two have woken up as dragons, while four are still asleep.

With very few exceptions, the Iron Pact now believes that it has successfully recruited awakened drakworms as well as dragons to their cause, but some of its more cynical members emphasize the need for caution. All beasts are capricious, prone to valuing their own urges and desires over any pact or alliance, which is why this apparent stroke of genius may very well lead to complete disaster...

SKARAMAGOS THE GREAT

Skaramagos has ruled the Black Pitch Mire for hundreds of years. His subjects have been beasts, goblin tribes, and trolls; he has managed to retain his power by playing different groups against each other in a game of terror, where they enjoyed his protection but lived in constant fear of losing it. When the woods started buzzing with rumors that the lindworm's disrupted life-cycle was being restored, Skaramagos expected that he would soon feel the imminent transformation burn in his body. But it never did, which he took as an insult and a sign that he was not yet powerful enough to deserve the exaltation.

When the first Ambrian expeditions set off along the river Malgomor, Skaramagos saw a chance to prove his greatness. The humans were regarded as intruders, and butchered to the last cabin boy. But even though they kept coming, better equipped and in greater numbers, and even though he slaughtered them all, the lindworm was denied the glorious blessing of exaltation. Increasingly beset by the humans, he decided to adopt a different strategy: to accept their invitation to negotiate.

This proved to be a wise move. Not only were the intruders willing to recognize him as lord of the Black Pitch Mire; they also promised to honor him with princely gifts, and offered to pay tribute for all discovered valuables and harvested resources. Skaramagos was so pleased with the arrangement that he even had his armies come to the humans' defense, for instance when the Iron Pact tried to put an end to Ordo Magica's damdra plantations, and when the warriors of the Sovereign's Oath were attacking Ambrian outposts in the area. And whether it was due to the humans' strategic submission or simply the course of nature, after a long and impatient wait, he could feel the glowing, tingling call telling him that the time had come.

As soon as the lindworm had burrowed into the ground on one of the central isles of the mire, the Ironsworn arrived – twelve late summer warriors along with four older mystics, commanded by two autumn elves named Eliriel and Aláoan. Their mission was to protect and care for the hibernating serpent, and they immediately made it clear to visitors and inhabitants alike that they would not tolerate any disruptions. All who go near the area are first met by an unarmed late summer elf telling them, in Elvish (and with gestures), to turn back, after which she uses her Shapeshifter feature (*Player's Guide*, page 122). If the visitors do not comply, a warning shot is fired, followed by genuine attacks.

Philip Linden (Order #6290457)

THE PLAYER CHARACTERS

When, for some reason (see below), the player characters arrive at the adventure location, we suggest that roughly five months have passed since Skaramagos fell into slumber. During that time, the tensions between local inhabitants have slowly deteriorated, and there is a great risk that the situation will soon erupt into bloodshed, which you can read more about under the *Groups & Factions* heading (see page 173).

There are various reasons why the player characters might want to visit the Black Pitch Mire – some that make them directly involved in the main conflict, and others that make the presence of the Iron Pact a complication. The latter might be more interesting, as they would arrive unaware of the attritional war between the Ambrians and the elves. But as always, the Gamemaster knows what is best for the gaming group, and perhaps your players will appreciate the guidance that a clear, faction-based mission provides?

Reinforcements

If the Gamemaster wants the player characters to be thrown right into the action, they could be sent to the mire as reinforcements for the Iron Pact or some Ambrian faction. In the latter case, they could constitute a task force sent by the army or the Royal Sekretorium, depending on what contacts they have. Another possibility is that they have been sent by a senior representative of the Sun Church, who have heard of the conflict and wants to make sure that the champions of Prios play a decisive role in the unfolding drama.

Regardless of which side they end up on, a lot of things can happen once they arrive and begin to understand what is going on. Perhaps they have come to participate in attacking or defending Skaramagos' island, but learn that there is something else they would rather do. Meetings and conversations with representatives of various factions open for a number of different goals and strategies.

Peacemakers

Another alternative is that the player characters have been sent there as peacemakers. Perhaps some clan witch, or even the Huldra herself, has deemed them a capable bunch, well-suited for the task of reducing tensions between Ambrians and elves? Or maybe it is Sarvola, Deseba, or some other reformist within the Sun Church, who fears that the conflict at the Black Pitch Mire will lead to open war between the Queen's people and the woodland folk?

In this case, the player characters' first job will be to speak to everyone involved, in order to calm the waves. But here, too, their goals might change as they gain a deeper understanding of the situation.

Treasure Hunt

Should the gaming group have a particular fondness for making unexpected discoveries, the location could very well be the final destination of a treasure hunt. If so, the Gamemaster should work out what kind of treasure (artifact, knowledge or gems) might entice the player characters to arrange such an arduous excursion; information about the treasure can be bought from a reliable source in Thistle Hold, or be found during a completely different adventure.

Of course, the treasure they seek turns out to be located in or near the ruin on Skaramagos' island; they could be aware of this from the outset, or figure it out after having searched the ruins on the surrounding islands. In any case, it soon becomes clear that they will not be able to reach the treasure until the conflict between the Iron Pact and the Ambrians has been resolved, one way or another.

Friends and Family

Last, but certainly not least, it is possible that a friend or relative of the player characters has been reported missing, and that the evidence clearly points toward the Black Pitch Mire. Once on site, they might learn that the missing person has joined either side of the main conflict, or is determined to mediate between the warring parties.

With this entry point, the location could also become the scene of a murder mystery – the individual is found dead in the mire and the Ambrians blame the Iron Pact, who in turn claim that they have never seen the person in question. How the situation develops, and who is really to blame for the death of the friend/relative, is entirely for the Gamemaster to decide.

The Black Pitch Mire

ASIDE FROM THE main stream, kept open by the river Magomor, the Black Pitch Mire is muddy, partially overgrown, and therefore not very traversable. It is possible to row or punt through the waters, but one should expect to spend a lot of time hacking, sawing, or burning one's way forward. In fact, some areas are so overgrown that predators and other antagonists can cross the quagmire on foot, to run between islands or reach boats that have gotten stuck. It should also be said that the water temperature varies due to the hot springs and gas pockets that are scattered across the mire; in some places, the temperature is so scalding hot that a person who falls in might be badly injured.

What still makes the mire a very attractive destination are three essential features – the ruins, the tar, and the damdra bushes. Ordo Magica has concluded that there was once a large city in the area, and though its buildings have been reduced to dust, one can still make amazing discoveries on the islands and the muddy bottom of the swamp.

Philip Linden (Order #42324067)

Scalding Damage

Falling into scalding water inflicts 1d6 fire damage each round. Characters who are heavily clothed or wearing thick leather armor do not sustain any damage for the first turn in the water, but instead keep taking damage after getting back on land, for four turns or until their clothes and armor have been removed.

As for the tar, it occurs in both crystalline and thick, liquid forms, the latter being concentrated near the hot springs. Much of the substance is harvested by the goblins of the Hurrularbbakk tribe and shipped to Ambria, to be used as joint and sealing compound in the construction of houses and fortifications. Finally, the damdra bush, which for the past years the Ambrians have not only harvested but also cultivated in the mire. Its seeds can be eaten just as they are, or pressed in order to extract a golden, energy-dense oil to be used as lamp fuel or for cooking.

This section provides an overview of the central parts of the mire, just east of the wide channel. It focuses on a number of notable locations, the groups currently operating in the area, and a handful of interesting individuals. The Gamemaster should of course feel free to add, subtract from, or adjust the environment according to their own, and the gaming group's, preferences.

GROUPS & FACTIONS

In addition to the elves stationed on Skaramagos' island, there are three important factions in the area – the Ambrians with their outpost, the goblin tribe of Hurrularbbakk, and the liege troll Golangarg who intends to conquer the Black Pitch Mire in Skaramagos' absence.

The following is a brief description of what the factions want, what forces they have at their disposal, and how they relate to one another.

The Iron Pact

Eliriel and Aláoan's orders are clear – to protect and nourish the hibernating Skaramagos, and once he awakens, gain his trust at the Ambrians' expense. They have twelve elves at their command; eight with stats like a **late summer elf**, four with stats like an **autumn elf** (*Bestiary*, page 175).

The leaders will never compromise Skaramagos' safety, but will gratefully accept any help that is offered, for example in exchange for free access to the ruin on Skaramagos' island. The latter is therefore a possibly way forward for those who wish to infiltrate the elves in order to assassinate the lindworm or spy on behalf of someone else.

The Ironsworn feel beset on all sides. Diplomatic negotiations were held between them and the Ambrians until roughly one moon ago – negotiations which became increasingly heated and eventually broke down, turning into hostile silence. Golangarg has sent his minions on a couple of probing attacks which were easily fended off; they still do not know exactly what he is after, but have assessed that the trolls can be handled as long as they do not join forces with someone else. As for the goblins, Eliriel has negotiated both a peace agreement and a contract stipulating that the Hurruls are to report on the other groups' activities in the swamp, in exchange for valuables for the goblins to trade with the Ambrians. However, none of the Ironsworn trusts Chieftain Ilfolusk to honor the agreement if he ever feels threatened by someone else.

The Ambrians

South of the island lies the Ambrian outpost of Bogstead, which is usually inhabited by about twenty people but has grown as a result of the conflict with the elves. The Ambrians have several interests in the area, one of which is directly threatened by the forbidden zone established by the Iron Pact – namely, the ongoing excavation of the ruin on Skaramagos' island.

The project is led by Odella from the Kurun Chapter (see page 179), and she currently has two clear objectives: to resume the excavation before the elves can steal or destroy the wealth of knowledge stored in the lower levels of the ruin, and to slay the sleeping lindworm before it wakes up and makes further exploration of the Black Pitch Mire impossible. Despite numerous letters to the Grand Master, and then directly to the Queen's council, she has not yet received permission to order the ranger and army troops on site to attack. Odella grows more desperate by the day; soon she will disregard the political discretion of her superiors and take matters into her own hands!

She has her regular guard force of twelve hired **clan warriors** from clan Odaiova at her disposal (*Bestiary*, page 192), along with two **Adepts of the Order** (*Bestiary*, page 178) and ten or so workers (stats like a **fortune hunter**, *Bestiary*, page 185). In addition, she has been reinforced by a squad of **Queen's Rangers**, consisting of one captain/officer and eight soldiers (*Bestiary*, pages 190–191).

Bogstead has long been using the Hurrularbbakk tribe as labor, and also expects the goblins to fight in the front line during the impending attack. Furthermore, the newly arrived liege troll is not entirely opposed to an alliance, though in return he demands to be recognized as Skaramagos' successor as lord of the bog, under the same conditions that previously applied to the lindworm. In other words, it seems that the Ambrians have two options: either collaborating with an exalted lindworm, or having a liege troll to deal with later on – not exactly an easy choice...

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The Goblins

For a long time, the Hurruls have lived in Skaramagos' shadow as his loyal subjects. It has not been a bad life, compared to what other goblin communities must sometimes endure in Davokar. The lindworm has protected them, made sure that the humans give them work in exchange for food, and left them whatever was left of his prey after his own hunger was satisfied.

With the lindworm in hibernation, the whole tribe feels lost. Chieftain Ilfolusk tries to keep up appearances, even though the humans are demanding much harder work for less and less compensation. The arrival of Golangarg and the Iron Pact did not improve their situation. The former is already demanding tribute as lord of the bog, making the already dire food shortage even worse. The elves are forcing them to spy on the others, which terrifies the Chieftain; should the liege troll or the Ambrians ever find out about it, it would most likely be the end of the tribe.

What Ilfolusk needs most is advice, and since he is not a skilled diplomat or strategist by any means, he tends to trust any outsiders who give the impression of being friendly. His forty able-bodied subjects all have stats like the **goblin warrior** (*Bestiary*, page 189), and could probably be very useful in battle, if they are provided a suitable strategy – such as splitting up into several smaller groups in order to ambush a (hopefully) surprised enemy.

Regarding relations, Ilfolusk and his people are terrified of everything and everyone. They would rather not bite the hand that feeds them, but they are also afraid to flee the area and risk ending up in an even more precarious situation. No, for now they will try to stay on good terms with the bog's more powerful groups, and hope that Skaramagos, once awakened, will resume his place as their protector.

Golangarg

Golangarg has been banished from a troll kingdom in the Underworld, and is determined to establish his own realm on the surface. When he heard that Skaramagos had gone into hibernation, he saw a chance to seize the lindworm's territory, but with the Iron Pact nearby, this seems very hard to achieve. He has not given up. He has already subdued the local goblin tribe and made his presence known to the human curs cowering behind their palisade. And he keeps luring in more subjects in the form of beasts and rage trolls, with the aim of soon having amassed a force large enough to attack.

For the time being, Golangarg can boast a force of six **group-living rage trolls** (*Bestiary*, page 211), five **goblin warriors** outcast from other tribes than Ilfolusk's (see the *Bestiary*, page 189), and three tame **hunger wolves** (see the *Bestiary*, page 140). They all obey his every command – unless the Gamemaster wishes otherwise, that is. Perhaps there is a potential defector among the rage trolls who might be willing to betray its liege, if the price is right...

In Golangarg's case, the only interesting relation is the one with the Ambrians. They have come to speak, and brought gifts that pleased him, but so far, it appears that they are not ready to offer him the same arrangement as they currently have with Skaramagos. Golangarg will not budge one inch from his demands!

LOCATIONS

The Lord of the Bog focuses on a limited part of the Black Pitch Mire, located just east of the more navigable channel of the Malgomor River. The Gamemaster is free to expand on the relatively superficial description of the mire's notable sites, depending on what best suits the gaming group and the player characters' incentives.

Bogstead

The Bogstead outpost is currently overcrowded, because of the rangers and the fact that the tense situation is scaring visitors from spending the night on their ships or camping outside the palisade.

The outpost consists of five houses and a tower overlooking the marshlands. One of the buildings serves as a dining hall and an infirmary, two as bunkhouses, and one as a chapel, managed by the young sun priestess Almertina. The central building is occupied by Odella and her adepts, Ranger Captain Mandarol, and the outpost's severely nearsighted liturg and Medicus, Kralga; it is also where administrative duties take place and meetings are held. The barbarian commander, an axe-wielding warrior named Husk, lives with his soldiers in one of the other houses.

Hurrularbbakk

Ilfolusk and his people are scattered across three islands in the northwestern part of the area. The tribe consists of almost one hundred and twenty individuals, many of them children or elderly. The chieftain resides in a somewhat larger, dome-shaped patchwork hut at the northern end, always surrounding himself with twenty or so capable warriors. Not far from Ilfolusk lives the tribe's shaman, Algulff, who has no mystical powers whatsoever and barely knows how to concoct an effective herbal cure.

The Liege Trolls' Camp

The liege troll Golangarg is currently based on a smaller island northwest of Skaramagos' resting place, but does of course have his eye on the relatively well-preserved ruin where the Ironsworn have set up camp. He lives in a cave that his subjects were forced to build by gathering and stacking boulders, filling in the cracks with gravel, and covering the creation with soil. The other trolls sleep on the ground outside, unconcerned by weather.

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Skaramagos' Island

The island where the hibernating lindworm's mound is located, alongside Master Odella's former excavation site, is completely dominated by the Iron Pact. They take turns resting, keeping watch around Skaramagos, and patrolling the island in pairs, including its surrounding islets. They sleep inside what must once have been a Symbarian palace, but is now a decrepit ruin, partially swallowed by the swamp. The excavation focused on its lower levels, and the entrance hole, with its rope ladder and winch, is still there in the largest and best preserved of the main building's halls.

The Great Dark

In the northeastern parts of the swamp is a vast stretch of corrupted wilderness. In this case, the location in question is plagued by a thick, corrupting mist (*Bestiary*, pages 20–23), which oozes from the ground at irregular intervals, but always emerges whenever living creatures are moving through its waters and islands. Sometimes the mist drifts over to other islands as well, which seems to occur regardless of other weather conditions. The last time it swept across Bogstead, it brought with it abominations that killed a handful of people, and maimed just as many, before Husk and his warriors could finally restore calm at the outpost.

The Little Dark

The other severely corrupted area in the vicinity is generally referred to as the Little Dark, even though it is almost as vast as the Great one. Some unspeakable crime against Creation must have been committed on these islands, judging by its exceedingly vengeful wildlife (*Bestiary*, pages 110–113). It mainly concerns **gobble gnomes** and **choking undines**, but there have also been reports of the ground opening up, spewing enraged **hunger furies** – something that has repeatedly forced Ordo Magica to postpone their mapping of the islands' overgrown ruins.

The Standing Stones

In the north of the area are a handful of standing stones of the kind that can mainly be seen in the northern parts of the Black Pitch Mire. They were being examined by one of Odella's adepts when the Iron Pact arrived, forcing her to abandon the project. And as Golangarg has now seized the island where she was working, it seems she will not be able to resume her studies any time soon. The main question – whether the standing stones are sculptures, or some form of giants turned to stone – remains unanswered, though persistent rumors suggest the latter.

The Damdra Plantations

Ordo Magica is running two damdra plantations in the area, one of them grown on the larger island where Bogstead Outpost is also located. They have no problem accessing their own plantation fields, which still produce good yields, but alas, the same cannot be said for the wild variety growing on one of the islands in the Iron Pact's taboo area.

The Chain of Algsar-Mara, ARTIFACT

As far as anyone knows, Algsar-Mara is only mentioned in a single verse, accredited to Aroaleta, which only refers to their craftiness, murderous disposition, and "biting chain". Who this person really was, and what made them worth mentioning, is as big a mystery as the question whether this chain really belonged to them.

With its thin but immensely strong links, the chain is almost seven feet long, but as light as a rope of equal length, and it seems that a hungering – even ravenous – power has been instilled in its metal. In addition to the powers below, it can be used as a whip with the deep impact, ensnaring and finesse properties.

Entwine

A creature attuned to the chain can make a ranged attack roll at advantage to throw the artifact at an enemy. If successful, the chain immediately wraps itself around the target, restraining it for one minute. On its turn, an affected creature can use its action to make a **DC 18 Strength (Athletics) check**, freeing itself on a success.

Requires: Action

Corruption: 1d4 temporary Corruption per use

Creeping Trap

The artifact's master can place it somewhere as a living trap, covering a larger area (a palace ruin, a clearing, or a campsite). When a creature approaches within fifteen feet of the chain, the chain attempts to capture them. A creature can avoid the chain by making a successful **DC 18 Dexterity saving throw**. A creature that fails is restrained as per the above effect and can attempt to free itself on its turn. The chain rattles loudly when it captures a creature, the master can make a **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check** on its turn if asleep to wake up due to the noise. An awake master will automatically know if the chain was successful on its attack.

Requires: Action

Corruption: 1d6 temporary Corruption when placed

Philip Linden (Order #6334067)

The adept Malkomo is deeply concerned that the bushes have not been grafted in a long time and that corrupted weed seeds might have blown in from the Great Dark. If only someone would come with him, Malkomo would gladly try to reach the island, preferably without being detected by the elves.

Other Ruins

There are plenty of ruins in the Black Pitch Mire, and due to the alliance between Skaramagos and the Ambrian Crown, visiting fortune hunters have had a hard time reaching them. However, the current situation offers an opportunity to sneak onto the outer islands, and maybe even reach more central ruins if arrangements can be made with the Iron Pact or the liege troll. In fact, a deal with Odella can also give the player characters access to areas which she considers less interesting.

There are ruins all over the islands, although some are hidden underground. Furthermore, much of the area's Underworld is flooded and difficult to reach. But there are exceptions where many interesting finds can be made. As Gamemaster, you may use the guidelines in the *Gamemaster's Guide* (pages 78–81), unless you would rather lay the foundations for the player characters' treasure hunting yourself. Either way, the *Treasure* table below can be used to randomly determine what they find, or serve as inspiration for the Gamemaster's own ideas.

TREASURE

1d20	Type	Description	Value
1–5	Debris	Damaged object.	1d10 thaler
6	Curiosity	Tray of blackened silver covered with cuneiform, with an engraving of a goblet.	1d10+10 thaler
7	Curiosity	Crimson gem the size of a fist, cracked, with black veining.	1d10+10 thaler
8	Curiosity	Iron-clad leather gauntlet with signet rings on all fingers.	1d10+10 thaler
9	Curiosity	Neck ring of pure gold, engraved with winding snakes.	1d10+10 thaler
10	Curiosity	Thin rod of blue-glazed stone with a silver cat's head on one end and a dog's head on the other.	1d10+10 thaler
11	Curiosity	Lantern of smoky glass, continuously shifting colors in the light of a flame.	1d10+10 thaler
12	Curiosity	Small jug of facial oil that gives the skin a youthful glow for one day, after which it becomes terribly flushed.	1d10+10 thaler
13	Curiosity	Tankard of troll horn which, when full, miraculously turns out to contain twice the amount of liquid that was poured into it, though with a vapid aftertaste.	1d10+10 thaler
14	Curiosity	Gelatinous, colorless, fist-sized lump that mirrors the appearance of its beholder, though viciously ugly and rugged.	1d10+10 thaler
15	Mystical treasure	Palm-sized medallion of a snake, whose head seems to be alive. When held against bare skin, the head bites, but nine times out of ten it excretes a weak antidote; in the tenth case a moderate poison. Roll 1d10 every time it is used; an outcome of **1** means poisoning.	1d100+100 thaler
16	Mystical treasure	Bronze belt buckle shaped like the grinning face of a bear with black opals for eyes. If worn visibly over armor, it may have a confusing effect on beasts. Once per combat the wearer may attempt a **DC 15 Charisma (Intimidation) check** as an action; if it succeeds, the beast cannot take an action on its next turn.	1d100+100 thaler
17	Mystical treasure	Silver headband with pearls painted like eyes, which gives its wearer a premonition of imminent danger – they have advantage on Perception checks to detect ambushes and stealthy foes.	1d100+100 thaler
18	Mystical treasure	A pendant in the form of a golden owl with spread wings, which can distort the wearer's shadow. Whenever someone uses the Shadow-sight feature, 1d10 is rolled. If the outcome is **1–2** the shadow makes it seem like the person's Corruption total is 5 higher than its actual value, **3–4** reveals the true total, and at **6–10** it makes it seem the character's total Corruption is 5 less than its actual value.	1d100+100 thaler
19	Artifact	The Brazier of Eldred, see textbox on next page.	1d1000+1000 thaler
20	Artifact	The Chain of Algsar-Mara, see textbox on page 177.	1d1000+1000 thaler

Philip Linden (Order #42324067)

The Brazier of Eldred, ARTIFACT

There is a rarely told legend about the Symbarian city of Dakovak that features the mystic and interrogation leader Eldred, or possibly Eloderad. It is said that he could force the truth out of anyone, even truths which the respondent had repressed, forgotten, or been forced to forget. He who binds to this brazier gains access to the mystic's ancient secret.

The brazier is the size of a soup bowl, made of cracked ceramic with iron threads weaved into it. When used, the oil must be ignited and the artifact held in the cupped hand of its master, who suffers corruption when the powers are activated.

The Liar's Penance

The master may ask someone a question (open or yes/no). When it has been answered, the person's hand is forced into the flame. If the respondent did not tell the truth, their hand is severely burned (2d4 fire damage); otherwise the fire feels cool and pleasant.

Requires: Action

Corruption: 1d4 temporary Corruption per question

Evoke Memory

The master can light the brazier in order to evoke memories which the respondent has forgotten or repressed, in response to a question or a request to describe a certain situation or event. The person sticks their hand into the fire and takes 3d4 fire damage, but will then remember the event/answer with perfect clarity.

Requires: Action

Corruption: 1d4 temporary Corruption per activation

Non-Player Characters

THE FOUR PEOPLE below are of particular interest to the player characters, regardless of why they are visiting the location. If stats for additional creatures or individuals are needed, they can most likely be found in the *Bestiary*, in the sections *Beasts & Monsters*, or *Adversaries*.

Odella

"Now! It must be done NOW!"

Master of the Order Odella is the same age as her chapter master, the famous Argoi, and has always lived in his shadow. With the excavation at the Black Pitch Mire, she expects this to change – that she will finally win the fame and recognition she thinks she deserves. Her entire future is at stake, which may be a mitigating factor for those who are forced to endure her anger, frustration and verbal abuse.

Tactics: Odella does not fight. In a combat situation, she uses *invisibility* to reach a safe distance, from which she will, at most, support her allies with her spells.

Odella

Medium human (Ambrian)

Armor Class 13 (order cloak)
Hit Points 112 (15d8 + 45)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	15 (+2)	17 (+3)	20 (+5)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Int +8, Wis +3
Skills Arcana +8, Investigation +8, Nature +8, Perception +3
Senses passive Perception 13
Languages Ambrian
Challenge 5 (1,800 XP, proficiency bonus +3)
Manner irritable, flushed face
Shadow glossy reddish-yellow with thin, dark streaks, like a polished yet scratched plate of copper (Corruption: 5/16)
Equipment field library, excavation tools, pipe and tobacco, 2d10 thaler

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

Cantrips: *light* (0), *mending* (0), *message* (0), *minor illusion* (0), *prestidigitation* (0), *ray of frost* (0)
1st-level spells: *detect magic* (1d4 + 1), *expeditious retreat* (1), *shield* (1d4 + 1), *sleep* (1)
2nd-level spells: *invisibility* (2), *locate object* (1d4 + 2)
3rd-level spells: *counterspell* (1d4 + 3), *nondetection* (3)
4th-level spells: *illusory correction* (1d4+ 4), *private sanctum* (4)
5th-level spells: *hold monster* (5), *mislead* (1d4 + 5)
6th-level spells: *flesh to stone* (1d4 + 6), *globe of invulnerability* (6)
Rituals: *alarm*, *flaming servant*, *tiny hut*, *fire soul*

ACTIONS

Quarterstaff. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d8) bludgeoning damage.

Philip Linden (Order #6324067)

Golangarg

"You are small, you are weak; I'm in charge!"

Golangarg challenged the ruler of a minor troll kingdom in the Underworld, and lost. Regeneration has healed the scars on his body, but the ones on his soul will not heal until he has established a realm of his own, strong enough to attack and crush the weaklings who banished him. He will succeed, or die trying.

Golangarg

Large humanoid (Troll)

Armor Class 14 (skins)
Hit Points 138 (12d10 + 60, tough)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	15 (+2)	20 (+5)	13 (+1)	12 (+1)	9 (-1)

Skills Athletics +7, Intimidation +2, Perception +4
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14
Languages Barbarian, Troll languages
Challenge 6 (2,300 XP, proficiency bonus +3)
Manner composed, suspicious
Shadow mottled black and gray, like wet, dark granite (0/7)
Equipment jewelry and trinkets (10 thaler)

Rage (3/day). As a bonus action, Golangarg 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 to its damage. Golangarg 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. Golangarg can also use a bonus action to end the rage.

Regeneration. Golangarg recovers 8 hit points at the start of his turn, unless he has taken acid or fire damage since his last turn.

Tough. Golangarg has 1 extra hit point for each Hit Die he has.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Golangarg makes an attack with his warhammer and then attempts to Grab and Squeeze a creature with his off hand.

Warhammer. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (3d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage.

Grab and Squeeze. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* if the target is a Medium or smaller creature, it is grappled (escape DC 17) and restrained. Golangarg can only grapple one creature at a time. On subsequent rounds, he can use his action to do 15 (2d10 + 4) bludgeoning damage to a grappled target.

Tactics: Golangarg does not care much about tactics or strategies; he trusts that the massive stone hammer will get the job done, even if he is banged-up a little in the process. He enjoys a good beating!

Ilfolusk

"No, not! Or ... Maybe yes? No?"

The increasingly gaunt Chieftain Ilfolusk is beset on all sides, not least by his own self-image, which demands that he provides food and shelter for his people. He is terrified of entering agreements that might displease other factions, but at the same time, he realizes that he will soon have to pick a side – without a strong ally, the tribe will perish.

After many long years of collaborating with Bogstead, Ilfolusk speaks decent Ambrian.

Tactics: In battle, Ilfolusk fights at the forefront with his club and shield, ready to die for his people. He will not even consider surrendering until he stands alone in a sea of fallen subjects.

Chieftain Ilfolusk

Small humanoid (goblin)

Armor Class 18 (Studded Leather, Shield, Defense)
Hit Points 22 (4d6 + 8)
Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	17 (+3)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)	12 (+1)

Skills Deception +3, Insight +4, Stealth +4, Survival +4
Senses darkvision 60 feet, passive Perception 12
Languages Ambrian, Troll Tongue
Challenge 2 (450 XP, proficiency bonus +2)
Manner drifting eyes
Shadow maroon, like the wood of a rotten tree stump (Corruption: 0/5)
Equipment chieftain's cloak made of grey and black feathers, four almond biscuits which he strictly rations out

Action Surge (1/day). Ilfolusk can take an extra action.

Defense. Ilfolusk adds +1 to his armor class, included above.

Survival Instinct. Ilfolusk can take the Dodge or Disengage action as a bonus action.

ACTIONS

Club. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) bludgeoning damage.

REACTIONS

Battle Wind (2/day). When an attack hits Ilfolusk, he receives 2d4 + 2 temporary hit points before he takes damage.

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Eliriel and Aláoan

"Contribute, or leave. Or die!"

Both Eliriel and Aláoan stand tall and proud, ready to do whatever it takes to defend Skaramagos and win his trust. They belong to the bellicose faction within the Iron Pact, but are ready to swallow their wrath until they know whether Prince Eneáno's plan to enlist the dragon's support will succeed. If they are attacked, they will not hesitate to slay anyone who endangers their mission.

Tactics: The leading elves prefer to keep their distance, but can also use their bows in melee combat if need be, fighting back to back to avoid being flanked.

Eliriel/Aláoan

Medium humanoid (elf)

Armor Class 15 (woven silk)
Hit Points 85 (10d8 + 40)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)	20 (+5)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Int +8, Wis +5
Skills Arcana +11, History +11, Perception +5, Survival +5
Senses passive Perception 15
Languages Ambrian, Barbarian, Elvish
Challenge 5 (1,800 XP, proficiency bonus +3)
Manner terse, uncompromising
Shadow green, shifting between bright and dark, like a swaying leaf on the lower branches of a tree (Corruption: 5/16)
Equipment 20 arrows, 3 herbal cures, 2 doses elixir of life

Ancient Magic. The elf can cast *accurate strike*, *minor illusion* and *poison spray* without gaining Corruption.

Precise Shot. At the beginning of its turn, the elf can choose to use its bonus action and take aim at a target. Its speed becomes 0 until the end of its turn and it has advantage on any ranged attacks until the end of its turn.

Ritualist. The elf can cast the *alarm*, *fire soul*, and *tale of ashes* spells as rituals without gaining Corruption.

Spellcasting. The elf is a 10th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save 16, +8 to hit with spell attacks). The elf knows the following spells:

Cantrips: *acid splash* (0), *light* (0), *minor illusion* (0)
1st level spells: *magic missile* (1d4+1), *silent image* (1d4+1), *spirit walk* (1)
2nd level spells: *hold person* (1d4+2), *see invisibility* (2)
3rd level spells: *fear* (1d4+3), *slow* (3)
4th level spells: *dimension door* (1d4+4), *greater invisibility* (4)
5th level spells: *cone of cold* (5), *hold monster* (1d4+5)

ACTIONS

Mastercraft Longbow (see page 21). *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, range 150/600, one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage. *Deep Impact:* this weapon does 15 (2d8 + 6) piercing damage on a critical hit.

Developments

THE IDEA WITH this setting is of course that the development should largely be governed by the player characters' strategies and interactions with other people involved – factors which, in turn, may vary considerably depending on who the characters are and what they hope to achieve. The Gamemaster simply has to build on what they know about the gaming group's characters, and prepare as much as possible for situations that might emerge as they take on the Black Pitch Mire – combat, negotiations, treasure hunts, or visits on corrupted islands.

Should your players have difficulty taking their own initiatives, it may be wise to let them be guided by one of the area's authority figures – most likely Odella or the Ironsworn elves. In general, the Gamemaster should expect the other inhabitants of the mire to move between the islands, and that they can therefore be used to start scenes or complicate the characters' activities.

Below are some suggestions regarding the scenario's negotiations and resolution. Apart from that, the Gamemaster must be perceptive and try to present the gaming group with interesting challenges. The important thing is that everyone is having fun!

ALLIANCES ARE FORMED

Regardless of why the characters have come to the Black Pitch Mire, they will sooner or later become involved in the conflicts surrounding the hibernating lindworm. The moment they make themselves known, the groups involved with see them either as a threat or as potential allies.

The rules for social challenges in the *Player's Guide* (page 36) can be very helpful in making the social game both interesting and challenging. That way, the characters' previous relations with, for instance, Ordo Magica or the Iron Pact will also affect the outcome of the

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negotiations. But if the gaming group prefers the scheming to be handled in summary, it can easily be conducted with **Charisma (Persuasion) checks**, or without any die rolls whatsoever.

As a general guideline, it can be said that Odella and the leading elves want the player characters on their side, while Golangarg would rather see them dead or join the Ironsworn – the latter because an alliance between the player characters and the Ambrians could later mean that Odella would not have to negotiate with him at all. Ilfolusk and his people will probably be mere pawns in the game between the others, even if (with the player characters' assistance) they could actually free themselves of the liege troll's oppression.

THE LINDWORM AWAKENS

It probably goes without saying that, eventually, Skaramagos will wake up. There are two main ways in which the Gamemaster can handle this dramatic event.

If the gaming group is mostly focused on exploration and scheming (rather than combat), it could happen when the player characters are not even around; perhaps they are in the middle of a negotiation or busy digging in some ruin when a mighty roar is suddenly heard from the island guarded by the Iron Pact. In this case, the awakening of Skaramagos becomes a turning point in the story, when the factions stop focusing on each other and instead try to win the drakworm's favor. The social playing field is changed, and soon the player character will also have to kneel before the lord of the bog, or ally themselves with the trolls or the goblins in an attempt to slay the tyrant.

But for gaming groups who enjoy combat, the awakening should probably be used differently – in conjunction with some ongoing confrontation between the defenders of the island and their attackers, perhaps after a few rounds of battle. Should the player characters find themselves on the attacking side, they must choose between focusing on the drakworm or the Ironsworn, and if they have joined the defenders, the newly awakened creature might very well attack everyone within reach, at least initially.

Regardless of how you and your gaming group decide to introduce the awakening of Skaramagos, he has the stats of a **drakworm** (*Bestiary*, page 36). The Gamemaster is of course free to adjust the dragon's capacity based on the player characters' features, but if so, we recommend a pause for reflection: Skaramagos is the Lord of the Bog, and his features, traits and other stats should definitely reflect his awesome power.

The Chasm of Erdugald

The greatest dangers and most treacherous secrets of Davokar come not from the dark and trackless undergrowth or the twisted spires of ancient ruins, but from the unexpected and ever-changing features that seem to materialize from nothing and vanish without trace or warning. Any treasure-seeker worth their salt will never venture out lightly nor ill-prepared, and none will fall foul of the tricksters and charlatans who claim to have reliable maps to untold riches. The few landmarks that persist with certainty have been cleaned out of their easily accessible wealth. Those relics of ages past that have wealth to plunder have yet to be discovered or have only become accessible and may not stay open long. And occasionally, something more dangerous may well up from the depths, offering the rarest of opportunities to those willing to risk their lives.

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Introduction

DAVOKAR CONSUMES; DAVOKAR provides. For the common traveler that can mean both danger and the promise of plenty. Of the ruins in the great forest, that can mean the difference between absence or access, as is the case with Erdugald, which has lain beneath the loam and moss for a decade, a part of the trollish Underworld. Davokar never rests and quakes send ripples through the ground that force the darkness into the light.

A few months ago, a part of what was Erdugald re-emerged from the abyss. This place might have been part of an outpost or some distant branch of the Underworld, but the quake carried it to the surface in the depths of Davokar. The rise from beneath carried other stray structures with it, including the nest of the predatory **spites** (*Bestiary*, pages 102–105).

The surviving trolls continued, aware from centuries of experience that these things happen – they continued to study, to live, to discover. But the spites had other plans. The parasites stalked the halls, using an infestation of tricklestings to cover their activities. They preyed upon the cocooned, seeking the strongest host – killing some, nesting in others. The poison turned once studious and mature trolls to fits of rage unbecoming of their stature, no better than the starved and desperate kin who often stalk the surface.

Those not affected tried to do something about it, but the fury of the infected burned bright and the trolls realized the source of the 'disease' could as easily infect them. They could sense that their friends and associates were sick, but not lost…

And then one of the spites found Ahaxrys, the **arch troll** (*Bestiary*, page 207). Once infected, all hell broke loose.

PLAYER CHARACTERS

Scholars and travelers who have come across the name of Erdugald disagree absolutely over the origin and identity of the individual, or indeed if it is a person at all. Could it perhaps be the name of a place, a claim of possession, or even a cryptic warning. Below are some suggestions on how the player characters might become involved in finding and delving into the truth of Erdugald – though discovery may still only reveal part of the story.

Erdugald the Grey

One story claims Erdugald was an early colonist, one of the very first who crossed the Titans from Alberetor, even before The Great War had poisoned the land. She might have been a spy or a member of the King's expeditionary forces; in any case, Erdugald is said to have compiled dozens of reports and drafted many maps of her travels before meeting an untimely end in the depths of a rift within the dark woods, taking her journals with her to the grave.

The mayor of Thistle Hold or one of the Dukes of the northern regions would pay a handsome sum for the discovery of those journals, and an inebriated treasure-seeker recently returned from an expedition claims to have uncovered Erdugald's resting place in a virgin site on the edge of Dark Davokar.

Erdugald the Blight

Another cautionary tale states the Erdugald was, and still is, an elvish curse set upon a store of treasures lost within the depths of what was once a key outpost of the Symbarian Empire. This fortress survived the first great purge that laid waste to the greater bulk of the empire. As a result, the site became the target of a coordinated and brutal strike from forces that sealed and warded it for all time with an artifact of unprecedented potency.

The theurgical scholar Tello has uncovered evidence that part of the lost treasures included artifacts sacked from the Sun Temple. Tello believes the Word of Prios, a flame-colored gem the size of a human fist that is said to manifest the essence of the One himself, lies within the bounds of a recently discovered ruin, said to bear the marks of the sun. The scholar has every reason to believe that the elves will protect such a location, with force and magic, but the reward should the Word be uncovered would be significant for all involved.

Erdugald the Wise

A further account, of questionable authority, says that Erdugald references a site of mystical significance that predates any history that Ambrian scholars have found access to. It refers to a gateway of sorts, that drills deep into the nether realms, an ancient and abandoned cache, or simply forgotten one, filled with untold lore.

Ordo Magica in Thistle Hold has an open remit to encourage expeditions into Davokar to confirm or strike out rumors that consistently surface around the wealth of lore in the forest depths. Amongst the many shreds of lore, Erdugald remains an unfulfilled hope, the promise of knowledge that recalls a time from before any of the known peoples of this age.

The matter may surface through a contact in the Ordo Magica or as a job pulled from the pile by Mother Mehira (see the *Gamemaster's Guide*, page 24) that matches the talents the player characters have to offer. Reports of a recent quake in the depths of Davokar has raised interest in scouting of the virgin territory in pursuits of any artifacts or lost lore the site might offer. Return with something of value and standard contract rates apply.

Scholarly Survivor

When traveling through Davokar, the player characters come across Damaka – a troll that has collapsed, weak and delirious from lack of sustenance, looking like someone who has wandered aimlessly through the forest. While most would avoid a famished troll, Damaka wears an outfit of remarkable quality, marked with strange glyphs and ornamentation.

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With water and a morsel of food, he recovers his senses and a little of his strength. He pleads for help, explaining how he fears that a terrible fate has claimed his companions; a curse perhaps, or some strange malady of the senses, something that warrants the involvement of someone with skills in mystical arts, herb lore, or medicine.

If all else fails, he needs help to rescue his companions and he can pay in gold. He wants to rescue them alive, as they are scholars, not soldiers, their worth counted in their wealth of knowledge and expertise.

Damaka, the Gatekeeper

"I would ask that you look past mere appearance and understand our plight..."

Under normal circumstances most would think twice before approaching Damaka, a Rage Troll of significant size, thick hide scored and criss-crossed with scars. However, Damaka has been into the Chasm beneath the Gatehouse, trying desperately to rescue those within and gained a mesh of faint scars to show for it. He suspects that the infection might be contained and controlled if the hive can be disrupted.

Damaka

Medium humanoid (Troll)

Armor Class 13 (heavy cloak)
Hit Points 127 (15d8 + 45, tough)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	12 (+1)	17 (+3)	11 (+0)	13 (+1)	17 (+3)

Saving Throws Wis +3, Cha +5
Skills Athletics +3, Perception +3, Survival +3
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13
Languages Troll tongue
Challenge 5 (1,800 XP, proficiency bonus +3)
Manner sad eyes, protective
Shadow deep red with faint streaks of rust (2/7)
Equipment handaxe, writing materials, Meeting Stone, Spark Stone, Weak Antidote, heavy cloak, hand-crafted jewelry and trinkets (20 thaler)

Songs of the Dusk. Damaka 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.

Regeneration. Damaka recovers 6 hit points at the start of his turn, unless he has taken acid or fire damage since his last turn.

Tough. Damaka has 1 extra hit point for each Hit Die he has.

Troll Singing. Damaka's spellcasting ability is Charisma (+6 to hit, spell save DC 14) and can cast spells as on page 120 of the *Player's Guide*. He can cast the following spells:

Cantrips: *accurate strike*, *dancing lights*, *light*, *mending*, *message*, *prestidigitation*
1st-level spells: *animal friendship* (DC 14), *comprehend languages* (favored, DC 14), *disguise self* (DC 14)
2nd-level spells: *enhance ability* (favored, DC 16), *heat metal* (DC 16)
3rd-level spells: *bestow curse* (unfavored, DC 18), *tongues* (favored, DC 18)
4th-level spells: *freedom of movement* (DC 20), *greater invisibility* (favored, DC 20)
5th-level spells: *awaken* (DC 22), *seeming* (favored, DC 22)
6th-level spells: *irresistible dance* (favored, DC 24), *true seeing* (DC 24)
7th-level spells: *etherealness* (unfavored, DC 26), *mirage arcane* (favored, DC 26)
8-th level spell: *glibness* (favored, DC 28)

ACTIONS

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) slashing damage.

Handaxe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) slashing damage.

Dancing Weapon. Damaka's handaxe begins to float as the troll sings. At the beginning of his turn the handaxe moves up to 30 feet and can make an attack roll against a creature (+6 to hit). Damaka must use his bonus action on subsequent turns to keep the handaxe active and this effect requires concentration (as if it were a spell). Damaka must take a short or longer rest before using this feature again.

Retribution Hymn. Damaka chooses a creature he can see. The creature must make a DC 14 Charisma saving throw. On a failure, when the creature does damage to Damaka, the damage is split evenly between it and Damaka (in the case of an odd amount, Damaka takes the extra point of damage). Damaka must use his bonus action on subsequent turns to keep this effect active and it requires concentration (as if it were a spell). Damaka must take a short or longer rest before using this feature again.

Sustaining Hymn. Damaka and up to six creatures of his choice gain 6 temporary hit points. At the start of each turn, they gain the 6 temporary hit points as long as this effect is still active. Damaka must use his bonus action on subsequent turns to keep this effect active and it requires concentration (as if it were a spell). Damaka must take a short or longer rest before using this feature again.

REACTIONS

Retaliate. When a creature within its reach does damage to Damaka, he can make a single Claws or Handaxe attack in response.

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Worse yet, he fears that he might have been responsible for the catastrophe that befell the outpost and that paranoia gnaws at him constantly.

Tactics: In social interaction, Damaka will use a Meeting Stone (*Player's Guide*, page 184), a trinket and a written note to attract interest with a proposal and a hint of wealth. In person, he will use *disguise self* initially to appear less threatening but will not hold off with the truth of his origins for too long, knowing that such trickery will not serve the needs of his people.

Erdugald

IN THE DISTANT past, the part of the Underworld now exposed to the surface served as a foundry of rare arcane artifice. The trolls here sought to find a means to store their wealth of knowledge and lore, but not in a form recognizable to Ambrians. A great long-stepped tower dove deep into the earth with radial corridors leading off at regular and precise intervals. The exacting construction and location of the places created a perfect resonance within the foundry, that allowed the trolls to craft remarkable works of crystal. Within each, they stored a fragment of the catalogue of troll-song, each fork of exquisite crystal a personal record of ancient lore. Whatever talents of stone crafting built this place, they used materials and expertise that rendered the acoustics of the interior perfectly balanced. The artificers and scholars who worked within the foundry could create these records with absolute crystal clarity.

The trolls most recently residing here were seeking to revive access to the catalogue, each setting to a methodical record and cross-reference of all the material held therein. However, a great quake from below raised the entire structure, impaling it with and through others, both from above and below it. Many of the crystals have been lost; many of the learned trolls, too, lost their lives, or lost their way, in the great upheaval. And the careful crafting of the location itself became permanently disrupted.

What remains appears like a mess of styles and architecture, all surfaces riddled with cracks or skewered by shards of other structures, above or beneath. Vents and rifts in the walls reveal soft earth, searching roots, bottomless reaches, or gathering pools of blue-green water. No two surfaces appear at angles comfortable to the eye or the inner ear, such that movement through the passages and halls requires careful attention, whether to avoid rubble or sudden drops, or simply to keep balance.

The massive disruption of the structure now also means the natural clarity of the place instead generates strange echoes and reverberations, every footstep setting off weird dissonance, each word a queer discord. Calls or cries for assistance or help do not necessarily carry the distance one would expect or end with an abrupt suddenness rather than echo.

STRANGLED GATEHOUSE

The natural flow and curve of the forest breaks suddenly with the appearance of a squared column of stone rising at an angle. The column consists of two complete levels, like a tower, the upper level narrower than the lower. The upper part sports a crown of flourishing trees bedded in layers of loose earth and undergrowth, from which hang copious roots that twist and bind around the lower level, almost drowning the pale stone surface in a web of green and brown. At the foot of the structure, a doorway, large enough to admit the largest of trolls, opens like a yawning maw, partially obstructed by hanging roots and chunks of splintered masonry, like giant's teeth.

A successful **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check** (or experience with siege craft or castle defense) identifies points at the summit that suggest fortification, elements that might be used by archers. Anyone with the Loremaster feature or the Artifact Crafter approach, identifies elements of more than one culture apparent in the stone work, utterly at odds with common sense. A **DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) check** pinpoints the new growth of the twisted roots, as something like a reaction to the presence of the column. The tower has not been here long and may not remain long, either.

There are elves nearby, cautious of intruders, curious about the recently surfaced structure, but inexplicably and deeply afraid of what lies beneath. A late Summer Elf, Oranhai, leads the group. The gatehouse gives him strange feelings, setting his senses on edge like fingernails scraped down a blackboard.

The elves do not yet understand the true danger of the parasites that infest this part of the Underworld, particularly in relation to their species. Oranhai has set a watch on the Gatehouse awaiting the return of his companion, Thenak, and a small scouting team. They have been gone below for a couple of hours.

The player characters have a 50% chance of finding an **early summer elf** scout checking in at the Gatehouse. The elf has orders to check the surroundings, make a brief survey of the interior, and then report back. Oranhai and a few others have spread out seeking alternate means of access into the Underworld, while others have gone to secure reinforcements. If the player characters draw attention to themselves, the scout will sound an alarm to draw the other elves back.

When (and if) the player characters later emerge from the depths, they may find Oranhai and the elves waiting for them, furious at the trespass.

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WEEPING STEPS

Inside the gatehouse, a hollow core reaches down into utter blackness. A stair curls both to the left and right from the door, one up, the other down. The left upward spiral rises into the second level of the structure, tree roots impaling the walls. Moisture drips from these growths like a steady shower, coating the inner walls and cultivating a growth of fungus. Fine streams of light slice down from on high.

The location could provide a perfect point for an ambush, as the light offers illumination for the attacker but nothing like enough for those defending. Player characters engaged in these conditions attack and defend as if blinded, opening torches fizzing and sputtering in the steady shower of moisture. Magical light or a lantern will help, though the lantern would need to be held high to cut through the gloom above.

An herbalist going up in the root-skewered eaves of the building might find raw ingredients for an elixir or herbal concoction amongst the damp growth in here. Alchemists make any required checks here at advantage.

The rightward spiral of the stairway sinks down; the steps run deep and wide, clearly crafted by and for creatures of trollish dimensions. A character succeeding at a **DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check** will notice the strange absence of correct feedback as the structure gathers and stretches sounds in an odd way. Neither footsteps, nor the patter of moisture, echo and the effect, once perceived, sounds distinct and strange. Anyone rushing up or down the stair must make a **DC 14 Dexterity saving throw**. And, yes, their strangled cry as they miss a step and fall several dozen feet (a minimum of 3d6 falling damage) will sound strange as well.

At the base of the stair, several dark passages lead away. Only one has a clear trail, presumably left by the elven scouting party. Any investigation of the other passages may lead to disappointment at a dead end, fruitless searching for a time, or a roll on the *Trails in the Underworld* table (see page 188).

THE SUNDERED HALL

Between the Weeping Steps and here are a fair distance of abandoned halls, musty passageways, and earth-caked chambers. The air smells like freshly dug dirt, heady and slightly sharp. The empty passages lead into a vast room with ruptured walls and shattered pillars, plant-life leaking through the cracks and floors leaning at odd angles.

Anyone determined to investigate these passageways should have an encounter, rolled on the *Trails in the Underworld* table (see page 188).

The site's structural and audible oddities appear more noticeable here. The Sundered Hall gives the impression of a fractured mirror held up to an elegant vault, the floor and walls rippled and broken, with strange tides of marble and finely crafted stone. Moving through the corridors that surround the hall feels like navigating the twisting and broken shafts of a forgotten mine, with some parts turned through 90 or 180 degrees, such that a treasure-seeker might find the wall beneath their feet or checkered and elaborate floors hanging above their heads.

The hall has elaborately crafted walls and majestic pillars rising into the gloom above. Roots and cobweb reach down from the darkness like rippling curtains, robbing the chamber of the true sense of scale. Thick cords of webbing may serve as makeshift bridges across the rifts in the floor, while in other parts thick roots dangle from out of the shadows like emaciated fingers. The Hall deadens sound, with shouts cut short and whispers all but lost.

Tiles of varying color spill strange and scintillating patterns across the floor. Some ancient quake has ruptured the surface, turning it into jagged and uneven waves interspersed with sinks and chasms in darkness.

Hundreds of stray cocoons are scattered the chamber, around the walls and floor, like abandoned diaphanous statuary. **DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check** finds that while many of these cocoons lie torn and empty, some contain twisted and brutalized corpses, with slashed flesh and throats ripped open. The damage looks intentional; some of the wounds look more like burns or bites, evidence of the many **tricklestings** (*Bestiary*, page 152) that have opted to make this ready larder their new underground home.

Traveling across the Hall demands some thought or consideration, as no surface sits quite right, and the weird baffling effect of the surroundings causes a natural imbalance of the senses. Whatever the plan, players roll necessary checks at disadvantage and a failure indicates a missed step and a fall of at least 10 feet (1d6 bludgeoning damage).

A character with a **passive Perception of 13 or higher** will find torn webbing and evidence of conflict, along with two elvish corpses at the bottom of a hole in the floor.

Tricklestings make their nests in the hall, feeding upon the carrion that remains. Worse yet, the Sundered Hall provides the first opportunity to present the explorers with a spite enraged troll. Skane will approach from behind them, emerging from amidst the cobwebs and roots, and attempts to surprise the characters. He has advantage on his Dexterity (Stealth) check due to the cluttered environment.

Skane has blood smeared on his hands and face, as well as viscera spattered across his ragged clothing. Treat Skane as a **famished rage troll** (see the *Bestiary*, page 211).

The conflict with the troll demands a **DC 13 Dexterity saving throw** at the beginning of a characters' turn (this affects everyone, including Skane). On a failure, the character becomes prone.

A character can use their action to make a **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check** to take the time to watch the troll and see the evidence of sickness, a sheen of sweat, a discoloration of the flesh, and the distended sac beneath the chin. Only after killing or subduing the troll will the

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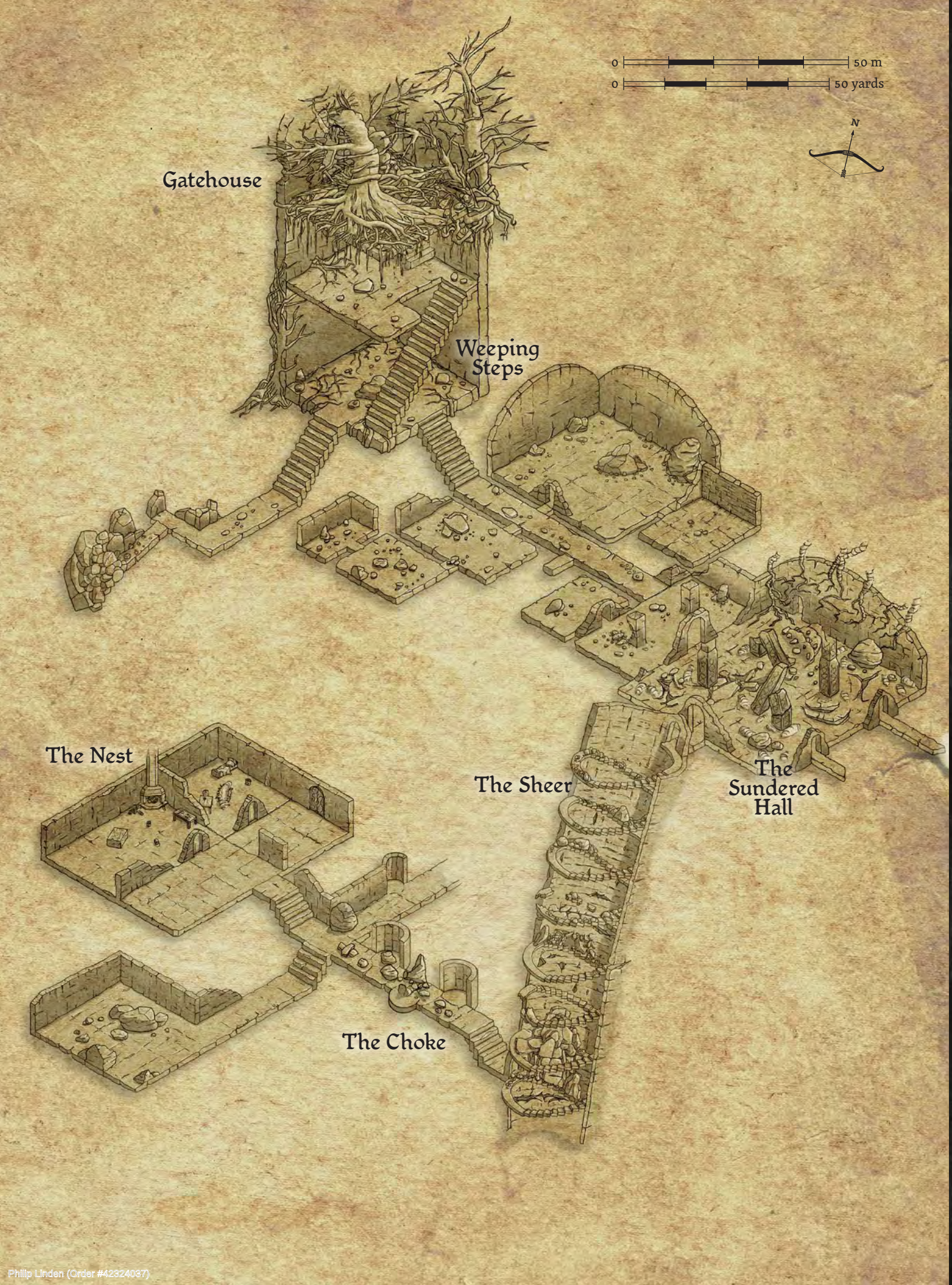

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Trails in the Underworld

HERE FOLLOW HALF a dozen suggestions regarding what the characters may encounter while investigating Erdugald. The Gamemaster can let chance decide (roll 1d6) or choose from the list depending on gaming style and preferences.

1. The Scout

A member of the elvish scouting group, wounded but alive. She may react in self-defense and panic, at first, firing off a warning shot; she had no expectation of rescue. She can tell the player characters that a massive and raging troll took Thenak and one other elf prisoner. She can offer a Herbal Cure, should anyone need one; she has already used one upon her own wounds.

2. The Treasure Hunter

The corpse of an Ambrian treasure-seeker, perhaps a month old and chewed upon by vermin. The characters might find a curiosity (*Gamemaster's Guide*, page 73), or perhaps a leading cryptic note, upon his person, as well as a serviceable shortsword.

3. The Spite Infected

An infected troll scholar trying desperately to shrug off the creeping psychosis caused by the spite larvae inside him. He warns anyone approaching to stay away – in the troll language or broken sentences in a language they do understand – holding his hand out to ward them off. If administered with suitable medication – any antidote or some mystical power, perhaps – he will pass out from the pain, but ultimately survive. Otherwise, after two game minutes, he will attack with the same stats as the enraged troll in the Sundered Hall.

4. The Carcass

The carcass of a troll slumped face down in a pool of oily liquid and vomit, surrounded by several empty and broken bottles, flasks, and phials. A successful **DC 13 Intelligence (Alchemist's Supplies or Field Laboratory) check** will identify the distinct odor of several familiar herbals and preparations used in the treatment of toxins, diseases, and maladies of the gut. Likely, the frenzy to consume them all poisoned the troll. Any detailed investigation – turning the corpse over and inspecting it closely, giving time for a quick ambush by some other creature of the Underworld – reveals the partially liquified and clearly dead larvae of the spite parasites in the dead troll's neck.

5. Dragouls

A horde of Dragouls, recently emerged from the depths of the Sheer, feasting on a corpse – either a troll or an elf. The horde should number sufficient pestilential deadwalkers to challenge but not overwhelm the player characters.

6. The Chamber

A closed and secured door, which needs a **DC 16 Strength (Athletics) check** to open – or some other suitable plan of approach to deal with the barricade set behind it. The sparse room beyond, which looks like the remains of a workshop, contains a lone troll corpse huddled in the corner, pale and cold to the touch. It would appear the troll died for lack of provisions. Its possessions contain a Weak Poison, a Weak Antidote, a ball of twine made from some form of hair, and a fork of clear crystal wrapped in a fold of cloth (worth 1d6 thaler, intact; at least twice that to a troll).

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horrible truth become clear, the larvae sliding within the opaque sac between the oddly deformed wishbone of material driven through the neck. A character succeeding at a **DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) check** recognizes the wishbone as the barb of a sting, though even a successful character will struggle to associate the evidence to a known beast.

If left undisturbed, the larvae will continue to feed on the corpse. Use of fire or an antidote will eventually kill them.

THE SHEER

A passage set at an unnerving and steep angle, which once served as a vertical shaft driving deep into the trollish Underworld. Masses of fallen rock, masonry, and loose earth fill gaps in the Sheer, which make it possible to traverse the angular route at a slow pace, if not necessarily in absolute safety.

The whole shaft smells of damp earth, as if freshly dug, sweet and heavy in the lungs. Anyone close to the Sheer can always smell that tang of dirt getting stronger (providing advantage on any necessary Perception or Survival checks to return to the Sheer).

At the upper entrance, beyond the Sundered Hall, the Sheer extends a short way upward, with an elaborate balcony rammed full of earth and roots. At this point, characters can see this was once an upright, circular shaft. Ten paces down the shaft, fractures line the walls, and they are at strange angles beneath that point. Every ten paces or so, the effect grows worse, the walls more skewed and the damage more obvious and dangerous. Beyond the five-hundred-foot mark, should anyone push on that far, the angle of the Sheer becomes vertical again, the balcony sections sheered off completely, dropping off into darkness.

Player characters entering the Sheer will notice that the loose dirt shows signs of something being dragged, with smears of blood spattered here and there. Impossibly, the trail leads down the ragged sides of the Sheer for more than a hundred paces, before disappearing into a rubble-strewn side passage. The descent seems to have been more like a controlled fall or bruising roll than a steady descent. Player characters can use the roots and jutting masonry along with a standard length of rope to complete their descent.

A successful **DC 13 Wisdom (Survival) check** notes a trail separate to the blooded one leading into one of the many side passages accessible, with difficulty, through the mess of rubble and debris choking the balcony. Should the player characters investigate, roll on the Trails in the Underworld table.

THE CHOKE

An elaborately decorated passage with troll-accessible alcoves a few feet deep. Each alcove has evenly spaced depressions that once contained the delicate crystal rods and forks. The quake shifted and splintered the hall and all the contents, scattering the floor with shards of knife-sharp crystal under loose rock, hunks of masonry and root-riddled earth. In places the passage narrows and twists, though never so tight that a troll (or ogre) couldn't squeeze through. In fact, a close inspection of the narrows finds fresh, wet blood in several places.

The quake undermined the structure of the passage here – and all the radiating corridors from the Sheer – such that player characters moving through the clutter risk the floor giving way beneath them or the weight of their passage dropping loose stone down from above. Have the players roll 1d10 for their characters – with any roll of 1 indicating a drop, and a 2 indicating a collapse.

In either case, the character can make a **DC 15 Dexterity saving throw** to avoid the danger. If a drop, they fall 2d6 ×10 feet on a failure; for a collapse, they are subject to 4d6 bludgeoning damage on a failure. On a success, they take no damage.

As the map suggests, narrow branch passages lead away from the Choke and if the Player Characters investigate them, either roll or choose an option from the Trails in the Underworld table.

The nature of the passageway also makes this an ideal spot for an ambush by an enraged troll – or even an enraged elf from the missing scout party. If the party has already encountered the Dragouls and left some alive, they may also choose to use the Choke to their advantage.

THE NEST

A robust and mostly intact chamber furnished in the fashion of a home of sorts, with space to study, to rest and to prepare food. The smell suggests that whatever food might have been stored here went off some time ago. There are buckets of stale water, a couple of slender crystal ornaments on a desk, and the remains of a cocoon adhering to the wall. In the back wall, a great slab, with frame and elaborately carved lintel, suggest a door onward, but without any obvious means to open the way.

Just outside this door there is a long and narrow crack in the floor, through which the spites have entered Erdugald. One way of stopping more of them from entering is to block this rift, with enough stones and gravel to make it impossible for the insects to get through. Of course, then they must clear out all intruders remaining inside the structure's many nooks and corners before Erdugald can be considered safe.

The task of closing the rift is made complicated by the fact that Ahaxrys calls the Nest his home. The characters will likely meet him here, unless they made enough noise in the Choke to draw attention to their approach, in which case he attacks them as they squeeze through one of the narrower sections of the passage.

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Ahaxrys, the Fury

"Raaaaaaaaaaaaaaargh!"

Of all the trolls encountered so far, Ahaxrys looks furthest along, his green-tinged black flesh distended horribly beneath the chin, like some abominable toad. Maggot-like larvae as thick as an ogre's finger squirm and wriggle between the stretched skin.

Tactics: Driven by rage and pain, Ahaxrys can only seek to feed, survive, and remain for as long as his parasitic offspring need him. A well-respected scholar once, somewhere deep inside Ahaxrys desperately seeks to wrestle back control.

Ahaxrys' Intelligence

Normally Intelligence 16, the spites have deprived Ahaxrys of his aptitude, which will return once released of the influence with medical attention and a suitable antidote (or a casting of *lesser restoration*, see the *Bestiary*, page 104). Without help, he will dwindle to almost nothing before losing his life to the larvae inside him.

Ahaxrys, the Fury

Medium humanoid (Troll)

Armor Class 14 (skins)
Hit Points 180 (19d8 + 76, tough)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	12 (+1)	18 (+4)	6 (-2)	13 (+1)	9 (-1)

Saving Throws Con +8, Int +2
Skills Athletics +10, Perception +5, Survival +5
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15
Languages Troll languages
Challenge 12 (8,400 XP, proficiency bonus +4)
Manner insane fury
Shadow bluish red, like the anoxic blood of the deepest veins (0/3)
Equipment —

Rage (2/day). As a bonus action, Ahaxrys can enter a rage that lasts for 1 minute. While in the rage, he has advantage on Strength checks and saving throws. When Ahaxrys makes a melee weapon attack he adds +4 to his damage. He has resistance to bludgeoning, piercing and slashing damage while in the rage. The rage ends early if Ahaxrys 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.

Regeneration. Ahaxrys recovers 8 hit points at the start of his turn, unless he has taken acid or fire damage since his last turn.

Tough. Ahaxrys has 1 extra hit point for each Hit Die he has.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Ahaxrys makes two attacks with his claws.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (1d8 + 6) slashing damage.

REACTIONS

Retaliate. When a creature within his reach does damage to Ahaxrys, he can make a single Claws attack in response.

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The Raven's Beak Massacre

The harsh demands of travel through any stretch of wilderness mean that traders and caravan leaders alike constantly seek out new routes and opportunities to ease their passing. As much as a treasure-seeker might make their coin in the ruinous depths of dark Davokar, pathfinders furnish their existence through the mapping of practical and viable routes. Amid the mountains or the depths of the forest, the lead of a capable pathfinder can make all the difference; the prudence of securing a route while expensive at the outset can reap reward over the course of time. Alas, an inviolable route through any wilderness does not exist and uncertain dangers persist. Despite the best guards, the swiftest transport, and the most thorough preparations, the curious current of events can quickly turn trade into tragedy. And worse still, there are dangers that even the greatest pathfinder cannot foretell or know how to avoid – especially where the facts fall silent.

Introduction

EAST OF MERGILE, in the territory of Mervidun, a rough but serviceable trail follows the northern shoreline of the Noora. Compared to the westward road, the trail appears like an afterthought – for who would care to travel away from Yndaros? Sparse trees across low hills to the north and the still waters to the south make travel a less stressed and fraught process, though bandits make it their business to ravage caravans too complacent even to post a guard.

Hills quickly become low peaks, then snow-capped mountains as the trail cuts deeper into the Ravens. Occasional outposts, most little more than wooden dens or stone cabins, provide shelter along the way – and rumor has it that dwarves crafted those stout structures that have weathered the passing years without failing. Compared to a night spent out in the open amidst the towering peaks, the chill wind cutting to the bone, a traveler welcomes any shelter, no matter how crude.

At the east end of the lake, before the trail divides – one continuing directly east toward the lands beyond the Ravens, the other angling south through the Fell Pass toward Küam Zamok, the ancient fortress of the dwarves – along a scattering of ancient stones winds a breadcrumb trail, over considerable distance, to a ruin stood upon the water's edge. A tower rises a dozen paces tall, clad in stone with a green cast that glistens with dark seams and flecks.

The ground around the tower shows signs of other structures, long gone. The tower seems to have once sat at the center of a settlement or a fort. Or it might have been just a part of a larger structure, as sections of wall divide the land between mountain and lake. Odd stones show patches and blemishes that allude to fire or conflict.

A mountain peak looms to the south, the cap strangely twisted and bent, cracked and battered as if shattered by some ancient magic or struck by some impossible giant in a fit of rage. The odd shape has earned the landmark the moniker of the Beak. The eastern body of Lake Gile ripples cold and grey to the north, the surface twisting and distorting the peaks beyond the northern shore.

BACKGROUND

Beneath the surface of Lake Gile lies an ancient rock, once known as the Lock-stone. The stone lies at the heart of a maze of passages carved out in a time long forgotten. The presence of the Lock-stone has served as a barrier between worlds, established by practitioners of the symbolist tradition in the distant past; and, for the longest time, Melok the daemon has prodded and poked at this point, seeking freedom.

Simple erosion of the stone has weakened the ward enough to allow Melok influence upon the world beyond. Now, the daemon grazes upon the exquisite sustenance of people's nightmares and finds strength within the darkness, summoning creatures called **glimmers** (*Bestiary*, page 42) into the real world. Whenever travelers have passed, Melok has reached out for those plagued with negative emotions.

Most often, Melok uses the glimmers to weaken the targets and once diminished it ensnares them. Lone travelers simply vanish, while those traveling in company walk away in the night or disappear in the midst of an ambush by the glimmer. Melok feeds on the captured, building its strength, working toward the day it has harnessed enough power to pry open the rift between worlds and return.

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PLAYER CHARACTERS

While the core problem at the eastern edge of Lake Giles lies with the machinations of the daemon Melok, the reason for venturing out this way is unlikely to center on it. Below are some suggestions on plothooks and situations that may draw the players characters in to visit the Post – situations at a tangent within their own challenges and practical solutions.

A further alternative to any of these would be for a player character to lose contact with a personal connection, colleague, mentor or loved one – someone with a strong tie who chose to head out across the Ravens.

Tainted Water

The door to the establishment frequented by the player characters swings open and a blood-drenched figure slops across the threshold, face streaked by gore and tears. Or at least that's how it seems in the first instant of the arrival. On closer inspection, the stain comes from discolored water, but the smell lingers somewhere between earth and blood, like wet rust.

She is Anora, a preacher of Prios (use the stats of a **Black Cloak**, *Bestiary*, page 168), and she went down to the Noora for her ablutions only to find the river running red. She dived in to help a local who lost their balance while stricken with fear and became stained in the process. Now she feels certain that this is a bad omen and seeks aid and support – she plans to follow the Noora to the east and discover the truth of this sign.

The facts might well show that the source of the discoloration comes from a collapse in a part of the clay mines along the southern shore of the Lake, east of the Noora; but the evidence might suggest blood isn't far from the truth. Anora wishes to uncover the source of the ill-omen and make certain to return to show that the Light of Prios prevails.

Glories of Old

The Guild of Engineers has been tasked by Duke Sesario with drawing up plans for a strengthening of the roads and martial support in Mervidun. Careless whispers would hint that the Duke seeks to make the domain not only the heart of commerce for Ambria but also a stronghold from which the whole nation might be governed, should anything ever happen to Yndaros. The Guild has tasked various engineers with the presentation of plans and projects, dividing the land into patches and slivers upon which each can focus.

The journeyman engineer Bergo found himself engaged along the southern shores of the Lake to the east of Mergile and set off in the company of soldiers departing for attachment in the east. He had found old maps, from the earliest scouting trips into Ambria, that hinted at ruins in the mountains and hoped to find something that might have the potential for reclamation. That was weeks ago, and nothing has been heard from him since; worse still, the local commander in Mergile cannot account for the unit the engineer departed with. The Guild offers a reward for Bergo's return, while the commander offers a favor for anyone who can provide information on the unit he traveled with.

The soldiers fell to the glimmers on the lake shore, and all were taken prisoners by Melok, and number amongst those in the cells or the channels (see page 197). Bergo (use the stats of a **fortune hunter**, *Bestiary*, page 185) lost his mind during the attack and can be found wandering, babbling and incoherent. The experience itself might be enough for Melok to target the engineer himself, drawing him in to The Places Beneath.

Glimmer of Despair

Leria, the wife and business partner of an old merchant called Fortha, seeks willing parties to seek out her husband. He left Mergile a week ago and this morning a message arrived by homing pigeon. Leria fears for the wellbeing and sanity of her husband given the message, filled as it is with incoherent rambling that is vague and oozing with dread.

leria wife love hate
despair cage blood stone fear
dark ordeal loss

Leria fears for the worst, not simply because of the nature of the message, but because while certainly his pigeon and signed in his name, this painful scrawl is not written in his hand. Something seems terribly wrong and Leria will pay for the safe return of her husband.

Raven's Beak

THE POST

The Post lies some 75 miles east of Mergile. A rectangular tower of stone, as tall as five Ambrians, with two levels inside and narrow windows that face north toward the lake on both floors. Arcing buttresses at the mid-level support stones that form the floor of the second level. A narrow slot in the floor and upper ceiling on the south side allows a small fire to be built and smoke channeled up and out without weakening the defenses.

A stone door, with an intricate hinge mechanism, swings inward and has the means to wedge it closed – though never so thoroughly or completely as to make the inside inaccessible permanently. The crafters clearly intended the tower to serve as a shelter and a defense, but never to be permanently and irrevocably occupied.

A successful **DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check** notes that the external walls show evidence of points where the tower once adjoined to other structures. The

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Relocating the Maze

If it suits the Gamemaster's plans better, Raven's Beak and its maze can of course be placed somewhere else – further north along the Ravens, on some western route through the Titans, or possibly inside the forest of Davokar.

grass around the base show clear discoloration where passages and other walls once stood – and a **DC 13 Wisdom (Survival) check** finds a stone stair littered with long grass and chunks of rubble, but showing clear sign of recent passage, whether from footprints in mud or broken grass stalks.

The composition and crafting of the rock within the structure of the Post works like a permanent *forbiddance* spell. The effect radiates from the whole tower; broken elements will not retain the beneficial effect (i.e. a player character cannot take a stone from here and use the effect remotely). However, a pouch of dust from the Post can substitute for the powdered ruby required to cast the spell.

STABLES

An open wooden lean-to that faces the back of the Post, intended to provide shelter to mounts and other animals. Animals will be safe here, from the elements and the glimmer. The basic animal mind doesn't provide the same rich potential for manipulation, unless they have suffered mistreatment or witnessed violent acts enacted upon others. If either case applies to the player character's animals, they will bolt at the earliest opportunity. Attempts to calm animals unnerved by the glimmer require a **DC 16 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check**.

THE DISTANT TOWER

Stones and rubble lie scattered along the waterfront, occasionally presenting as a spine of crumbling rock or a shattered masonry pillar. About a half mile from the Post, at a bend in the trail, another tower remains, sturdy and intact. Physically, it matches the appearance of the Post, but the Distant Tower has a cellar and the interior has been fitted out for a degree of comfort and long-term use. On approach, player characters will smell fragrant firewood or the tantalizing odors of cooking meat around mealtimes. The ground around the tower has been cleared of any natural cover or debris to about fifty paces.

The robber leader Kenan and his band of followers have made this valley their own, tending to the track like a farmer tends to cattle. Not wanting to scare anyone away, Kenan often pretends to be a guard stationed here with a few others as an outpost of the Queen's territories. He wears the uniform and insignia of the Mervidun division of the Queen's Army.

A master of persuasion and a pillar of confidence amongst his followers, the strange presence around the shores of the lake both scares and excites him. In the past, Kenan and his band have preyed on travelers with sword and subterfuge, but in the past few months people have gone missing without explanation and left behind possessions for the taking. Unfortunately, the missing have included some of his own people, but that's a price Kenan willingly pays. It feels like the place has become haunted, but the potential presents too good an opportunity to pass up.

Kenan's allegiance has flexibility if the player characters can offer him enough to make it worth his while. As it stands, the robbers number three times the size of the player character group, with statistics per the **robber** and **robber chief** (*Bestiary*, pages 186–187). The tower holds stores and gains from caravan raids in the cellar and sleeping arrangements on the upper floor. The robbers have shillings instead of ortegs in their purses, while Kenan has thaler instead of shillings; the band have done well and often take the time to travel east, or back west to Mergile, to spend their ill-gotten gains.

As well as possessions and food, the cellar also has a post and manacles for holding prisoners and a barricaded iron-shod door that accesses the tunnels beneath. This tower, like the Post, has a lean-to stable, but there's a 50% chance it's empty, with horses and robbers out on a patrol, pretending to be diligent members of the Queen's Army. They can provide convenient reinforcements if player characters start a fight, or might not return if you feel the need to ramp up the tension and sense of danger.

MINE HEAD

Partially obscured by a collapse of rock and a growth of scrub, the entrance to the mine falls 50 paces east of the Post. Long disuse means many tunnels have collapsed, flooded, or become unsafe. A **DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check** identifies the tunnels as part of a clay pit, the likely source the building materials of the ruined keep.

The lower flooded levels of the mine provide a means of access into the caves beneath Lake Gile, but, while unprotected, this route easily represents one of the most dangerous approaches. Anyone attempting to navigate the flooded tunnels would need to be no larger than Medium size, unarmored, and would need to hold their breath long enough to get through to open air unharmed (at least 3 minutes of swimming) – otherwise, they will suffocate.

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Beneath the Keep

1. A nest of tricklestings (*Bestiary*, page 152) in a room containing a dozen small cocoons full of the decomposing remains of vermin, most sucked dry of their inner nutrients. Anyone searching the room will find (roll 1d6): **1** A silver belt buckle, **2** A battered flagon with a lindworm motif, **3** A clay figurine of a proud dwarf warrior, **4** A gold brooch depicting two elf-like figures grappling, **5** A Spore Bomb, **6** A purse containing 1d6 thin gold coins of questionable origin.

2. 1d4 robbers from Kenan's group patrolling the corridors. They attempt to escape and warn Kenan of the player characters' presence, if not known already. They fight to take advantage of the narrow tunnels. They have sufficient natural cunning to not reveal where they come from, using the story that they're part of a mission from Mergile to restore and reclaim the fortification.

3. A kanaran (*Bestiary*, page 142) strikes from the darkness, out of a flooded side-tunnel, or from amongst the debris in a cluttered room.

4. A glimmer (*Bestiary*, page 44) blossoms from the shadows, surprising the characters if it succeeds at a contest between its Dexterity (Stealth) check versus the highest passive Perception among the characters.

5. Old food store, now thick with mold and fungal growths. Anyone investigating must make a **DC 16 Dexterity saving throw** to avoid the equivalent of a Spore Bomb attack (*Player's Guide*, page 182).

6. A passage that used to hold wine bottles, with a multitude of vinegary alcoves holding corked or shattered vessels, much of the glass in shards on the floor. Sticking around and making a thorough search finds a bottle of wine worth 10 thaler to a collector or connoisseur but may require a **DC 16 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check** to avoiding attracting attention. Roll 1d4 on this table to find out the type of attention attracted.

7. Twisting funnel of passages containing Moderate Mechanical Traps (2d12 piercing damage, a victim becomes grappled [escape DC 13] and restrained) intended to catch unsuspecting trespassers and requiring a **DC 14 Dexterity saving throw** to avoid and a **DC 16 Dexterity (Thieves' Tools) check** to disarm.

8. Collapsed passage or room, requiring that the player characters double-back on their route to find an alternative way. Inspecting the collapse requires a **DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check** to avoid accidentally bringing more of the walls or ceiling down on the character; failure inflicts 2d6 bludgeoning damage from falling stones, while success finds an interesting curiosity (roll on the *Curiosities* table in the *Gamemaster's Guide* [page 73] or use the one of choices in the tricklestings entry).

9. Cells (1d4 of them) containing prisoners of Melok. Once past the unlocked door of a cell, the player characters find the prisoners alive but malnourished and unresponsive. They stink of sweat and ordure, and blood trickles from between their lips. Inspection by a player character with the Medicus feature identifies livid bruises and the suggestion of internal injury, which appears quite fresh. They also appear to have many old injuries and scars, suggesting they have all served time as soldiers, mercenaries or similar martial pursuits. They're kept unconscious by Melok's influence and in thrall to the dreams created by the glimmers. If carried back to the Post or subjected to *dispel magic* spell (consider the effect as if from a 5th level spell), they recover consciousness long enough to recount they were traveling along the shoreline of the Lake when something overcame their senses. Since then, they have been trapped in a living nightmare, prisoners inside their own heads.

10. (or higher) Access to the Submerged Cave.

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THE STAIR AND THE CELLS

Anyone searching the ruins and rubble piles around the Post finds a stone stair, littered with tall grass, weeds and debris, leading down to a passage of restrictive dimensions, ribbed with slender stone supports and floored with packed earth. While ogres and trolls can fit down this way, all checks for activities requiring rapid movement suffer from disadvantage.

The floor of the passage becomes increasingly like slurry, water dripping down the walls. Strange echoes carry along the tunnels, sounds like the conversation or cries of distant voices raised in alarm or heated exchange.

The passage adjoins rooms, side tunnels, stairs and shafts, a labyrinth that requires focus and concentration to avoid injury. Each character moving through the area must make a **DC 13 Dexterity saving throw**, taking 1d6 bludgeoning damage on a failure – the knocks and injuries are many and varied.

The passageways spread all the way along the shorefront across multiple levels, accessed via sloped tunnels, stairs and channels once serviced by ladders. If the player characters have visited the Distant Tower, the door in the basement also accesses this labyrinthine area.

You can use the entries from the textbox *Beneath the Keep* to engage the characters in encounters while they search the passages, or roll randomly. If the latter, roll 1d8 and adjust by a cumulative +1 after every roll. If the player characters have a useful feat, class feature, or spell, adjust by an additional +1 after the first roll.

SUBMERGED CAVE

A cavern filled with trapped air, accessible from the lake (by swimming), the passages accessed from the Stair, or by diving through the flooded tunnels of the clay pit via the Mine head. Stalagmites pierce upward from thigh deep water that fills two-thirds of the floor, while stalactites hang from above like blood-soaked fangs. Characters wading in the pool cannot see anything beneath the surface, the water opaque from the crimson sediment. **Singing eels** (see page 202) live in the pools subsisting on vermin that, like the player characters, cannot see their approach in the cold and cloudy pool.

THE LIGHTLESS CHANNELS

A shaft leads down a dozen yards and then slopes northward into a circular maze of interconnecting stone passages beneath the lake. Cool and dry, the channels curve gently and anyone with the Loremaster feature or a heritage in the craft of a mason can tell that much time and effort went into creating these passages. Even lightless, the relatively smooth floor makes travel, at a reasonable pace, safe. With a light source, those walking the channel can see patterns of concentric circles, lines and other symbols carved into every single surface.

Someone with the Loremaster feature will not understand the patterns as a language but can confirm that these are not the signs of elves, trolls, or the Symbaroum Empire. However, a Loremaster of 9th level or higher might discern certain commonality with runic works by Symbaroum's sorcerers on theories of other planes of existence. Equally, a practitioner of the Symbolist tradition will recognize forms and shapes.

As the player characters traverse the channels, the cool air becomes cold and all should make a **DC 13 Wisdom saving throw**. Anyone who fails feels a pervasive presence poking at the outer edges of their mind and experiences flashes of violent personal memories.

This is Melok seeking out fresh anchors to establish a beachhead in the player character's world. It is possible that any of the player characters who have experienced events more traumatic than Fortha will be of interest to the daemon.

The twisting passages present a maze of curving passageways, open caverns, and occasional dead ends. Connecting tunnels display the same patterns and characters as the channels. Here and there, hunkered down and almost invisible in the shadows, the characters will find more prisoners of Melok, all in a desperate state. They all appear malnourished and catatonic, unresponsive even with medical attention. Some mutter half-intelligible oaths or brief mumbled words, their eyes darting back and forth behind closed lids.

LOCK AND QUAY

As the player characters reach the end of the channel they feel the temperature drop and hear the rhythmic dripping of water. The channel terminates in a cavern, roughly circular, with a shallow pool of opaque water on the ground fed by an irregular cascade of dripping water from above. A couple of hairline cracks, in the center of the ceiling, allow the slow passage of water from the lake above.

Several flat stones stand proud on the surface of the expanding pool, each elaborately carved with the same circle and line patterns. At the very center of the chamber, a larger stone, balanced like a table on a couple of smaller rocks, has a simple pattern of three whorls side-by-side, spanned by a line that expands beyond either side. It appears like a small fragment of a chain, the whorls the links.

The water dripping from above strikes this central stone and, on inspection, anyone can see that the steady stream has left the surface pitted, breaking a vertical line between the second and third whorl.

The chamber has an unnatural stillness about it and any character with a Dexterity of 10 or lower will experience a sensation of mild vertigo within the space. After entering the chamber, a character suffering this effect must make a **DC 13 Constitution saving throw** to perform any actions while in the chamber.

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The symbols on the stones match those seen in the Lightless Channels. The damage could be repaired easily if the player characters have clay with them or go back to fetch some. A combined Strength of 40 would suffice to slide the whole upper stone from its supports and out of the stream of water, an action that would not disrupt the ward generated by the symbols.

Any attempt to destroy the stone or deface it further will compound the current problem and the Gamemaster can freely take such acts as an opportunity to throw an **intruder daemon** or two at the player characters (*Bestiary*, page 23). The group might escape the location, but they will have set in progress a far greater and immediate threat to Ambria.

Incidents

WHATEVER HOOK DRAWS the player characters in, they find themselves set with a trip to the east, along the Noora into the heart of the Raven Mountains. They will find that while several trade caravans head east, most take routes further north to cross the mountains, while others only visit local settlements on this side of the Ravens, supplying the workers with lumber and quarried stone.

Beyond Mergile the weather turns, and the temperature drops noticeably (whatever the time of year). A day beyond Mergile, the state of the road deteriorates with a persistent fine rain. The trail becomes muddy and potholed, slowing progress as the peaks of the Ravens rise all around.

The player characters encounter local traffic in the first half of the journey, with the inhabitants of a small settlement in the foothills searching for wood or hunting for food, but nothing much once they enter the midst of the mountains proper. There are many other routes across the mountains, most further north, so the player characters will find few travelers approaching from the east.

THE LAST POST

Within a half-mile of the Post, the player characters see wreckage on the trail. What looks like the remains of several carts litter the ground, as well as several bodies, all Ambrian. The remains have already been picked over by carrion birds and predators, making it tough to identify any of the dead. Predators might remain at the site when the player characters arrive and in numbers could be protective enough of their food to make a half-hearted fight before fleeing.

A **DC 10 Wisdom (Medicine) check**, or anyone with the Medicus feature, can ascertain that all the bodies have been torn and blooded after death. None of the corpses show any signs of injury inflicted with a weapon, just the desecration of the predators that soon followed their demise.

A character with the Tactician feature, experience as a Hunter, or a history of time spent on the battlefield can make a **DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check** to realize that the ground shows no signs of conflict, more of panic or flight. The footprints appear muddled and loop back upon themselves, as if the travelers had become gripped by confusion or hysteria (the attacker was a **glimmer**, *Bestiary*, pages 42–45).

In the distance, the player characters can see the squat tower of the Post and a few clear trails fleeing the field of battle in that direction. Heading toward the Post, the going becomes muddier and a character with **passive Perception of 13 or higher** will notice the mess of stones that suggest the remains of some ancient, abandoned structure.

SURPRISE AND SANCTUARY

About 150 feet from the Post, streams of sunlight dance off the surface of the lake, as if cutting through the cloud, catching the eyes of the characters – but there is no break in the cloud. The glimmer has emerged, drawn by the presence of the travelers, frustrated by the inability to reach those hiding within the Post.

Fighting the glimmer feels like striking out at many enemies while facing into the blinding light of the sun, things only half seen snatching and striking. The presence of the undead invokes an inexplicable sense of dread.

If someone runs for the Post, the door will open at the last moment of approach and no sooner. Within the tower, the player characters will find a scene of squalor and despair, a dozen desperate and weakened survivors of the caravan, all suffering from dehydration for lack of water. Half of them are asleep, too tired to do anything else.

The most vital and vocal are Birtas, a barbarian warrior, and Aranja, a preacher. Birtas feels certain that their assailant is an abomination, a creature of corruption, and that there must be a source that can be stemmed or destroyed. Aranja fears that the avenging light has come as a manifestation of the ill-will of Prios toward the faithless. Both explain that members of the caravan they journeyed with have disappeared, vanished during the attack that assaulted their caravan or walked off during the night. Among the lost are, of course, any individual that the characters may have come looking for, for instance Bergo or Fortha.

Before exploring further, the travelers will welcome the sharing of supplies, the acquisition or offering of clean water, and any offer of healing assistance. With any attempt to revive the occupants of the Post, the player characters may get assistance from those travelers who have remained conscious, including the three named caravan members. Otherwise they will struggle, weak from their forced

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imprisonment. The players can make use of the named characters as assistance, but without supplies any checks to heal the travelers will be at disadvantage.

DEVELOPMENTS

What happens at the location is solely up to the players and their characters, partly depending on why they are there. If they have come in search for someone missing, they will of course have good reasons to contact the robbers (the people hiding in the Post have seen them from afar and believe they have a camp site somewhere in the vicinity) and find their way to the places beneath. Should they arrive for some other reason, they must decide for themselves if solving the situation is in their interest – helping those in need, battling Corruption and/or making a name for themselves might be reason enough for some; others might be motivated by the information that Duke Sesario is willing to pay handsomely for securing and strengthening of the roads through the Ravens.

While moving around, the threat of the glimmer is always present – even if they always show up one at a time, the number of glimmers haunting the area are precisely as many as the Gamemaster needs them to be. However, the Gamemaster should be mindful not to overuse this threat. Keeping the characters on their toes by now and again having them notice the gleam of light from a piece of metal or glass is a good thing, but between the first encounter and the climax of the adventure, further confrontations with the undead should not be more than a couple – and always possible to retreat from. Our suggestion is that the glimmer emerges if/when the characters find themselves in a heated discussion with Kenan and his band.

The robbers are meant to function as a complicating factor. The leader balances between being thankful and absolutely terrified of the glimmer. If the characters admit that they aim to find a way to rid the area of the murderous undead, Kenan's first impulse will be to try and stop them, threatening to kill them if they don't leave the area at once. Very good arguments or promises of a hefty reward may change his mind, and possibly even convince him to lend a helping hand. But chances are that he is only pretending to help, hoping to lure the characters to an encounter which will leave them dead, and all their belongings for him to salvage.

Whatever the characters decide to do, make sure they feel haunted and unsafe while they are exploring the location – from the moment they discover the massacred caravan, until they reach the center of the Lightless Channels!

OLD WOUNDS, FRESH SCARS

When close to the Lock-stone, the player characters find themselves exposed to a place between worlds, fueled by their own nightmares. The slosh of water and the pitter-patter of droplets resolves into the clash of distant steel and the trudge of exhausted soldiers. No longer in the underground cavern, they are standing on a twilight battlefield.

The characters find themselves in the middle of the most savage encounter of their recent adventures, whatever experience tested them most, especially if that battle resulted in serious injury or the loss of a companion. The nightmare reruns the same battle, set against an eerie recreation of the same conditions, but filled with the sense of foreboding and horror that comes from knowing the outcome. The challenge is further increased by the presence of Melok itself – a fragment of the daemon's manifest power that pushes on the tattered fringes of the real world.

If the characters have convinced any of the non-player characters to join them in their search of the tunnels beneath the lake, they may assist them on the battlefield. The Gamemaster should play on the fears of the player characters, knowing that this battle went badly before. The experience should be as much an opportunity for narrative conflicts as one for straight combat with a sword and shield.

In mechanical terms, the specifics of the conflict depend on the experience level of the player characters, but this should be a hard fight. The fragment of Melok will contribute to the challenge (see his stats on page 202) turning what was already a disaster into a deadly confrontation. Of course, if Melok were truly present it would be even worse – fortunately this manifestation is simply a reflection or echo of that greater power.

Defeating the nightmare – and most importantly Melok – drives its reach back into the Yonderworld. In the shared dream-like experience this should manifest as Melok's form being sucked through a dark gash floating in the air. The gash oozes and bubbles with black Corruption, then knits shut – preceded by a scream of despair from Melok. The Lock-stone manifests this closure as an uneven black scab filling the hole in the surface. The glimmers will vanish; the prisoners will regain their senses, but require assistance, support, and sustenance in short order to recover.

Alternative Nightmare

If the characters have not experienced any such savage encounters, they find themselves in nightmares of another, like Fortha – waging war on the battlefields of Alberetor against the Dark Lords – or Birtas – battling abominations in the shadows of Davokar. To portray a battle taking place in the memories of a non-player character, play upon what knowledge the player characters have of The Great War or the horrors experienced in the face of rampaging abominations.

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CLOSING THE DOOR

While the actions of the characters in the nightmare confrontation drive Melok back, the daemon continues to persist on the periphery of the Yonderworld. Melok pokes and prods at the schism between the worlds and starts over, infecting the nightmares of passing travelers to restore the bridge across the divide.

The only way the characters can stop Melok from exploiting the weakness in the reality is repair of the eroded Lock-stone in the chamber beneath the lake. This act represents no simple deed, as the powers that created the Lock-stone have long since passed. The nearest equivalent would be for a master artisan to prepare clay from the nearby mine with Artifact Crafting. Then you would need a friendly Theurg to cast *forbiddance* on the clay or the Lock-stone and thus close the way for Melok through this path.

Of course, seeking to bar Melok permanently may draw the attention of Demonologists who seek to harness the daemon's might or worship it as a provider of eternal life and power. These schemes will find their root within inexplicable dreams, sent by the daemon itself and fulfilled only for so long as needs must to complete an escape from the Yonderworld. How such a chain of events develops is up for the Gamemaster to decide.

Non-Player Characters

Birtas, Vajvod Pathfinder

"Every dawn brings both sadness and celebration."

The sole survivor from amongst his siblings, after an abomination laid waste to his tribe, Birtas of Clan Vajvod vowed to cleanse the land of all Corruption. His skill with his father's double-axe and keen senses have made him invaluable as a guide and a sellsword, most recently engaged on retainer by Fortha.

Despite his stern exterior, Birtas has a confused and troubled mind, haunted by the loss of his family. He believes that he can still speak with his father through the double-axe that he carries, and his father carried for many long years before. When asleep, he argues with unheard voices, pleading forgiveness for his failure to save his family and his tribe – something not hard to understand given that Birtas must have been a child at the time, but he cannot forgive himself.

Birtas finds matters of the spirit world fascinating and would give up everything to reach out to his family. If he could find some way to fight that battle again, he would pursue it doggedly. It's possible that the Lock-stone would be something that might give him such power, though whether that means protecting or destroying it likely won't be clear to the barbarian.

Long-limbed and athletic, Birtas has a short mop of orange hair and features bunched up in a constant scowl. That Birtas survived bothers his sense of worth and honor, feeling that, somehow, he let his tribe down; now, he acts as if each new gathering of travelers he guards were his family to keep.

Note that Birtas' Nightmares and Soulmate are linked, as the troubled barbarian continues to hear the words of his father.

Birtas

Medium human (Barbarian)

Armor Class 16 (laminated armor, Man-at-Arms)
Hit Points 42 (5d8 + 20)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	12 (+1)	18 (+4)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)

Saving Throws Str +6, Con +6
Skills Athletics +6, Intimidation +3, Perception +4, Survival +4
Senses passive Perception 14
Languages Ambrian, Barbarian
Challenge 2 (450 XP, proficiency bonus +2)
Manner scowling, keen to assist
Shadow green as sun-dappled underbrush (0/5)
Equipment hunting traps, 2 spears, 5 thaler

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

Nightmares. When Birtas ends a long rest, he must succeed at a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or gain a level of exhaustion. During battle, he gain use his bonus action to make a contested Charisma (Intimidation) check with a foe that he can see within 5 feet. On a success, the foe becomes frightened of Birtas until the end of its next turn.

Soulmate. Birtas mourns his father, Gand, and has dedicated himself to become a strong warrior (reflected in his scores above).

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Birtas makes two attacks with his double-axe.

Double-axe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (1d12 + 4) slashing damage. *Massive:* when rolling damage for this weapon, roll twice and take the higher result.

Spear. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60, one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage or 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage if used with two hands to make a melee attack.

REACTIONS

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

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Tactics: Birtas will let loose a throwing spear first and then barrel into skirmish, relying on the savage bite of Rib Cleaver (his double-axe). He mutters words that sound like prayers during battle. He keeps an intense and intimidating eye contact with his enemy, something prone to unnerve any but the most robust of civilized opponents.

Fortha, Aging Merchant

Fortha has been a trader since the time of King Ynedar, and life on the road has always suited his temperament. He loves his wife and extended family dearly, trusting his three daughters to handle his business while he travels, but he rarely stays home for long and rejoices in the open air and fresh trails. Perhaps, thirty years younger, Fortha would have been a daring treasure-seeker; here and now, he clings vigorously to the trailing threads of his youth, though some mornings treat him better than others. Melok found the old warrior an easy target and his body now lies insensate in the chamber of the Lock and Quay.

White-haired and well-tanned, Fortha sports a waxed mustache and a braided beard. Sinewy to a point where he seems to have no excess fat to burn, Fortha nevertheless seems a wellspring of energy. An elderly man, he has good days and bad, but if backed against a wall or faced with a certain end, he will always take up his spear.

Use the stats of a **cult follower** (*Bestiary*, page 183) but double his hit points to 26 (4d8 + 8) and give him the following feature: ***Burden of the Elderly.*** When Fortas fails an ability check, he has disadvantage on all other ability checks for 1 minute.

Aranja, Gloomy Missionary

"All I ask of you is to believe!"

Aranja appears to be one of the faithful of the Lawgiver, zealous in her belief and focused on spreading the Light. Once a potter, eking out a meagre existence on the northeastern edge of the Southern Artisans' Quarter in Yndaros, Aranja had an epiphany. She struck her head while moving stock from storage and didn't wake for a week. Upon recovery, Aranja explained, in confidence, that she had been lost in darkness until she spied a distant light. She felt certain of what that light meant and that understanding transformed her.

Or so she says. In fact, while she recites the story with ease and accuracy, it isn't remotely true. Aranja has good reason to be part of this caravan and her eyes on a prize greater than the rescue of a few misbegotten souls. Aranja has been hired to investigate accusations by the Queen's Army that Fortha is a deserter and collaborator with *"the enemy"*, smuggling contraband and information across the Ravens to a contact of the beleaguered power to the east. His association with the likes of Birtas simply compounds these suspicions, given the chaotic beliefs of the Vajvod clan influenced by those who dwell beyond the mountains.

Tactics: Aranja will always seek the best position and strike unexpectedly, bypassing the efforts of her enemy to do the same to her with a quick sidestep or sudden dive. Once fully engaged in combat, the whole appearance of Aranja the missionary seems to melt away and it becomes clear that she probably spent her time fighting in the alleyways of Yndaros rather than hawking pottery from them.

Aranja

Medium human (Ambrian)

Armor Class 20
Hit Points 65 (10d8 + 20)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	20 (+5)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)

Skills Acrobatics +8, Perception +7, Persuasion +5, Stealth +11
Senses passive Perception 17
Languages Ambrian
Challenge 5 (1,800 XP, proficiency bonus +3)
Manner soft spoken, constant frown
Shadow bruised copper (0/9)
Equipment moderate poison candle, strong antidote

Army Contacts. Aranja knows many people in the Ambrian army and can make DC 10 Charisma (Persuasion) check to gain their assistance if they can hear her.

Backstab (1/turn). Aranja deals an extra 10 (3d6) 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 that isn't incapacitated and she doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

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

Evasion. If Aranja 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.

Expertise. Aranja has expertise in Perception and Stealth.

Nimble. Aranja's armor class is equal to 10 plus twice her Dexterity modifier.

ACTIONS

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 15 (2d4 + 10) piercing damage (plus backstab damage if applicable).

REACTIONS

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

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Melok, Daemon of Greater Power

"Your pain gives me power."

Something from the Yonderworld lingers in the fracture between realities beneath the shores of Lake Gile. Melok, a demon of great power, laid waste to the fortification and settlement that once stood guard over the pass before a cabal of symbolists managed to banish it. Now, Melok has found a way to return. Like a loop of loose thread on a garment's hem, the entity kept picking and clawing, until it finally got a hold of something. Melok could make a connection with strong negative emotions, the trauma of loss, defeat and similar. Desperate people seeking lost relatives, haunted veterans of the Great War, frightened travelers fleeing their shattered homesteads – each provided Melok with a little more strength and a firmer hold on the real world.

The stat block below represents the fragment of Melok that it can manifest in the nightmare realm and is a lesser form of the great daemon. If it were truly present, it would be even more intimidating and impressive but fortunately the Lock-stone still has some power left in it.

Tactics: Melok wields a magical great flail in one hand and an executioner's sword in the other, taking advantage of its size. It lays waste to any foes that it can reach and will launch itself into the sky to maneuver to be closer to an enemy. It relies on its fire aura to defend itself from foes and may attempt to dominate them into following its will.

Singing Eels

Singing Eels make the best use of darkness and the element of surprise to catch their prey off guard. The only evidence of their presence is a warbling, airy 'song' they make as they circle the waters and which reverberates around the chamber.

Tactics: Most vermin have comparable vision in darkness to the Eels, but player characters likely won't, so the beasts will make those carrying torches early targets. Once darkness returns, they continue to strike while their prey panic.

Fragment of Melok

Huge fiend

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)
Hit Points 184 (16d12 + 80)
Speed 40 ft., fly 80 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
23 (+6)	13 (+1)	21 (+5)	11 (+0)	15 (+2)	20 (+5)

Saving Throws Str +11, Con +10, Wis +7, Cha +10
Damage Resistances cold, lightning; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Damage Immunities fire, poison, psychic
Senses passive Perception 12
Languages telepathy 120 ft.
Challenge 16 (15,000 XP, proficiency bonus +5)
Manner preening in the chaos and death
Shadow all-consuming darkness (thoroughly corrupt)
Equipment —

Fire Aura. At the start of Melok's turn, any creatures within 5 feet of it take 7 (2d6) fire damage and flammable objects in the aura that aren't being worn or carried ignite. A creature that touches Melok or hits it with a melee attack while within 5 feet of it takes 7 (2d6) fire damage.

Magic Resistance. Melok has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Melok makes three attacks, two with its great flail and one with its executioner's sword.

Great Flail. *Magical Melee Weapon Attack:* +13 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (1d12 + 8) bludgeoning damage. *Ensnaring:* on a critical hit a target is knocked prone in addition to taking the weapon damage; *heavy:* Small or Tiny creatures have disadvantage with this weapon.

Executioner's Sword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (1d12 + 6) slashing damage. *Massive:* when rolling damage for this weapon, roll twice and take the higher result.

Dominate (Recharge 6). Melok targets a creature that it can see within 60 feet, That creature must make a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw or become charmed by Melok. If its allies are in combat with Melok it has advantage on the saving throw. Melok can use its telepathy to provide instructions to the charmed creature (such as where to move) and use its action to have the creature take an action or its reaction to have the creature use a reaction. Whenever the creature takes damage it can repeat the saving throw ending this effect on a success. While this feature is in effect it is as if Melok is concentrating on a spell and the effect ends after 1 minute.

REACTIONS

Preemptive Attack. When a creature comes within reach, Melok can make a weapon attack against it.

Philip Linden (Order #42324067)

Singing Eel

Large beast

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)
Hit Points 34 (4d10 + 12)
Speed 0 ft., swim 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	19 (+4)	16 (+3)	5 (-3)	14 (+2)	6 (-2)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Con +5, Wis +4
Skills Perception +4, Stealth +6
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14
Languages —
Challenge 2 (450 XP, proficiency bonus +2)
Manner weaving through the dark water
Shadow pale green like pond slime (0/2)
Equipment —

Blood Frenzy. The singing eel has advantage on melee attack rolls against any creature that currently has less than its maximum hit points.

Water Breathing. The singing eel can only breathe in water.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d10 + 4) slashing damage.

REACTIONS

Sudden Strike. When a creature comes within range of the singing eel it can make a bite attack.

Philip Linden (Order #6224067)

With wishes of a trouble-free journey and a safe return, the undersigned Recruit is entrusted the task of leading the expedition to, and the exploration of, Excursion Object: the Temple of Exaltation.

The Recruit is responsible for planning the route, procuring equipment/supplies and recruiting personnel; a fund of Six Hundred and Fifty silver thaler is at his/her disposal and deemed sufficient for the task, including a License for Excursions into and Exploration of the Forest of Davokar.

The expedition to and from the Temple of Exaltation shall be carefully documented, all discoveries recorded and findings registered. Upon return, any discoveries shall be reported and finds submitted to the employer. A monetary remuneration of One Thousand Silver Thaler will be paid once the employer has approved the debriefing; the remuneration may be halved in the event of dubiousness.

Under no circumstances is the Recruit allowed to disclose the identity of the employer; this contract must be kept in such a way that no unauthorized individual can gain knowledge of, or access to, its contents. Should the employer's identity be revealed as a result of the Recruit's actions, the contract shall be considered void, and the Recruit called to account.

Vidina
Recruit

Sesario Karnak
Employer

Philip Linden (Order #42324037)

In the Hold

He's awful. Loathsome. Not only slimy and arrogant — there's something vile behind his smile. Sure, he seems sincere in seeking a cure for his beloved's affliction. But why the secrecy? Why the Temple of Exaltation? And why the blackness in his eyes?

One thing is certain: he has no intention of paying me in full. So, it's only right that he gets no more than half the spoils of the expedition. That's how it'll be: I will write in the expedition journal after my entries here, and leave out whatever I want to keep for myself! Same with the finds.

The decision to leave Alavan in Kastor seemed obvious at the time, but less so now that I'm at the Hold. No matter how annoying he can be, no matter how dangerous the journey will prove, I can't stop worrying. Hopefully the Baron's enforcers will stay true to their word and leave him alone till I return. Because return I will.

Helin and Rann were waiting at the Ruin, but the other members are yet to be recruited. Will ask Alagai, of course, if I can find him; I'm trusting Helin to find another two or three candidates, preferably a skilled hunter and tracker. My first task will be to secure a guide. Shouldn't be a problem with the resources available to me.

Philip Linden (Order #42324037)

~:{ RECRUITMENT }:~

Not a strong start. The guides I had in mind are unavailable – Arval and Fonsiul out on missions; Beor dead (killed by ferbers). Got a tip about a newcomer, a barbarian from clan Zarek. He was blasted drunk and disgustingly handsy. I'll keep looking.

Spoke with Lysindra about the map. Might have been a mistake, but it was a risk I had to take (she's getting 40 thaler when I get back). She has doubts about the whereabouts of our destination and the route I've planned for us. A search in the Legation archives and talks with the regulars at the Salons suggest she's right – about the corruption in the area as well.

By the way, in the archives I found a reference to a ruin called the Shrine of the Exalted. It comes from a lone fortune hunter who returned from deep within Davokar, incoherent and "feral" (whatever that means). A vague account at best, but full of darkness and death. It included a drawing of the medallion she wore, found during her travels. Not exactly encouraging in its design...

In any case, I'll need to bring a priest along, or a black cloak. Or a witch. Someone who can handle the black blight. Wish Yerola was here. Or Sarvola. Will have to ask Elfeno. A young, talented person in need of experience would be ideal; qualified, but not cocky. Better a theurg than a black cloak.

Philip Linden (Order #42324037)

"Good luck finding a reliable guide at Thistle Hold; most of them will stab you in the back or find other ways to screw you over. The loyal ones are exceedingly rare and even more expensive."

Deceived

Got my Explorer's License today. Ridiculously expensive – good thing the swine is paying: over two hundred thaler for one month. I hope it will be enough time, otherwise there'll be a fine to pay when I return. That aside...

Damn people. All of them. Humans, goblins, changelings, everyone. Damn Malga! I was sure she was the right guide for the job, but then she started questioning the route. The new one. Suggested a stupid, westward semicircle around Jerak – straight through the area everyone says is the new feeding ground of the liege troll Gunagan. As if I didn't know.

I hope no one will miss her. Well, aside from her true employer, whoever that was – she wouldn't say. Could be Goldengrasp, although it isn't like her to mess up that badly. Who else? Has my own esteemed employer been shooting off his mouth? The sun temple? Someone I met at the Salons of Symbaroum? Not likely. I was very careful.

Must clean up. Then quickly find another guide and get going. Risky to stay at the Hold after this.

Departure

Now I just need some carriers. Will sort that out in Karabbadokk. Didn't dare to stay any longer, and after Malga's duplicity was exposed, it would be best to avoid further recruitment in Thistle Hold anyway. The question is, can I trust the ones already hired?

Usula is an experienced guide of some renown, even better than those I had in mind, though more expensive and worn out; she returned from the forest only yesterday.

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The sun priest Erdan seems competent enough, and eager to please in every way. His vanity is a nuisance, but that's youth for you, and it will no doubt fade after a few days in the filth of Davokar. I'm more doubtful about Orgai. Despite his lowborn stature, he has already started questioning my leadership – not explicitly, but I can see it in his face. I do need someone to interpret any finds and symbols we come across, and the fact that he is independent from Ordo Magica is certainly an advantage. But he must be kept in check.

At least I can trust my guard team. Rann and Helin are beyond reproach, and in the three excursions I've made with Alagai I must have saved his life three or four times. The new additions are Morea (archer, tracker) and Harlar (alchemist, sapper) – both recommended by Helin.

Back in the saddle!

With the Goblins

Worrying. In Karabbadokk I left the recruitment of carriers to Helin while I inspected the mules' packs. The bottle of Purple Sap is missing; I KNOW I packed it and where I put it – along with the herbal cures and the dose of Elixir of Life that Father Elfeno gave me. I have been wrong before, of course, especially under pressure. And it might have fallen out, I suppose.

I haven't told the others. Best to keep it close to the chest so as not to warn a potential traitor to be more cautious. Will have to keep an eye on Morea and Harlar in particular. Could have been anyone, really, depending on what they are after or what a third party (Malga's employer?) might offer as a reward...

Damn it!

In the margins of this section you will find a number of rumors about Davokar. They reflect what many are saying in the taverns and squares of Ambria, often in whispered voices. Half of them are likely pure fiction, and the rest littered with misinterpretations or exaggerations. But who knows, maybe there is a grain of truth to be found in some of them after all.

Philip Linden (Order #42324037)

Day 1 in the Forest

The first major conflict with Orgai settled, no more than halfway between the edge of the forest and the River Eanor. He started grunting and moaning during my presentation of our route to Karvosti, but didn't say anything until we faced a slight setback – an old, starving mosey monk hiding in some bushes, waiting for death. Now our pretty-boy theurg has less to be vain about, after the fumes of the monk burned his milky white skin, but it wasn't so bad. The monster ran off, and the acid was soon washed away in a nearby pond.

However, Orgai argued that it was the unwise choice of route that caused the incident; that we should have stayed on the caravan route that traverses the Skull Rapids. I refused to discuss it, just kept staring him down while he went on about ranger patrols, caravans and safe night camps. When he finally stopped blathering, I told him like it is: "Shut up or face the consequences of a broken contract." He had another go about the woods growing darker and the delicious breakfast bread at Gray Wade Crossing.

It ended with a slap in the face. Or didn't end – he can forget about getting any bread with his gruel before we head out!

Philip Linden (Order #42324037)

Day 2

The first casualty today – one of the carriers. Her name was Ugl- something. Or Ulg-. I think. A pity, since she was apparently both strong and skilled with the axe. "A survivor," as the leader of the carriers (Olfions) remarked, without seeing the irony in his statement. Anyway, the beast that slew her didn't care about her character. It was a marlit, which is surprising in itself; we weren't more than an hour's walk from the Eanor, and I've never heard of marlits hunting in these parts, at this time of year. "Davokar darkens," muttered the swellhead, followed by a faint: "Told you so..."

To be clear: Orgai isn't wrong, except that it is always improper to question one's expedition leader. I heard Helin reprimand him during this morning's trek, hissing threateningly, something like: "Far fewer expeditions have perished because of rage trolls and elves, than due to idiots who don't know the importance of following orders!" That's true, but still, he is not wrong...

Had it not been for our slimy employer's orders to keep our excursion secret, I too would have preferred the caravan route. The memory of my meeting with him, the Slimeball, still pops into my mind from time to time. Even in my dreams. Again: the mission itself seems reasonable, justified. It is he, as a person, that bothers me. I have met obnoxious nobles before, even blight-stricken ones, but none less pleasant than the Duke of Mervidun.

Must see this for what it is: a well-paid job to save Alavan, for someone I will never have to see again. That is all.

"Oh yes, you needn't go very far to hunt marlit these days. Don't know why, but they are coming further and further south, mark my words!"

Philip Linden (Order #42324037)

Day 3

Spent the night at one of the Karits' encampments. Empty, as expected. Everything points to the rumors being true – that the clan is in crisis, with many of its members having joined the High Chieftain, while the rest have scattered and headed east. I hope Yerola is among the former. Kora and Aroun too. Maybe I'll see them when we pass Karvosti.

Otherwise a slow day. Everyone has been quiet, focusing more on the surroundings than on their aching muscles and each other. That's usually what happens: when someone dies, the others realize where they really are: in Davokar, where every step may be your last. The cool, fragrant air under the foliage; the rays of the summer sun above; the silence that is only broken by the rustling leaves and the moss creaking softly beneath our boots – none of that matters. The true darkness of Davokar cannot be dispelled by light or beauty.

Now I'll sleep, peacefully. I'm taking the dawn watch tonight; then I might as well write an entry in the Slimeball's journal, before waking the others.

Day 4

If yesterday was nice and quiet, today was anything but. It's been a long time since I was this close to death – three times in a single day, no less. If it hadn't been for Ugleg, Harlar and Alagai, yesterday's entry might well have been my last.

It started at noon, after the morning trek. Ugleg, one of the carriers, hurried over with panic in his eyes, hissing, "Quiet, quiet, danger!" I still don't understand how he could know, but we put out the fire and hid in a crevice, with the mules in the back. Just a moment later a patrol of ten or twelve barbarian warriors passed in the distance; must have been the Sovereign's Oath, a scouting party perhaps.

Philip Linden (Order #42324037)

Next person to save my life was Harlar. I knelt to drink from a small stream, but before the water touched my lips, he kicked me in the rear so that I almost fell in. Pissed me off at first, until I turned around and remembered that I'd ordered silence after our encounter with the barbarians. Besides, his eyes said it all: he gave me a stare of warning, pointing downstream along the bank, toward the cadaver of a freshly killed fawn. A quick examination was enough to rule out predators and common diseases; it had likely been poisoned, possibly from the water.

Last but not least, I have Alagai to thank for my continued existence. We were just about to set up camp for the night when we suffered the first serious predator attack of the journey — a large flock of mare cats, led by a scarred and abnormally large female. We formed a cluster, the warriors on the outside. It was cramped and chaotic, and I was pushed, fell forwards, and dropped my sword in front of the leader beast. If Alagai hadn't leapt forward, plunging his knives into the animal and wrestling her to the ground, she would have sunk her teeth into my neck.

Trying to recall who was behind me as I fell. I think it was Rann. Maybe Orgai. Whoever pushed me, I hope it wasn't intentional, but either way we must become better at clustering up. This won't be good enough against more dangerous beasts, deeper in the forest.

Philip Linden (Order #42324037)

Day 6

Two days without much to report. Well, last night there was something sneaking around our camp. Possibly fairies, but more likely just some small animals – Morea had a look before setting off, but couldn't find any tracks. Also, two of the carriers have fallen ill; they're puking and shitting like goblin babies, maybe because of something they ate but probably just a bad case of the runs.

Despite the sick ones slowing us down, we reached the Malgomor this afternoon. We should be almost precisely due south of the Earth Towers, but there's some disagreement as to where we are in terms of longitude. It doesn't matter; we just have to follow the river to Karvosti, for supplies and a few days of rest.

Had another fight with Orgai, by the way. It'd be one thing if he came directly to me with his reluctance to go near Karvosti, but when he's trying to influence the others behind my back... This may end badly. For him.

Day 7

Today we've been walking along the river, on the south side. Not too close, of course; we're trying to keep a distance so that we can barely distinguish its rumble from the other sounds of the forest. It's not just predators we must look out for. The High Chieftain's troops may be allies of the Queen, but they might very well decide to stop us, not least because Morea apparently comes from one of the northern clans. And we must make sure to avoid the enemy's forces as well.

"If there's something you want to know about the ruins of Symbaroum, ask the goblins. Their stories may be difficult to interpret, but they can lead you to amazing treasure!"

Philip Linden (Order #42324037)

Interesting lunch break today. I sat down with the carriers, and though the conversation didn't exactly flow (only Olfions and one of the others speak decent Ambrian), they seem to know a thing or two about the Temple of Exaltation. There is, of course, no guarantee that the place they're talking about is the one we seek, but I'll keep questioning them during tomorrow's breaks and report what I've learned. Based on what they told me today, the ruin in question seems to have an extremely colorful history.

Day 8

Was forced to cower and hide twice today — first to avoid a group of mounted rangers, then twenty or so barbarian warriors double-timing it east, many of them clearly wounded in battle. It should be noted that Ugleg was once again the first to notice the threats. He seems to be tremendously astute. Maybe I should promote him, have him partner up with Usula?

So, the carriers' information about the Temple of Exaltation. Or, rather, their legends. Fairy tales. They say that for a long time, the place was a permanent outpost of the Iron Pact, where local goblin tribes were free to make camp during journeys, hunting trips or in the event of emergencies in the area. But then "the mountain shook and the earth cracked"; the building collapsed and a chasm opened to the Underworld (or "the Dark Below," as Olfions put it). The elves disappeared (swallowed or relocated), and the darkness has kept spreading ever since.

It's still unclear whether they are describing the right place, or whether the legends are even true. Also uncertain when this was supposed to have occurred — at first Olfions said "many generations"; and then, when I demanded clarification, "don't know, maybe a hundred Queen's years." Must look into this on Karvosti, if I can find someone suitable to liquor up for questioning...

Philip Linden (Order #42324037)

Day 9

Army camps to the east, west and south. There's a mound under construction to the north, westwards from the Obala Creek; they have also started erecting a wooden palisade nearby. With our license in order, we had no problem getting access to the plateau. Finding a place for the tents at the pilgrim camp went just as smoothly. Few treasure hunters, even fewer pilgrims. The Black Cloaks have taken over the sun temple after the Knights of Dead Prios went down the path of vengeance.

Edrafin is still here, but it's getting late; will see him in the morning. A maximum of two glasses wine, stut or hubble per person is the order of the evening – a balanced dose of mental and physical recuperation. More carriers are having stomach problems; one got really sick, but hopefully the powder I bought from Teresma at the Longhouse will do the trick. Tried asking her about the Temple of Exaltation or "The Shrine of the Exalted," but she had never heard of it.

Another thought: the purpose of the expedition is to find something that might help the ailing Queen Mother, and yet the Slimeball never said our journey had the Queen's blessing. Instead he demanded that the expedition be kept secret, especially his own involvement. And if the goblins are correct – why would there be a cure of any kind in a place swallowed by darkness? If we didn't need the thaler to pay off the debt, to remove the death threat, I would honestly consider tearing up the contract. There's a lot that doesn't seem right.

Philip Linden (Order #42324037)

Day 10

Rann has a deep cut across his neck; got into a fight with an Ambrian fortune hunter over a game of Prios' Sun and was slashed by the opponent's drunken friend. The opponent is now locked up safely at the Stronghold. Rann was bleeding heavily; he's feeling faint, but has not lagged behind, even though we kept a fast pace during the evening's walk. We've made camp now, south of the mound. Exciting day tomorrow.

Haven't found out anything more about our destination, but Edrafin assures me that the Sovereign's Oath won't stop us. He doesn't know their views on the matter, but he has talked to several groups who have ventured into Baiaga territory and returned, despite encounters with the Blood-Daughter's warriors. So, we continue as planned – north via Serand's to the Sinkhole, before heading almost straight north-east until we reach the stream which Goldengrasp calls the Slay Waters (after a former colleague who died there).

As for myself, I'm tired. Strange that a day's rest can have that effect. I've heard others say that the fatigue is at its worst immediately after a longer rest, but never experienced it before. I just hope I haven't caught something from the carriers. Should have bought more of Teresma's powder.

Philip Linden (Order #42324037)

"I heard the Sovereign's Oath is cleaning out all ruins north of Karvosti, even the ones in the deep. All of them! Seriously, they'll strip all of Davokar of treasure and artifacts!"

Day 11

We've made camp about halfway to Serand's, sooner than planned. No Sovereign troops thus far, but Rann is weak and I'm feeling a bit off as well. Run-down.

Didn't mentioned it earlier, even though it had already crossed my mind, but I'm starting to suspect that we're being followed. Maybe I'm just imagining things, but even before we reached the Malgomor, there were a couple of occasions when I heard sounds that seemed out of place, wrong somehow – a distant bang and a thud, and a scream. Then there were the quiet footsteps around our camp, though Morea couldn't find any tracks. And now, as we set up camp, I could swear I caught the scent of cooked food wafting in the south-west wind, extremely faint and only for a moment.

I spoke to Usula; she couldn't smell anything, said the hunger was playing tricks on my mind. And she didn't seem worried about anyone following us. Granted, I never told her about my previous observations, but with all that experience she too must have noticed the sounds, just not deemed them noteworthy. Got to trust her judgment; must assume that she's loyal – if I can't rely on my guide, I'm doomed anyway.

Day 12

How wrong can a person be!? I'm so furious I can barely write.

I don't know what to think, and I'll never be able to prove any of this, but either Edrafin was seriously misinformed or much too optimistic. Or maybe he lied, paid by whoever wants to see me fail.

Philip Linden (Order #42324037)

We are one hour south of Serand's Pyramid, hiding in an abandoned hut that reeks of troll and mold. But Rann and Morea aren't here. The Sovereign warriors we encountered forced us Ambrians to turn back, along with the carriers; the commander asked me to tell our countrymen about "the Blood-Daughter's mercy and goodwill toward the people of the Tyrant Queen." But our barbarian companions were treated differently.

They were savagely beaten before our eyes, accused of treason, of fraternizing with the enemy instead of joining the new army of Symbaroum. Just as we were pushed away, firmly and without a hint of kindness, a chuckling, rune-covered warrior took out his primitive tattoo kit – probably to initiate Rann and Morea into the Sovereign's Oath.

I will not have it! Both shall be freed, tonight!

Day 13

Must be brief. Followed. Thanks to Usula the extraction went easier than anticipated – she snuck up, slit the camp guard's throat, freed Rann and Morea, and escaped without the warriors noticing.

Note 1: they must have underestimated our ability; thought we wouldn't dare come back.

Note 2: I was a fool for ever doubting Usula's loyalty!

I've decided to head east, not only because of Gunagan's hunting grounds in the west, but also because Usula and I are more familiar with the terrain around the Sun Temple and up north. We can find places to hide. Also, I already know two or three spots that would be perfect for an ambush, when/if the Sovereign warriors catch up to us.

Now, onward through the night.

Philip Linden (Order #42324037)

Day 14

We may have managed to shake our pursuers, or at least bought us some time. A few hours before dawn we reached a brook that crossed our path, shallow enough that we could walk on the bed, follow it toward the Ravens. We moved slowly; there were no stars in the sky, so we stumbled through complete darkness. Had to stand still for almost a glass after Usula noticed the sound of beating wings coming from above. We couldn't see it, due to the darkness and the foliage looming over the brook, but it sounded big. Huge. Much bigger than a wraith owl.

It is now noon and we've finally dared to take a break, after backtracking and keeping a close watch on the way we came, from some bushes roughly forty paces away. So far everything is calm and quiet, but I noticed something else – the waybread is moldy. It shouldn't be possible, not this soon, not the way we have kept it. And sure enough: there are tiny holes in the fabric, barely noticeable but certainly done on purpose. The question is when. Back at Marvalom's where we bought the "waybread"? Before leaving the Hold? Or on the journey?

Must discuss it with someone. My gut tells me I can trust Rann and Helin, but nothing about who might be a traitor. Orgai bothers me to no end, but doesn't that speak against him being a planted saboteur? And Usula... It was awfully convenient that she happened to turn up at the Hold, but if she wanted to sabotage the expedition, why save the two warriors from the Sovereign's Oath? Maybe she's the one I should talk to.

Philip Linden (Order #42324037)

Day 16

Not much rest these past few days, yet we haven't gotten very far – chose route and terrain for the purpose of shaking the Sovereign's Oath, not to gain ground. But we've left the Sun Temple behind and turned north. We passed at a distance; only Usula and I snuck closer – it's now dominated by the Sovereign's Oath, with a few Knights of Dead Prios held prisoner. And with squires and a couple of priests as their slaves. Can't imagine the First Revenger will let this go unpunished...

The journey is taking a toll on us, slowly but surely. Two of our three mules are limping from pushing through the rough terrain, and several of the carriers are still plagued by stomach problems (one of them in particular, whose fever won't come down). Morea has a fever too, probably from her infected tattoo – where Rann has a red crown entwined with thorns, she has one sticky with puss. The exhaustion can also be seen in Orgai and Erdan; the swellhead no longer has the energy to complain or make faces, while the previously so vain sun priest has let his hair become tangled and dirty, his acid burnt face coated with the filth of the forest.

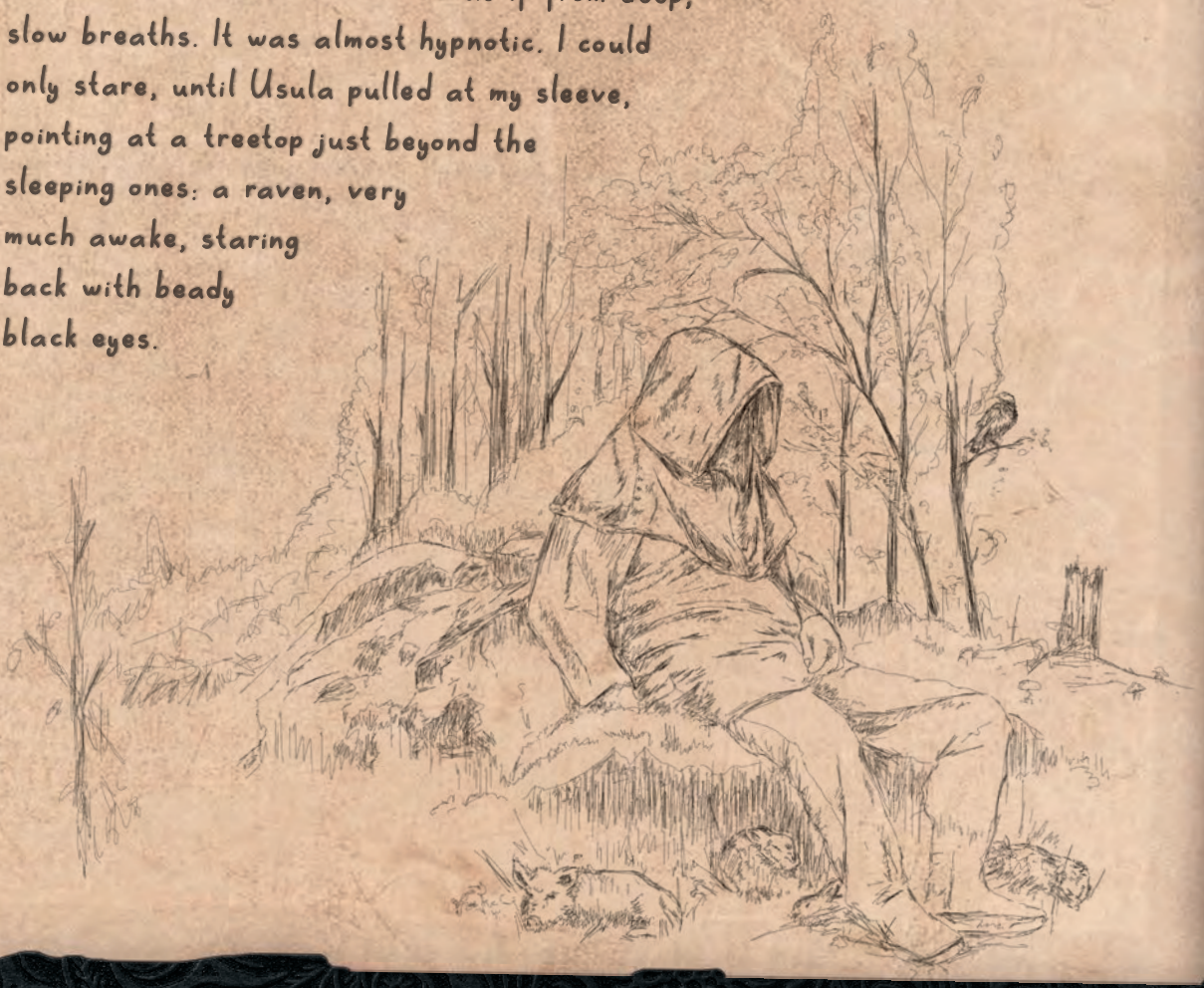
Then again, so far we have actually been lucky, especially considering the situations we've faced. Hard to believe so many of us are still alive.

Philip Linden (Order #42324037)

Day 17

Had a real Davokar moment today, the kind Alavan would have loved – incomprehensible, inexplicable and therefore deeply unsettling. Usula gestured us to stop and waved me over, pointing through the misty darkness at a figure sitting on a mossy rock, surround by sleeping animals – including a couple of hares, a mink and a wild boar piglet.

We didn't dare to go closer. The figure's head was covered by a blanket-like hood, leaned forward as if the person (creature?) was asleep; I thought I saw a beard, but it could have been long, unkempt hair. The hunched back moved as if from deep, slow breaths. It was almost hypnotic. I could only stare, until Usula pulled at my sleeve, pointing at a treetop just beyond the sleeping ones: a raven, very much awake, staring back with beady black eyes.



Philip Linden (Order #42324037)

After circumventing the strange scene, we continued through a stretch of forest that felt more peaceful than usual. Might have been my imagination, or maybe I was just lulled by the sense of harmony radiating from the creature on the rock. Or maybe Orgai is right and the creature we saw was one of the Elders, one of the shepherds and wardens of the forest. On the other hand, this is Davokar – the creature and the animals may just as well have been fortune hunters that poked around in the wrong ruin or angered the wrong arch troll...

Day 18

Orgai is an absolute idiot! We made camp in the outskirts of what must once have been the city of Alkor, with clear orders to ignore the ruins. The swellhead protested, saying that we should investigate the rumors circulating the Hold that Karlomei Mederen has gotten lost around here, in the city's old sewers. When I shook my head, he blurted out other rumors about hidden treasure chambers and "power-laden blackwater." Like a fool, I had him take the first watch as punishment for his insolence. Naturally, he went off on his own.

Rann, Helin and Morea have gone to bring him back. I wanted to go as well, but everyone objected, and they're right – the expedition leader and the guide must never knowingly expose themselves to risks that others can handle. But I have a gnawing feeling in the pit of my stomach. Davokar always finds a way of punishing stupidity, and the swellhead has certainly earned it... I just hope no one else will have to pay the price.

By the way, I'll have that talk with Usula while we're waiting, about my suspicions as well as how to ration our supplies. I expected that we would have to hunt, fish and pick berries and mushrooms. But with the amount of bread lost, the plan needs updating.

"The spiders are taking over Davokar again, just like they did in the days of the Spider King. You know what arachs are, don't you? Like, his soldiers. They've recently been spotted near Serand's Pyramid."

Philip Linden (Order #42324037)

Day 19

Rann is dead. Spiders. Tricklestings, Orgai said; bigger than that, according to Morea. The latter is badly wounded, pale as snow and shaking with chills, as if she wasn't weak enough already from the tattoo. Harlar and Usula are trying to help. Erdan is also at her side, immersed in prayer, but I doubt she'll make it through the day.

It is noon, and we have stopped at a small lake, fairly certain that the spiders aren't following us. Fled from Alkor in panic – Helin and the swellhead came running with Morea hanging between them, wild-eyed with fear. One of the already injured mules squealed and collapsed shortly after setting off, unwilling to stand; must have twisted an ankle again. I ordered the carriers to pick up the animal's bags; then we left her there, as a peace offering to anyone hunting us.

Helin is inconsolable; the murderous glances she's throwing at Orgai are even more hateful than my own. But we can't lose him as well; he must live, for now. Don't know whether his silence is due to fear or regret; hasn't said a word since he returned, barely raised his gaze from the figurine he brought with him from his moronic jaunt. Can probably rule him out as a traitor after all. Wrong – he is a traitor, but in the service of his own greed, not someone else's. Will resume my conversation with Usula this evening, after last night's abrupt interruption...

Philip Linden (Order #42324037)

Day 20

Morea departed tonight; the Elixir of Life did nothing. She died with a curse on her lips, spoken in her native tongue. I didn't understand, but Alagai translated: "By Oroke, I damn you, wretched Orgai, son of the Black Queen, to suffering, to a slow death and an eternity of torment." The Black Queen? Maybe she was the traitor after all?

Usula understands and shares my suspicions, especially after I told her about the purple sap and the moldy bread. But she didn't blame any specific individual. We considered them all: Helin, Harlar, Alagai, Erdan, and the swellhead; also spoke briefly about Olfions and the carriers. We agree that no one stands out — none can be ruled out or condemned. Maybe it really was Morea, fueled by some kind of hatred toward Ambrians in general, but it doesn't feel that way. Might be time to set a trap; something an infiltrator couldn't help sabotaging.

Must also mention that we came across some blackland today, near a Baiagan campsite. The place was as empty as the rest of the area; it's probably true that Clan Baiaga has splintered as well, after years of internal conflicts — apparently Tharama convinced much of the clan to head south and join the High Chieftain, while the rest went to the Sovereign's Oath. Anyway, Usula and Erdan were able to take us around the tainted area. We should arrive at Jerak before tomorrow night.

Philip Linden (Order #42324037)

Day 21

It was probably good that I listened to Orgai for once and turned east before we got too close to the Sinkhole. There is something about this place, in the air and in the water – something rotten, a sour tinge. Usula shares my assessment that this area south of Jerak is darker than it was just six months ago. Erdan seems to agree. He's been singing prayers all day, in an almost whispering tone of voice.

The baiagorn Alagai and I fought off (severely blight-marked with fur oozing with what looked like tar) was yet another sign. With the Baiagans gone, it seems the Sovereign's Oath has failed to monitor the sinkhole and what emerges from the deep; maybe we should consider taking the route through Arshaka and Odaban on the way back.

After half a day's march east, we are now headed north-east to the Slay Waters. Already three weeks in the woods and maybe four or five days to our destination, provided that we manage to stay on course. There are two landmarks to look out for once we reach the creek, visible from above the foliage – The Crimson Cliff with its deep red, glassy veins, and the broken tower that Goldengrasp called Barlegor's Bell Tower. (Maybe this is where the bell in Kastor came from?)

"We're done for! Clans Karohar and Baiaga have already been disbanded, almost all of the them defecting to the Sovereign's Oath. The same will happen to Zarek and Odaiova, and then we can forget about Davokar."

Philip Linden (Order #42324037)

Day 22

Sometimes you've got to admire this forest. Sure, it is to be loathed and feared for all the death it causes, all the darkness it shelters. But it can also be beautiful beyond words. Saw a colossi today. It's the second time in my life that I've seen a wild specimen up close. The damp night air lingered over the moss and leaves, making everything glitter in the sun that gently burned the humidity away. Erdan had the morning watch and heard it from a distance. Looked pale as a ghoul as he woke us up. On Usula's command we gathered around two large boulders, pressing ourselves against the rock, and watched it coming towards us, knocking down trees with steps that shook the ground. It went straight past us, close enough that I could touch its bark-like skin. But I didn't; I was busy keeping Orgai in check.

In contrast to that experience, the afternoon was a tough one. We reached a marsh with a black lake at its center. Or rather a pond. Good to see the sky again, but Usula thought she spotted King Toad tracks, so we made a pretty severe detour. She led us through the deepest part of the marsh, as the toads' usual prey was unlikely to go that way. Feels like I'll never be dry again, and I could swear our two remaining mules have been throwing hateful glances at me all night, as if they're just waiting for me to fall asleep so they can put their plan into action: stomping me to death.

At this very moment, that doesn't sound too bad...

Philip Linden (Order #42324087)

Day 23

I survived the night, and yet another day of walking. We're heading into the dark, into the territory of predators and trolls, and it shows. Now it's time for Usula to prove herself, probably Erdan and Orgai as well. We have found tracks

Day 26

They caught up with us. The Sovereign's Oath. Knocked me unconscious. I woke up yesterday, on and off, too dazed to grasp the situation. Feel better today. Well, not really. A summary of what happened (according to Usula and Alagai), followed by a status report:

We were attacked by Sovereign warriors, first with arrows and javelins, then they came charging (that much I can remember). Everyone took up arms, even the carriers. Fought bravely but suffered heavy losses. Then suddenly the attackers were fired upon from behind, by a third party. Usula took charge: ordered Harlar to carry me as we all fled; all who still could. A couple of warriors pursued us, but they were soon brought down by Usula and Orgai (who took control of the enemy's will and made them run the other way); most of the other warriors were busy fighting our guardian saints. None of us got a glimpse of the latter.

The situation is grim, the morale low. We reached what must be the Slay Water; our saviors have not made themselves known. Alagai and the priest are gone, presumably dead; only four carriers remain, including the sharp-minded Ugleg, but not Olfions who was reportedly cleaved by a heavy axe blow. A mule fled in the same direction as us; it is packed with elixir, water and food, but only enough for a couple of days.

Philip Linden (Order #42324037)

So: Helin, Harlar, the swellhead, the guide, four goblins, and I, roughly two weeks' march from the edge of the forest (as the dragon flies), against merciless Davokar and possibly a group of vengeful barbarian warriors...

Even though we are only a day away from our destination, I suspect that Edrafin's deceitful promise will be the death of us all.

Day 27

Sent Usula up a tree when the sun was at its highest. On learning that she could see both the Crimson Rock and Barlegor's Bell Tower, we all just nodded silently. That she could see a thin column of smoke rise from where the Temple of Exaltation should be was enough to raise an eyebrow, at least for me. It doesn't make things worse, just more interesting – if someone is already there, that means there's hope that they'll be friendly, or even helpful.

I've been thinking more about the attack, particularly about who it was that came to our aid. And why. Could they have been members of some forest-dwelling goblin tribe, wanting to protect their kin or simply to combat the Sovereign's Oath? Perhaps it was an Iron Pact warband, but if so, one must wonder why they let us go. The more likely explanation is that we have been followed ever since leaving the Hold, by a group who do not know the way to the ruin and need us to guide them. That would also explain the traitor's activities; he or she has made efforts to weaken us, but not actually stop us from continuing.

If that is the case, it will of course be particularly interesting when we reach our destination. Will the freeloaders let us live, or aim their arrows at us this time?

Philip Linden (Order #42324037)

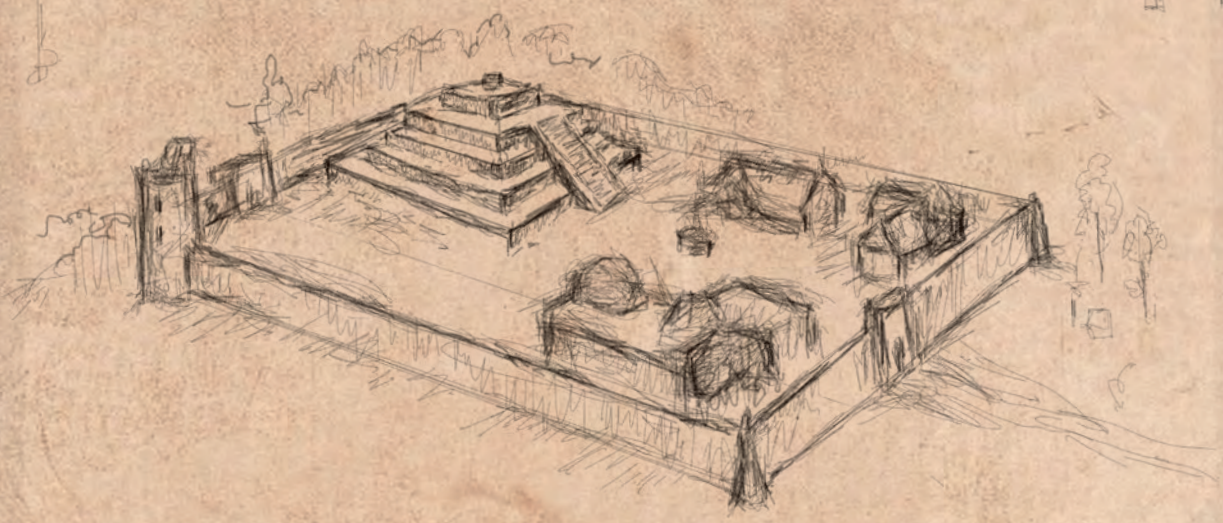
Day 28

We have arrived.

Before starting this journey, I had a very different idea of what writing those words would be like. But I'm alive and approaching the moment of truth: in a couple of hours we should know if all hope is lost or if we have an actual chance of making it back alive.

We have stopped on a ridge south of the ruin. Haven't seen any sign of the blight Goldengrasp warned me about, not in the air, nothing visible to the naked eye – just a remarkably well-preserved, walled set of buildings, overgrown with winding greenery. One of them looks like a ziggurat, but small, maybe fifteen meters wide and ten meters high. And, as I said, we were not the first to arrive. The intruders cannot be seen from here, but the smell of their campfire is unmistakable, and someone has recently cleared the trees near the wall.

I'm going over there now to negotiate. For our lives.



Philip Linden (Order #42324037)

Day 28, Evening

Negotiation tomorrow. The felled trees have been used to build a palisade of horizontal logs in front of the gateless opening in the wall. I called out when I was roughly ten paces away, waving Harlar's dirty white handkerchief, and they immediately responded. A man, Ambrian, croaking voice. I explained the situation: we've suffered losses, are short on food, and are willing to work hard for modest pay and company on the way home. Moreover, I pointed out that we are followed by another group seeking the ruin; together we stand a better chance of holding them off.

Didn't get much of an answer, except that their leader was busy but would be notified and come back with a decision. I am to look for a burning lantern at the top of the wall, and return alone for negotiations when it appears. If it appears.

Seems that we'll have to spend another night under the tree crowns. We've started eating the moldy bread, cooking it into porridge so as not to get poisoned or sick. Usula wants to backtrack a bit and try to catch a glimpse of our pursuers, if they are even there. But I stopped her. No point in poking the bear now that our rescue is within reach.

"Even if a ruin is said to be haunted by a primal blight beast or immersed in the darkness of The Eternal Night, it may be worth a visit. Everything changes fast in Davokar!"

Philip Linden (Order #42324037)

Day 29

Night falls over Davokar, and for the first time since leaving the High Chieftain's cliff, there is a wall between me and the forest. Almost three weeks in the wild, north of Karvosti, with an Explorer's License that expires in two days. Half the members of our expedition are dead, the rest now formally contracted by Ordo Magica's Kurun Chapter, members of Master Rigor's exploration party.

I seriously doubt that the man I negotiated with really was this Rigor. He did wear an order medallion with the master's mark, but looked more like a warrior or hunter in the guise of a wizard. He's young too.

But it doesn't really matter: our new colleagues also suffered heavy losses on the way here (diseases and poisoning, they said), but managed to arrive with all their baggage. A provisional contract was drawn up: in return for serving as loyal members of Rigor's expedition (with all that entails in terms of work, protection and foraging for food), we get one fifth of the profits to split between us, in addition to any knowledge/information obtained. My repulsive employer will not be happy, but it is a good deal, probably offered out of fear of having to fight both us and the group that seems to be at our heels.

There are six of them (plus two carriers), all Ambrian, all armed with bow and sword, possibly with a mystic in this Rigor. There are five of us, plus four carriers, in worse shape but probably more capable. We could take them, but it would be bloody and risky. I think we'll have to be satisfied with this and make the best of the situation.

Philip Linden (Order #42324037)

Day 30

Our pursuers have made themselves known, marked their presence, with not one but three campfires burning in the night. Surely an attempt to confuse us, scare us off, but it's good to know where they are.

Recognizing the threat at hand, Rigor assigned four men to guard and scout duty: me, Helin, Harlar (with his firetube) and a woman who calls herself Monai. The others are divided into two digging teams – one focusing on the rubble and debris in the basement of what must have been the main building, the other tearing up the floor of the pyramid. I went inside the latter during a break; it must be the Temple of Exaltation – a single hall, empty but for an altar-like table of stone with a statue on it – a muscular human, naked and sexless, with its head tilted back. Nothing special about it, except there are imprints in its hands suggesting that it once was holding something.

Even if this really was a temple, nothing indicates what was worshipped. One hears legends about people worshipping daemons and abominations, but that is not the case here. A bit far-fetched, but maybe they worshipped humans? Or humanity?

Philip Linden (Order #42324037)

Anyway, we got to inspect the finds Rigor and his team have dug up, assembled in an empty chamber on the ground floor of the main building. Haven't had time to take a closer look, but I'm pleasantly surprised. In addition to twenty or so scrolls in varying condition (hopefully legible after alchemical treatment), a large number of gold objects (some adorned with precious stones and ettermite inlays) and several curiosities have been found. The most interesting item was an orb of shiny black glass which immediately caught Orgai's attention.

Need to sleep now, only four glasses to my next shift. Feels good to be fed and hopeful again.

Philip Linden (Order #42324037)

Day 31

Shared the dawn watch with Harlar. Our so far invisible besiegers are clearly watching us, or they wouldn't have sent the message that landed inside the wall, tied to an arrow which, judging by the angle of impact, was fired from the west:

"Vidina, we have your priest, Erdan. Let us in. Together we can defeat the plunderers and take over the ruin; we'll split everything equally between our groups. You have until sundown tomorrow to decide. Or Erdan dies, then the rest of you."

The offer is too good to be true. And Erdan. On the one hand he is my responsibility as leader of the expedition, and he has never done anything to displease me; on the other... I honestly don't know if my feelings for him are strong enough for this to be an effective threat. Sure, Rigor doesn't seem entirely trustworthy either, but at least with him I know what I've got, and his group is not strong enough to stab us in the back without risking their own lives and limbs.

Only told Harlar, and he agrees: we must ignore it, both the offer and the threat. Focus on the digging, which after today feels even more promising. They dug up two new glass orbs in the main building's basement, one crimson and one golden. Orgai says they are mystically charged, like the black one. This could turn out quite well for us!

"Everyone says the Throne of Thorns is in Symbar, but no one knows for sure. It could be in some palace or temple somewhere else, maybe even here in Ambria!"

Philip Linden (Order #42324037)

Day 32

Two important notes from this eventful day.

First, regarding the excavation. Orgai's digging team has broken through to a basement section that's entirely intact. There is a gate of stone, locked or just wedged, which according to Orgai is "emitting darkness" (Rigor agrees but not very convincingly; becoming more and more sure that he is not Rigor, or even mystically trained). There's also a crack leading down (just like the goblin legends said!). Deep, judging by the echo. May well connect to the Underworld. Last but not least, there were clear signs of a recent visitor; someone who came from the crack, rummaged through two of the chambers (without doors), and slipped back into the dark. Our next step will be decided over the morning porridge.

Second: Erdan will be alright. My conscience and sense of duty triumphed over reason, and tonight I decided to rescue him. Orgai wove a mystical cloak over Helin, concealing her from outside senses, and she walked out into the forest. When she found the prisoner, he was neither bound nor gagged; he was drinking tea with two other sun priests and the guide Fonsiul, known to often work for Mayor Nightpitch. They were accompanied by a group of black cloaks, five or six from what Helin could see. I am not conv

Another arrow, another message: "Your time is up; the priest is dead. You have one chance to save yourself. Join us, or we will send more than just arrows over the wall – you will all die, from the black taint of Davokar!"

No deadline this time. If Helin is right about their numbers, they'd hardly dare to attack us. Will have to wait and see if they make good on their threat and, if so, what it means...

Philip Linden (Order #42324037)

Day 33

What a turn this expedition has taken. Only a few days ago I was nearly beaten to death; waking up, I almost wished that I had been. But now!

The breakfast meeting was perfect; relaxed, great discussions and plenty of smiles, as if we had been a joint expedition all along. Orgai claims to know how to open the stone door in the basement, with corruption; by placing one's palm in the imprint of a hand at the center of the gate – if the body is already corrupted the door swings open, otherwise one must first expose oneself to corruption. Sounds ridiculous, but maybe he knows what he's talking about. Anyway, the door must remain closed, not only because of the strong corrupting energies the swellhead senses from the other side. Usula spent hours with her ear to the gate, and she believes there are Night Swarmers in the chamber, possibly more than one swarm.

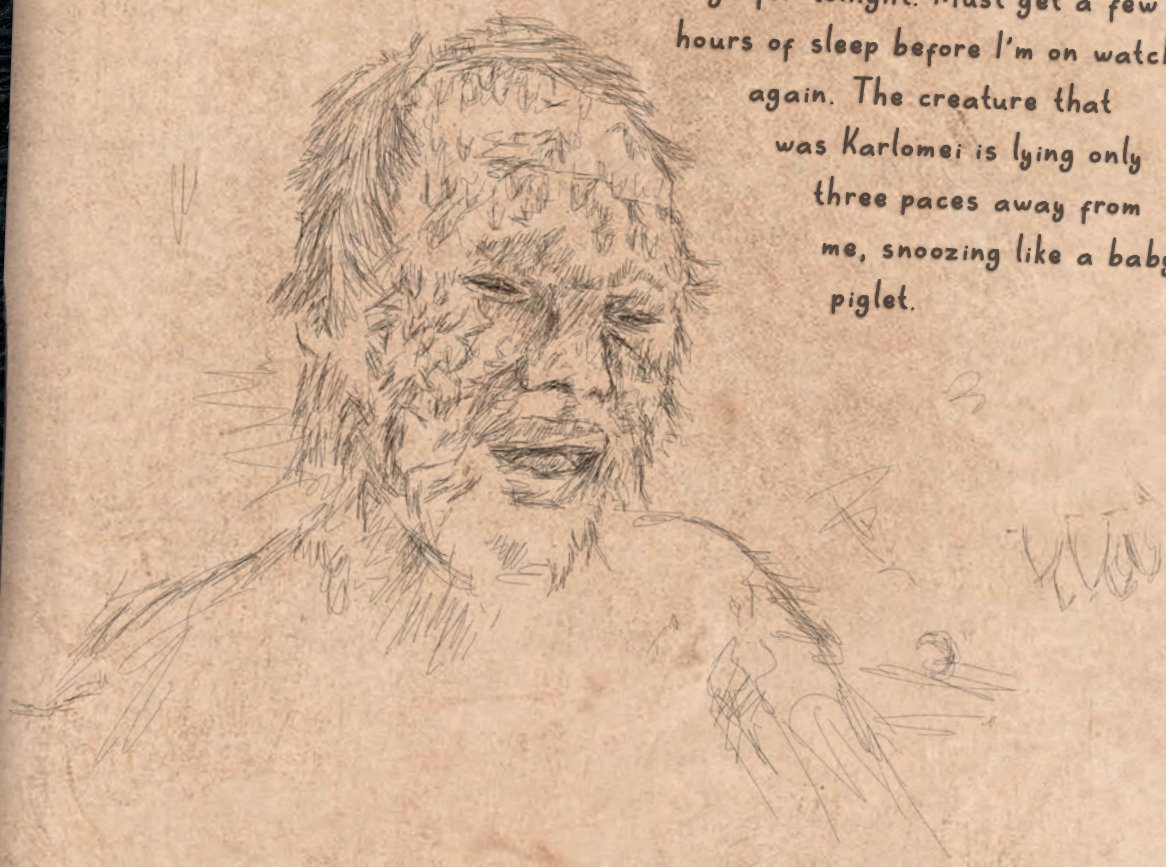
Instead, an expedition was sent down through the crack. I was part of it; Helin and Harlar took watch along with three of "Rigor's" warriors. Long story, but with two high points. Usula and I found another way to the surface, through some cracks into a basement with a flight of stairs leading to an earth-covered hatch in the ceiling; with our swords we could easily cut our way up into the daylight. Didn't inform Rigor, only Orgai; good to have an alternative escape route if things go sour.

The craziest part is that we have added another person to our party, someone both Orgai and Usula recognize as the noble Karlomei Mederen, who supposedly got lost in the sewers of Alkor. He has... been transformed.

Philip Linden (Order #42324087)

We found him deep down in the darkness, sitting naked in what can best be described as a "nest" of various items and curiosities. Well, he wasn't really naked – his skin is now covered with scales, off-white with black markings, with tufts of beard and hair poking out between them. His eyes are coated with yellow puss and he seems unable to speak; likely a combination of his hideously swollen tongue and an impaired mental capacity. He must have strayed here through the Underworld, somehow, corrupted by its darkness but still hungry for antiques and treasure.

Enough for tonight. Must get a few hours of sleep before I'm on watch again. The creature that was Karlomei is lying only three paces away from me, snoozing like a baby piglet.



Philip Linden (Order #42324037)

Day 34

Just as I was falling asleep it struck me: the glass orbs we found are just large enough to match the imprints in the alter statue's hands, and there was another imprint in the table top, between the feet of the statue. At this moment I wish that insight had never crossed my mind.

It is past midnight. Three carriers are dead and my conscience has taken a serious walloping, but we have added two urns filled with jewels, a chest of gold coins, and a few more curiosities to our collection of treasures. It is in fact Orgai and Rigor who should feel the weight of guilt, not I. The former pointed out that the globes could be a key that opens a hidden room, but also that it could be extremely dangerous to use them without knowing how to do it correctly. Rigor's solution was to order a carrier to set the globes in place.

Orgai was right. The first attempt ended with the goblin being knocked to the ground by a wave of corruption so powerful that she was blight-born and we were forced to slay her. And yet we had another carrier give it a try. Same result. But the third attempt had a happier outcome; a crashing click echoed through the hall as the goblin placed the yellow globe in the statue's left hand, the crimson one in the right, and the black one on the table between its feet.

Was it worth it? No, definitely not. Do I regret not protesting strongly enough? Absolutely. If I could turn back time, would I have done things differently? Probably not...

Philip Linden (Order #42324037)

Day 35

Two obvious facts: I am a gullible fool, and I love Orgai. Or loved, I guess ...

I was awakened before dawn by a sound, dizzy with exhaustion from the night's treasure hunt. Went back to sleep. Woke again. Fell asleep. It wasn't until one of Rigor's men removed the stakes and let the logs roll away from the wall opening that I really opened my eyes.

We had all been asleep, even Usula. Still drowsy, we rushed outside: our "colleagues" had taken off with mules and everything through the small gate in the north, and blocked it from the outside. But not before opening the main gate; black cloaks and theurgs could already be heard charging from the woods.

We could surrender, or try to flee over the northern wall, but I was too consumed with rage – I wanted to kill Erdan and his companions; I wanted to hunt down Rigor and carve the eyes out of his skull. And everyone was looking at me. What happened next was pure instinct.

After grabbing our bags and weapons we hurried into the main building, to the stone door in the basement. Usula tried to protest as I started pulling on it, but then we heard Orgai say: "You go, I'll lead the welcoming committee to the surface." I saw his point; he could make himself invisible and slip away from priests and night swarmers alike. But I haven't seen him since.

Once the gate opened, the rest of us fled down into the Underworld, went through the crack to the basement, and continued to the surface. And there we are now, waiting for our brave mystic, listening to the abominable howls echoing through Davokar, from what were once the servants of the sun god. Possibly from Orgai as well. Maybe he finally got the slow death and eternal torment that Morea cursed him to...

"Abominations and blight beasts? Many are huge and monstrous, oh yes, but there are also little ones that are just as dangerous. And most dangerous of all are the ones that can't be seen..."

Philip Linden (Order #42324037)

Too late for regrets, and guilt never helped anyone in the depths of Davokar. We'll stay a bit longer, to give our hero a chance, but then the hunt is on. They are lugging loads of baggage with unruly mules in tow. We've got Usula and a burning desire for revenge. I'd put my money on us.

Day 36

Stopped for the night, not far from our prey, little more than one hourglass according to Usula. Orgai never showed, but his sacrifice will not be forgotten. Must notify his father, the Baron, once I return to the Hold; will have to make up a truly heroic story in his memory. The swellhead! Must also contact the Dowager Baroness of Mederen. The creature that was her son followed us smiling into the Underworld, but not through the crack; he probably returned to the place where his nest used to be, before we stole the building material. I don't care, but maybe his mother cares enough to show her appreciation in the form of a reward.

Rigor is headed south after almost a full day's march east, deeper into the dark, probably because of the Sovereign's Oath's activities further west. If I were him, I'd aim for Odaban; then pass the Malgomor, go south to the Eanor, and continue along (or on) the river to Kastor.

The question is when should we strike, and how. Without provisions the hunt will be hard and particularly dangerous – the search for prey often ends with you yourself being targeted by predators. We must attack soon, without scaring off the mules. There are fewer of us, but we eclipse them in skill and can take them by surprise. It can work. It WILL work!

Philip Linden (Order #42324037)

Day 37

None of us have been in these parts before; we have no idea what to expect. There are many signs of the forest's darkness, but no serious threats so far. Passed by a glade with a rotting elk carcass; it looked normal, at least from a distance, but the trees around it were bleeding darkness. Or sweating, rather – shiny black drops slowly trickling down the trunks. Right before sundown we saw the remnants of what may have been the entrance archway of a mansion or castle, now broken and tilted. The ground around its base was heaving up and down, roughly twenty or thirty paces in all directions; it was throbbing, sort of bubbling, as if a horde of hyperventilating creatures were breathing at different rates beneath a thin layer of moss.

Hunger is starting to affect us. There are lots of berries, roots, carob pods and other things that look edible, but Usula won't let us touch them. I've seen the carriers secretly eating some of them, without being affected. But Alavan says a substance can have different effects on different people, let alone different races. Usula implies something similar.

Tomorrow's the day. By now they should be confident that they're not being followed. We will move in a western curve to avoid any traps and scouts in their track, and attack just as they're unpacking and setting up camp for the night.

"I'd never go off into Davokar without a human taster, never! Berries and herbs can look and taste exactly like plants in the plains, yet be poisonous enough to kill a horse!"

Philip Linden (Order #42324037)

Day 38

Not much to say. Everything went wrong. We never even reached our prey. Instead we were attacked on the way there.

Harlar is dead, his skull crushed by a troll's foot. Usula too, I don't know how. Two of the carriers were also slain by the rage trolls. As for me, I was dragged away by Ugleg, bleeding and barely conscious. Watched helplessly as Helin fought the last of the beasts. She almost didn't make it. Too weak to keep writing.

Well, I must also mention that I've probably killed Howla. One of the rage trolls wore a necklace. That necklace! With a smooth moonstone set in a rough silver nugget – the one Alavan got from our mother, and later gave to Howla when she walked off into the forest to die. Sure, another rage troll may have taken the necklace after she died, but my gut tells me otherwise; that Howla survived the goblin hibernation and woke up as a rage troll, hungry and without memories; thus, I stabbed my parrying dagger through the neck of a friend who saved my life countless times.

Now. Now I'm done.

Philip Linden (Order #42324037)

Day 39

Only moved short distances today. Long breaks. Me, Helin, Ugleg and what turned out to be his sister, Ilofil. Helin is bandaged in six places, including her left eye. Mostly minor wounds, but one looks really bad, like it's poisoned or maybe even infected with corruption, dark-edged in a way that lacerations usually are not, no matter how deep. Unclear whether the herbal cure will help.

Personally, I was hit in the leg with a dirty axe. Feeling dizzy from a punch on the nose that sent the back of my head crashing against a rock. I just want to sleep, just lie down and let Davokar take me. "To die in your arms on some starless night...," or however the poem goes, the one Alavan's always reciting. I usually find comfort in the fact that I've been in worse situations in my life, that whatever happens will never be as bad as the time I was Uhux's prisoner. But not now. I've never been closer to the afterlife than I am at this very moment.

As I see it, we only have one chance of surviving this. The mere thought makes me want to fight and scream and vomit with every fiber of my being, but to stop trying is not an option. This is Davokar, and if I've learned anything from all my hours at the Salons of Symbaroum, listening to braggarts and actual veteran explorers, it's this: whatever happens, never EVER give up.

So, we must catch up with Rigor. We must beg him and his people for mercy and help. We must offer them everything we own, anything we have to offer, for a chance of leaving the forest alive. It will be the worst humiliation I've ever endured, but we've just got to grit our teeth and hope that it succeeds. It's the only way I'll ever get my hands on those traitors' eyes!

Philip Linden (Order #42324037)

Day 41

Two days. Moaning, staggering, limping. We must be leaving a trail, one that will be noticed by some bloodthirsty beast. But we're alive. There are no more herbal cures, both Helin's stomach and my own are churning after having taken dietary advice from Ilofil. Every sip of water is a gamble. But we are alive. And we're getting closer to our potential saviors and, if my calculations are correct, to Odaban. That opens new doors for us. This time of year, there are always fortune hunters in the area around the ruined city, especially around the southeastern sector known as Akkona; maybe we won't have to beg after all, or at least not kneel before the treacherous swine.

But there's little time. We won't survive another two days. Helin's wound looks really bad – it is bleeding grayish-green puss and the blackness is spreading. Now we could use that bottle of purple sap. Damn Erdan. Damn people. All of them.

Day 42

I am warm. And fed. Don't know who we have to thank for that, but I refuse to thank Davokar. I thank Prios, although the group of sun god worshippers we killed at the Temple of Exaltation must have been really lousy ones for us to be blessed in this way.

It is roughly one hourglass since we caught up with Rigor's little band, in what must be the western borderlands of Odaban. They are dead. All of them, to the last goblin. Well, except the mules which were calmly feeding on the grass, tied to separate trees, with the bags on the ground.

"Everyone about to die from starvation in Davokar is visited by a warden of the forest. The good ones are saved, the evil ones left to die. The question is how the warden defines good and evil..."

Philip Linden (Order #42324037)

There were humans and goblins lying all over the place, most of them still wrapped in their sleeping blankets, but with purple skin, their bodies and faces twisted as if frozen in the middle of a seizure.

None of us are knowledgeable enough to figure out what killed them, but we trust that Ilofil will be able to determine whether the food they left behind is contaminated. We have eaten and settled down into what must have been a grand, now sunken Symbarian salon, where we made a fire. Helin and I both have miracle-working Elixir of Life in our veins; Helin also consumed two doses of purple sap.

It's been a long time since I cried like I'm crying now.

Philip Linden (Order #42324037)

Day 43

Halfway to the river Malgomor. Nothing to report, except that our little quartet (plus three mules packed with treasure and supplies) are feeling better. The elixirs helped, but just as importantly, everyone is genuinely starting to believe that we have a chance. A chance to enjoy a view without tree trunks, to sleep in a bed, or at least on a fairly even surface. Over forty days in Davokar; seven or eight to go. If Prios favors us.

We carry on as planned. If survival were our only priority, we should build rafts once we reach the Malgomor and follow the river to Lake Volgoma. But we have endured too much to risk a confrontation with the troops of the High Chieftain or the Sovereign's Oath. Sure, the former would no doubt take good care of us, but it is unlikely that they would let us keep our finds, now that the Explorer's License has long since expired.

No, we continue south, to the Eanor, and from there we follow the river to Kastor where we can breathe easy again. Alavan can keep us hidden until I'm strong enough for a meeting with the Slimeball. In Yndaros or Ravenia. Preferably Ravenia. Wonder what he will say about the things we have found? Whatever ailment has afflicted the Queen Mother, I can't imagine that anything we're carrying would be able to cure her. The contents of the scrolls, perhaps? Or one of the artifacts. But that is his problem, not mine.

Day 45

We're south of the Malgomor River. Stayed a few extra hours on the southern bank. Took a bath with clothes and everything – a long one. First, I scrubbed my clothes with sand, then my body. I've never felt this clean, especially now that the clothes are dry.

Philip Linden (Order #42324037)

That was yesterday. Today everything nearly went straight to Lyastra. We bumped into a Karitian hunting party. They lay in ambush, unaware of the contents of our bags, but probably excited anyway, about the chance to capture four slaves and three sturdy mules. But instead of attacking, they simply stood up, watching silently as we passed them by. At first it made no sense, but then I recognized one of them – a woman from the battle against Goured's warriors, at the old outpost. She must have recognized me too, from a distance, and restrained her brothers and sisters. She gave a brief nod, probably because she saw the sister of the rightful chieftain of Karohar rather than the expedition leader Vidina.

Either way, they let us pass. And if I know the Karits, they'll send word to other clan members about us traveling south, as neither threat nor prey. They might even watch over us. Perhaps this means we'll actually make it through. I'm starting to have faith. Dangerous but true. I'm going to make it!"

DAY 47

The walk between the rivers went without a hitch. We arrived at the river Eanor just before sundown, not far from its northern source, approximately two days north of Melima. Now that I have almost stopped worrying, I can't help thinking about the future. A payment of at least five hundred thaler, in addition to the almost one hundred thaler that remains of our funds (outstanding payments to the deceased) and a hefty sum from selling the finds I manage to stash away. The scrolls, the glass orbs, the other artifacts and most of the curiosities must be handed over to the Duke, but there should still be enough for me to get the thousand silver coins I was promised.

"You'd think most expeditions meet their doom in the depths of the forest, but that's not the case. Most perish on the way back, near the edge of the forest – due to starvation, diseases or carelessness."

Philip Linden (Order #42324037)

We will have a tidy sum left once the dept is settled. If I know Alavan, he will want to finance an expedition to try and find Goriol, but most of it will probably be spent on hiring capable people to provide ingredients for the drugstore – herbs, mushrooms, animal parts, etcetera – so I won't have to go out into the forest myself. At the moment it feels like a month or two of rest is all I'll need before heading back out. But it would be nice to have a choice.

After some deliberation, we have decided to continue on foot and stay on the north side until we pass Melima. You never know with free settlements; all of a sudden they have been taken over by robbers, attracted some terrible monster, or had their entire population blight-born. Mustn't let our guard down until we see the light shining through the tree trunks that mark the southern border of Davokar.

WEALTHY

Philip Linden (Order #42324037)

Day 48

What should I say? What should I feel? All I know is that I was close. So close.

I've bandaged my wounds, as best I can with a crushed right hand. But I'm still bleeding, internally and externally. I don't think Prios owes me any more miracles.

Have to stop writing. It hurts so bad I'm about to black out. Is this how the journal ends?

Day 49

Apparently not. The sun rises and I am still alive.

But I'm dying. My chances of surviving another day are extremely slim. I have made a small raft, with stones as a stabilizing weight on the underside. Once I'm finished writing these final lines, I will wrap the journal in layer upon layer of leather and oilcloth, then tie it to the raft and send it downstream.

Whoever is reading this, I hope you are among the few who are still capable of kindness and compassion. Half of the gems wrapped alongside the journal are yours either way, but in return I ask that you convey my account to Solara's Drugstore in Kastor. Ask for Alavan; give it to him, and no one else. He is my brother and deserves to know what happened to me. Not least how I died.

Philip Linden (Order #42324037)

Sadly, my death lacks any form of glory, heroism or any signs of destiny. Helin must simply have fallen asleep on her watch, sitting by the fire. And the rest of us were sleeping too heavily to hear it coming. The she-bear, beset by something, possibly what is known as a Glint among the barbarians.

When I woke up the beast had already bitten Helin in the neck, hoisted her up, and shaken her so badly it cracked her spine. Ugleg and Ilofil sat up, and before I had unsheathed my sword they were dead, stomped, crushed. I was next – she threw herself at me, more or less impaling herself on the sword I was holding. But she didn't die right away. She bit and slashed and ripped and tore, everywhere.

Alavan, I'm sorry. Use your part of the gems to clear the debt, and I wish you all the best in life. Know that I am proud of you, as mother and father would have been. And if you ever find Goriol, tell him to take care of you, for me, because he owes me that much.

That is all.

Farewell.

Philip Linden (Order #42324037)

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